



Box 1501, 7324 Kirkpatrick Way
Whistler, BC, V0N 1B0
Phone: 604 932-1885
Fax: 604 932-1876
info@whistlerwaldorf.com
www.whistlerwaldorf.com

Communication Policy with Grievance Procedure

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1. COMMUNICATION QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE

QUESTIONS, CONCERNS, COMPLAINTS: Where to go and who to contact

Questions on curriculum, discipline, homework, progress reports, academic standards, class trips, class meetings etc.	Your Teacher/Guardian	
Questions with what is going on in your child's classroom	Your Teacher/Guardian	
Questions on Financial matters including invoicing, fees, bursaries	Director of Administration	Vicky Bunbury Vicky@WhistlerWaldorf.com
Questions surrounding Policies and procedures at the school	Director of Education	Arnold Grimm Arnold@whistlerwaldorf.com
Questions or concerns about a teacher	Director of Education	Arnold Grimm Arnold@whistlerwaldorf.com
Questions or concerns about a non-educational staff member	Director of Administration	Vicky Bunbury Vicky@WhistlerWaldorf.com
General information about events, dates, or any other questions or concerns you do not know who to ask.	Receptionist	Romy Grayson Reception@whistlerwaldorf.com
Questions or concerns regarding school communications, marketing, public relations	Director of Administration	Vicky Bunbury Vicky@WhistlerWaldorf.com
Enrollment/Withdrawal	Registrar	Diane Riley Registrar@whistlerwaldorf.com
Concerns from parents or staff regarding an unresolved situation or process	Director of Administration	Vicky Bunbury Vicky@whistlerwaldorf.com
Questions or concerns about parent council activities, fundraising, community development	Community Development Manager	Jen Dodds Jen@whistlerwaldorf.com
Whistler Waldorf School Society	Chair of the Board	David Udows David.Udow@whistlerwaldorf.com



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2. Rationale

The social health of our school community is reflected in our commitment to clear, open communication and transparency of educational and organizational structures. High levels of professional confidentiality are maintained to ensure confidence in school communications surrounding conflict resolution.

These guidelines are to facilitate the smooth functioning of the school and to assist parents, students and staff to work successfully together. The guidelines complement the regular, informal communications that already take place between members of the school community.

This policy has been developed by the Administration and approved by the Board of Trustees.

Please note that the school differentiates between “questions” and “complaints” and accordingly handles them somewhat differently. In general:

a) **“Questions”** are those enquiries for which one seeks clarification, support, understanding or further information.

b) **“Complaints”** relate to matters where one wishes to register dissatisfaction and/or concern. Complaints range along a continuum of seriousness from mild irritations and/or differences of opinion/outlook to serious worries. The manner of handling complaints can therefore vary accordingly. Our school takes complaints seriously and is committed to ensure that they are comprehensively followed up. We see complaints as an opportunity for professional and organizational learning. We regard complaints symptomatically, that is, we see them as symptoms of an underlying issue or issues. These may reflect responsibilities at any combination of the levels of:

1. The organization
2. The teacher
3. The parent/family

3. Communication in Relation to Education

a) Communication between the Teachers and Students

In the classroom and throughout all school activities, there is an expectation that the communication from the teacher to the student is clear, loving and with definite and well understood boundaries. In addition, teachers are expected to be sensitive to and able to act upon individual and group needs, both inside and outside the classroom.

Students, likewise, are expected to behave respectfully and to communicate clearly to all adults at the school. If and when an infringement occurs, students are guided to understand the full consequences of their actions and given the opportunity to redress any harm done. If necessary, the discipline and guidance process will be used where disrespectful communication occurs.

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Teachers exercise authority in the classroom in different ways as the children journey through the school. The three approaches to authority – imitation, guidance and respect for expertise – provide a context for communication in the classroom or school context.

b) Communication between the Teachers and Parents

There are several forums in which this can occur. These include class meetings, scheduled parent teacher Interviews and other meetings with parents on an as-needed basis.

c) A parent directing a question or a complaint to a Teacher

As it is not possible to give proper and respectful consideration in the time directly before and directly after class, please refrain from approaching or discussing issues during this time.

