

Concerns and Complaints Procedures for Parents and Guardians



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General Guidelines and Principles

World Academy of Tirana (WAT) prides itself on the quality of the teaching and pastoral care provided to its students. However, if parents have a concern or complaint, they can expect it to be treated by the school in accordance with this procedure.

Any matter about which a parent of a student is unhappy and seeks action by the school is a complaint. Parents can be assured that all concerns and complaints will be treated seriously and confidentially. Complainants will not suffer as a result of a complaint.

Stage 1 – Informal Resolution

It is hoped that most complaints and concerns will be resolved quickly and informally by discussion with staff at the school; more difficult or complex concerns may take more than one discussion.

If parents have a complaint, they should normally contact their child's Teacher. In most cases (except during the school holiday periods) the Homeroom Teacher will meet/speak to the parents concerned, normally within two days of receiving a complaint to discuss the matter. In many cases, the matter will be resolved straightaway by this means to the parents' satisfaction. If the Homeroom Teacher cannot resolve the matter alone, it may be necessary for him/her to consult their Programme Principal and involve her/him in the matter.

Should the matter not be resolved within 10 days or if the Teacher and parents fail to reach a satisfactory resolution, parents will be advised to proceed with their complaint in accordance with Stage 2 of this procedure.

Stage 2A – Formal Resolution

If the complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis, then the parents should put their complaint in writing to the Programme Principal. The complaint will be acknowledged normally within two working days of receipt. The Programme Principal will carry out an investigation and respond to the complainant normally within 14 days following the acknowledgement.

The Programme Principal may request to meet the complainant to gain further information relevant to the complaint. Statements from witnesses will be collected where necessary. When all the relevant facts have been established, s/he may either call a meeting with the complainant and provide a verbal response, or produce a written response to the complainant, as considered appropriate.

The Programme Principal will keep written records of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint and consult with the Head of School regarding future actions. If the complaint is not resolved, the complainant will be given the option to move to Stage 2B.

Stage 2B - Final Resolution

If the complaint cannot be resolved by the Programme Principal at the formal stage, the complaint should be forwarded to the Head of School, in writing from the complainant. The complainant will be contacted by the school within 24 hours of receiving the notice, in order to arrange a meeting with the Head of School. Depending upon the nature of the complaint, the Head of School may elect to call a meeting of the Behaviour and Ethics Committee for collaboration on the specific issue in question.

The meeting should be held as soon as practicable and convenient to both the complainant and the Head of School to try to establish a solution. All written reports must be forwarded to the Head of School at least 24 hours in advance of the meeting. Until this is attended to, the meeting cannot take place.

After the meeting, and within 48 hours, the Head of School will give his/her written final resolution to the matter. If the complainant is still not satisfied with the final decision s/he can choose to move to Stage 3.

Stage 3 – Panel Hearing

If parents are not satisfied with the response to the complaint arising from the former two stages, parents should write to the Regional Head of Schools (RHoS) at Orbital Education (karl@orbital.education). The RHoS will acknowledge the receipt of the complaint, normally within five working days.

A panel consisting of at least three people not directly involved in matters detailed in the complaint, will be convened to hear the complaint. At least one of the panel members will be independent of the day-to-day management and running of the school.

The RHoS will schedule a meeting with the panel to take place as soon as practicable and normally within 28 days of receipt of the complaint. This meeting may be face-to-face or as an online call. Parents may be accompanied to this meeting by their child and/or one other person if they wish. This may be a relative, teacher or friend. Legal representation will not normally be appropriate. Details of this person should be supplied to the RHoS not later than three days prior to the hearing.

If possible, the panel will resolve the parents' complaint immediately, without the need for further investigation. Where further investigation is required, the Panel will decide how to carry out the investigation. After due consideration of all facts they consider relevant, the panel will reach a decision and may make recommendations, which it shall complete within 10 working days of the hearing. The RHoS will write to the parents, and where relevant, the person complained about, informing them of its decision, the reasons for it, and, where relevant, any recommendations. A copy of these findings and recommendations will be kept in the Official Complaints Folder in the Head of School's office and will be available for inspection by the RHoS and/or the CEO of Orbital Education.

The decision of the Panel will be final, in that there will be no further right to appeal or further hearing within the school's procedure.

If the parent is not satisfied with the outcome of Stage 3, they can contact the Albanian Ministry of Education.