It is also not acceptable to send lengthy, emotional or heated emails to a teacher; direct person to person communication is always best.

Please note: If you as a parent or guardian have a question or a complaint about another student's in-school relationship or interaction with your child, this must under no circumstances be communicated directly to the other student or be specifically discussed with the parents of the student. Such concerns must always be directed through the Teacher/Guardian or Subject Teacher.

d) Questions:

If parents have a question about their child and/or their child's education, or what is happening in the classroom, the first step is to speak directly with their Teacher or Subject Teacher. The process for establishing this forum is as follows:

- (i) Request the teacher arrange an individual meeting at a mutually convenient time.
- (ii) Please indicate the issue to be discussed as some lead time provides an opportunity for the teacher to give prior thought to the matter.
- (iii) Unless deemed necessary by the teacher, it is generally not appropriate for children to be present when discussing questions with a teacher.

Parents may request a meeting with their teacher either in person, via email, or by leaving a message with the receptionist.

At no time is aggressive or disrespectful language acceptable by any party in any communication between a parent and teacher. A meeting may be terminated and re-scheduled for another time if required.

If a parent is dissatisfied with a previous communication surrounding a question, the process is:

- (i) To write their concerns to the Director of Education, stating the issue and requesting that a facilitated meeting be established with the teacher and the Director of Education present.

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- (ii) The Director of Education is responsible to ensure that this facilitated meeting occurs within two weeks from the letter being received. Another member of the school administration may be called as a second person at this meeting.

The purpose of a facilitated meeting is to ensure that:

- (i) The parent has the opportunity to accurately convey their concerns to the teacher.
- (ii) The teacher fully understands them and that they have been witnessed and recorded by another member of the school.
- (iii) The teacher has an opportunity to respond directly to the concerns
- (iv) The nature of the teacher's response has been heard and understood by the parent.
- (v) A clearly articulated action plan for taking any next steps is made and that a member of the administration be assigned to support its implementation.

All meetings will be fully documented with records kept in the student files.

If this initial facilitated meeting does not result in a satisfactory outcome,

- (i) The parent/s or teacher address their concerns in writing to the Director of Education.
- (ii) The Director of Education will then determine the most effective process to resolve the concerns. This may include another facilitated meeting.

Respectful communication, with the child's needs always at the centre, is required at all levels of these processes.

e) Complaints:

If you wish to register a complaint, please give some initial consideration to how you regard the seriousness of the matter. If you decide it is at the lower end of the continuum of seriousness it would be most appropriate for you to try to resolve it through the same process as described above for addressing questions. If, however it is more serious in nature, please refer to the following process.

- (iv) Address your complaint in writing or in person to the Director of Education and identify that you wish that it be addressed. The Director will acknowledge the communication and respond in a timely manner; within five business days, depending on the seriousness of the complaint.
- (v) The Director of Education will request permission that the written record of the information provided is shown to the teacher/s concerned and that the complainant be identified. (Except in claims of physical, emotional and sexual abuse in which case the matter falls under the WWS Child Abuse Prevention Policy and Protocols.) The Director of Education cannot process anonymous complaints.

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- (vi) The Director of Education will then, in collaboration with the Director of Administration, or a nominated senior staff member, assist in the process of response. If the complaint refers to a teacher who has a mentor, it is appropriate that they be considered to be part of this process.
- (vii) The Director of Education and the nominated senior staff member will assess the complaint. In assessing the complaint, they will consider:
 - i. The grounds for the complaint
 - ii. The complaint as a symptom of an underlying issue relating to responsibilities occurring, in some combination, in the three levels: organization, teacher, parent/family.
- (viii) On that basis they may:
 - i. Address the complaint directly. This address will provide a clear description of their assessment of the matter, the response to be made and the reasons for that response.
 - ii. Share the details of the complaint with the teacher/s concerned who will, in the first instance, be asked to reply to the complainant with a direct written response to the issues indicating how the concerns will be addressed and in what time frame.
 - iii. Should there be more than one complainant or should another subsequent new complainant raise the same or similarly related issues, the Director of Education and the Director of Administration will initiate a review of the program delivered by the teacher. In this case the response to the complainants will come from the Director of Education. It will provide a direct response to the issues indicating how they will be addressed and in what time frame. The Director of Education is charged with following the matter up with both the complainants and the teacher/s with the time frame.
- (ix) If, after this response, the complainant is still dissatisfied, they may follow up with the Grievance Procedure (see 6)

4. Communication with the School Administration

Respectful communication between parents and those working in these management and support roles is required at all times.

The school welcomes feedback and information on any aspect of school operations as a part of a philosophy of overall accountability, responsiveness and transparency. Feedback on matters of governance, management or administration should be provided *in writing* to the Director of Administration, who will then ensure that it is addressed in the appropriate forum. The Director of

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Administration will acknowledge communications in writing in a timely fashion, and confirm the course of action and timelines that will be followed.

a) Communicating with the Board of Trustees

If the matter is related to overall school governance, the Director of Administration may recommend that the communication be addressed to the Board of Trustees. Parents or staff members may communicate in writing directly to the Board of Trustees through correspondence to the Board Chair.

The Board Chair will:

- (i) acknowledge receipt of correspondence
- (ii) ensure that correspondence is tabled at the next available meeting of the Board.

b) Communicating with Management on Administration matters

Individuals wishing to give feedback about aspects of school management should initially contact the relevant Director of Administration or the Director of Education.

- (i) The Director of Administration is responsible for any concerns about the school management and administration, clarification with fees or fee statements, school finances, communication, or school daily administration;
- (ii) Director of Education with any concerns with the educational aspects of the school; including faculty, curriculum, health and safety, etc.
- (iii) Contact the Registrar with feedback or concerns on enrolment or withdrawal.

Individuals may request a meeting with the relevant employee, which would be conducted in a professional manner. In planning this meeting individuals should give advance notice about the issue/s to be discussed, so that adequate preparation can be made. A record must be kept of any such meeting. e.g. a diary note indicating the purpose of and outcome of the meeting. Confidentiality is always an absolute priority in communications related to school.

If the individual is unsatisfied with the outcomes of this initial meeting/communication, they should submit their concerns in writing to either the Director of Education or Director of Administration, depending on who they were initially in communication with, clearly stating the issue and requesting that a facilitated meeting be established at which at least one other Management Team member will be present.

The purpose of this facilitated meeting will be to ensure:

- (i) That the concerns or feedback raised by individuals are accurately conveyed to the school Administration.
- (ii) That the school's Director understands the concerns and that they have been witnessed by another member of the management team.

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- (iii) That the Director has an opportunity to respond directly to the concerns and that the nature of the response has been heard and understood by the complainant.
- (iv) That the Director supporting the meeting takes responsibility to support a clearly articulated action plan for taking any next steps.
- (v) All meetings will be fully documented with records kept in the administration's office.
- (vi) Should this process be unsuccessful the school will offer a mediated meeting according to the Grievance Procedures set out in point 6.

c) Communications with Reception

The office staff have a large job supporting the staff and children of the school every day and it is important that they are not regularly repeating information which is already made available to the school community in the usual communication channels.

Parents have a responsibility to read communications from the school: e.g.: Class notes, school newsletter, website messages, school policies. All information regarding the daily operations of the school can be obtained from the office which is managed by the Receptionist.

Parents can communicate with office staff via the phone, email or with a note which their children can drop in to the office.

It is essential for parents to read the school's eNews regularly as this is an important channel for the school to communicate information and dates for up and coming school or class events.

The receptionist does not have an active role to receive or deal with complaints of any kind, other than to direct the individual to the appropriate channel to appropriately respond to the concern.

5. Communication Between Staff Members

All staff are responsible to uphold the principle of respectful communication and professional confidentiality.

Regular and respectful communication between teachers occurs in several forums of the school, as well as in meetings as required:

Teachers are required to attend all Faculty and Admin meetings to ensure they have up-to-date information/communication regarding school events, to provide and give feedback on educational matters, to exchange student news and to participate in pedagogical activities.

Specialist staff are requested to take any issues they have with a student, a class, or parent:

- (i) Directly to the teacher/guardian in the first instance; then
- (ii) To the Director Education should the teacher not resolve the issue.

a) Should a problem arise in a Staff communication

The first step should always be to discuss the situation directly with the person in a space, and at a time, which allows for respectful exploration of the concern.