Recording Complaints

A written record is kept in the official Complaints Folder in the Head of School's office, where records of all complaints made in writing under the formal part of this procedure are retained. A record indicates whether the complaint has been resolved at the formal stage or proceeded to a panel hearing, and any action taken by the school as a result of the complaint regardless of whether or not it is upheld. The school also keeps a record of informal complaints in order to enable patterns of concern to be monitored. Complaint records will be kept for a minimum of three years or as long as deemed necessary.

Confidentiality

Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except where a body conducting an accreditation or inspection or where any other legal obligation prevails.

If the complaint is about the Head of School directly, as opposed to school policy or procedures, then the RHoS and the CEO of Orbital Education will be informed, and the parents will be asked to send their complaint in writing to them (see e-mail address above).

We require parents to maintain the same level of confidentiality around the complaint and outcome.

Review

This policy will be reviewed annually by the Regional Head of Schools on behalf of the School Board.

Vexatious Complaints

1) Persistent / repetitive complaints

Where a complainant attempts to re-open the same issue with the school after the complaints procedure has been fully exhausted and/or the school has done everything it reasonably can in response to the complaint, the Head of School or RHoS will inform the complainant that the matter is closed. (In the event that the complainant wishes to escalate the concern to the final stage, beyond the school, this will trigger the next phase of the complaints procedure.)

If the complainant subsequently contacts the school again about the same issue, the school can choose not to respond. The normal circumstance in which we will not respond is if:

- the school has taken every reasonable step to address the complainant's needs;
- the complainant has been given a clear statement of the school's position and their options (if any);
- the complainant is contacting the school repeatedly but making substantially the same points each time,

but this list is not intended to be exhaustive.

The school will be most likely to choose not to respond if:

- we have reason to believe the individual is contacting the school with the intention of causing disruption or inconvenience;
- the individual's letters/emails/telephone calls are often abusive or aggressive;
- the individual makes insulting personal comments about, or threats towards, school staff.

Unreasonable behaviour, which is abusive, offensive or threatening may constitute an unreasonably persistent complaint. Once the school has decided that it is appropriate to stop responding, the complainant will be informed in writing, either by letter or email, by the Head of School.

The school will ensure when making this decision that complainants making any new complaints are heard, and that the school acts reasonably in line with the Complaints Policy and Procedures.

2) Unreasonably Persistent or Vexatious Complaints

While the school seeks to evaluate and deal with all genuine complaints diligently and fairly, there are unfortunately occasions when complaints are raised by individuals that are unmeritorious, unreasonable, excessive and, in rare circumstances, deliberately calculated to be disruptive to the school and its personnel. Such complaints can consume significant amounts of staff time and school resources and are detrimental to all other students at the school.

In order to discourage and facilitate the process of dealing with such claims, the school has a procedure to deal with Unreasonable Persistent or Vexatious Complainants, which is outlined below:

Who is a Vexatious Complainant?

A Vexatious Complainant is someone who:

- a) has made two or more complaints, in any school year, which have not been resolved after Stage 3 of the Complaints procedure;
- b) is any one or more of the following:
 - defamatory;
 - deliberately calculated to be detrimental to the school, its staff or other students;
 - demonstrating a complete breakdown in the confidence and trust between the complainant and the school;
 - made in a manner that is aggressive, harassing, intimidating, threatening or profane;
 - made without reasonable supporting evidence;
 - of excessive frequency with no sign of relenting;
 - repetitious with a complaint that has previously been rejected or after receiving a final response from the Head of School;
 - seeking a remedy that is wholly unreasonable or beyond the school's authority or resources to implement.

Who determines when a Complainant is a Vexatious Complainant?

The Head of School may make a finding that the complainant is a Vexatious Complainant at the same time as they provide a final decision in respect of any complaint at Stage 3 of the Complaints procedure.

The School Board may make a finding that the complainant is a Vexatious Complainant after Stage 3 of the Complaints Procedure has been invoked, but the complaint remains unresolved.

What are the consequences of being classified as a Vexatious Complainant?

While the school endeavours to consider and review any complaint based on its individual merits, if a complainant that has been classified as Vexatious makes further complaint(s), this may result in the school taking any of the following actions (each of which is dependent upon the specific facts of each case):

- ceasing to respond to the complaints;
- taking legal action for harassment against the Vexatious Complainant;
- not re-admitting the family to the school community.