If a staff member is dissatisfied with the communication, the next step in the process is to clearly outline the concern in writing to the Director of Education requesting that a facilitated meeting be established. The staff members in conflict and the Director of Education or the Director of Administration will be present at this meeting, the purpose of which will be to ensure:

- (i) That the concerns raised are accurately conveyed.
- (ii) That each party fully understand the concerns.
- (iii) That the teacher or staff member has an opportunity to respond directly to the concerns and that the nature of the response has been heard and understood by the other.
- (iv) That the Director supporting manages a clearly articulated action plan for taking any future steps.
- (v) All such meetings will be fully documented with records kept in the administration's office

If an issue is not resolved at this stage, please refer to the Grievance Procedure.

6. Grievance Procedure

a) Rationale

This Grievance Procedure is invoked only in situations when the previously prescribed steps have been followed and one or both of the participants are still unhappy with the outcomes on the grounds that they were:

- (i) unfair or unreasonable and/or
- (ii) that they believe that due process as described previously was not followed.

Grievance procedures may be followed in issues of communication between staff members and between staff members and parents. The school will not attempt to resolve disputes between parents.

b) Grievance Procedure

To begin a formal Grievance Procedure a written request must be filed with the Director of Administration or with the Director of Education, if the grievance is with the Director of Administration, and vice versa. It must state the evidence to support the claim of unfair or unreasonable treatment and/or the grounds for the belief that due process has not been followed.

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The Director will acknowledge the receipt of the letter within two working days and inform the Board Chair that a Grievance has been filed.

The Board Chair will notify the entire board that a Grievance has been filed (with or without relevant specifics) at a suitable time.

If there is a conflict of interest by the Chair, the Vice Chair, or other designated board member will be advised, who will then advise the entire board, as above.

The Director will assess the nature of the complaint and assign relevant school representatives to a Grievance Team, to follow up the matter. The Director will, in most instances, act as the school representative.

The school representative will contact the individual to discuss their written statement and to inform them of the next steps. The school representative, in consultation with the Grievance Team, will then promptly initiate appropriate actions to resolve the grievance. Appropriate action includes but is not limited to:

- (i) Making enquiries
- (ii) Reviewing reasons for the contentious decision or the cause of grievance.
- (iii) Reviewing the process of arriving at the contentious decision or the cause of grievance.
- (iv) Engaging external mediators to work towards conciliation for employees.

The school representative will then be responsible for:

- (v) Tabling a report which includes clear recommendations for the resolution of the matter to the Director of Administration who shall in turn present it to the Chair of the Board of Trustees,
- (vi) Providing a written reply to the complainant informing them of the outcome.

All parties to the grievance are to sign and date a written agreement to the resolutions to the grievance.

A grievance which was filed to question due process will result in the Board's Governance Committee reviewing the process and submit to the Board a report on the review.

7. Board Human Resources Grievance Procedure

The Board HR Grievance Procedure is invoked only in situations when all of the previously prescribed steps have been followed and one or both of the participants are still unhappy with the outcomes on the grounds that they were:

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- (i) unfair or unreasonable and/or
- (ii) that they believe that due process as described above was not followed.

Board Human Resources Grievance procedures may be followed in issues of communication between staff members and between staff members and parents. The school will not attempt to resolve disputes between parents.

Board Human Resources Grievance procedures essentially follows the same steps as outlined in 6. above, however it will be members of the Board HR Committee carrying the process.

After this review, should a parent continue to make vexatious complaints or to communicate in a manner contrary to this policy, or refuse to communicate on a matter of concern, the Director of Administration, in collaboration with the Director of Education, may request a re-consideration of the enrolment of the child at the school.

8. Federation of Independent Schools Associations (FISA) Ombudsperson

As a member of the Associate Member Group (AMG) of the FISA, any community member of the school, who has followed the above process and still feel that due process or unreasonable or unfair treatment has occurred can ask for the assistance of the AMG Ombudsman to review. The Ombudspersons for the AMG group (Peter Threlfall and Tako van Popta) can be reached through the President of the Associate Member Group, Harry Moes, through the FISA BC Office (info@fisabc.ca).