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Communication Policy with Grievance Procedure (Appeal)

Our Values:

Respectful communication,

Harmony & Balance,

Lifelong Learning,

Appreciation for the environment,

Respectful, supportive relationships

Approved by the Board of Trustees, August 2016

Updated February 2021


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1. Communications Quick Reference Guide

<p>Questions on curriculum, discipline, homework, progress reports, academic standards, class trips, class meetings etc.</p>	<p>Your Teacher/Guardian then:</p> <p>Early Years Chair g.aldenhull@whistlerwaldorf.com</p> <p>High School ali@whistlerwaldorf.com</p> <p>Lower School Chair a.brooks@whistlerwaldorf.com</p>	
<p>Questions with what is going on in your child's classroom</p>	<p>Your Teacher/Guardian</p>	
<p>Financial matters including invoicing, fees, bursaries</p>	<p>Director of Business Finance</p>	<p>Brian Gohlke brian@whistlerwaldorf.com</p>
<p>Policies and procedures at the school</p>	<p>Head of School Director of Business Finance</p>	<p>Rubeena Sandhu rubeena@whistlerwaldorf.com Brian Gohlke brian@whistlerwaldorf.com</p>
<p>Questions or concerns about a teacher</p>	<p>Director of Education</p>	<p>Rubeena Sandhu rubeena@whistlerwaldorf.com</p>
<p>Questions or concerns about a non-educational staff member</p>	<p>Head of School Director of Business Finance</p>	<p>Rubeena Sandhu rubeena@whistlerwaldorf.com Brian Gohlke brian@whistlerwaldorf.com</p>
<p>Events, dates, absences. Any other questions or concerns you do not know who to ask.</p>	<p>Reception</p>	<p>reception@whistlerwaldorf.com</p>
<p>School communications, marketing, public relations</p>	<p>Director of Advancement</p>	<p>Jen Dodds jen@whistlerwaldorf.com</p>
<p>Enrollment/Withdrawal</p>	<p>Director of Advancement</p>	<p>Jen Dodds admissions@whistlerwaldorf.com</p>
<p>An unresolved situation or process</p>	<p>Head of School Director of Business Finance</p>	<p>Brian Gohlke brian@whistlerwaldorf.com Rubeena Sandhu rubeena@whistlerwaldorf.com</p>
<p>Whistler Waldorf School Society</p>	<p>Chair of the Board</p>	<p>Tony Horn t.horn@whistlerwaldorf.com</p>

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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. Healthy, constructive feedback is encouraged, and asking clarifying questions to fully understand circumstances before issuing a complaint is the basis of all school communication. Essential to healthy communication is the ability to differentiate levels of concern, and how to handle them. The guidelines below facilitate the smooth functioning of the school and assist parents, students and staff to work successfully together.

It is important for all members of our school community to distinguish between “questions,” “complaints” and “healthy feedback”, and accordingly handle them somewhat differently.

Questions:

Questions are those enquiries for which one seeks clarification, support, understanding or further information. This is always the first level of communication.

Complaints:

Complaints relate to matters where clarification has been sought, and there continues to be dissatisfaction and/or concern. Complaints range along a continuum of seriousness from mild irritations and/or differences of opinion/outlook to serious concerns. The manner of handling complaints can therefore vary accordingly. Complaints must come directly versus indirectly. Our school takes complaints seriously and is committed to ensuring that they are comprehensively followed up on. 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:

- The organization
- The teacher or staff member
- The parent/family/student

Healthy Feedback:

- **Direct feedback** is the best feedback. Faculty, staff, and board members are happy to discuss school concerns and commendations staff and board members will direct feedback, questions, and concerns following the school’s communication policy, by firstly encouraging school community members to go straight to the person concerned.
- **Facilitated feedback** occurs when school members find it difficult or uncomfortable to speak directly with a person. Faculty, staff, and board members will then offer their support in facilitating a collaborative conversation.
- **Indirect feedback** occurs when school members are not comfortable in participating in a collaborative meeting but would still prefer their concern to be heard. Board and staff members can ask permission to relay non-anonymous indirect feedback. The person relaying the feedback may provide context and relationship during the process. This kind of feedback can be of use for non-urgent and nonpriority matters.
- **Anonymous feedback** may be solicited or unsolicited. When it is solicited it has value; when it is unsolicited, it can be misconstrued due to its anonymity. Anonymous feedback does not provide enough context to be a healthy catalyst for change unless solicited. Thus, it carries less weight than indirect non-anonymous feedback, may result in inaction or delayed action.

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3. Procedure for Parents with Educational Related Issues

I.

Schedule an appointment with your child's teacher.

Ask Questions: My child said, is this true? I heard this, did this happen? What is the context? Can we discuss this? What are next steps?

II.

In the meeting, be solution oriented.

Share your knowledge with the teacher, you are the expert on your child and the teacher is the expert in the classroom in relation to education and social learning.

III.

If you feel the issue needs further attention:

Schedule an appointment with one of the Chairs, then Directors and then Head of School, and the teacher. Share your questions and your concerns or complaint.

What parents can expect:

- Parent communications responded to within a reasonable time
- Requests for appointments responded to or scheduled within a reasonable time
- Parent to be notified about single serious issue or ongoing problem
- Two formal conferences per year, other meetings and calls within reason

What parents should not expect:

- Teachers returning a call after work hours
- Answering email in the evening/weekends
- Access to teacher's private phone number or email

When you should contact your child's teacher:

- Changes in family situation (divorce, new baby, move)
- Medical issues that arise or change
- Illness lasting longer than 3 days
- Safety issues, change in behavior at home
- Family emergencies, sleepless nights, play dates, appointments (send a note)
- Ongoing and pervasive problems/concerns at school or home
- When you can't keep a scheduled appointment
- When homework takes way more time than expected, or your child is unable to do most of it independently

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When you have last minute information for your child's teacher:

- Send a note to reception or with your child
- Call the office and leave a message for the teacher

Communication that interferes with student learning:

- Showing up before or during class to discuss a matter without an appointment
- Speaking to the teacher disrespectfully or angrily, especially in front of your child or other students
- Gossiping to other parents rather than discussing issues directly with staff members. Remember that you are the model of how you want your child to communicate.

Ways to help your child be more responsible and independent:

- Encourage your child to talk to the teacher about problems with homework or other issues at school. Send an email or note to the teacher so they're aware, simply saying, "Joe had a problem on the yard yesterday that he needs to talk to you about." Let the teacher take it from there.
- Have your child write a note to the teacher explaining why homework wasn't completed, then sign the note.
- Allow your child to be responsible for carrying their own backpack and belongings to and from school – even in kindergarten!
- If your child forgets their lunch, their homework, or their instrument, let them be accountable for it rather than delivering it for them.
- Allow your child to arrive to school as independently as possible. Send the message that you're comfortable dropping your child at school. If you are not, speak with your child's teacher.
- If your child is late, bring them to the office to fill out a late slip.
- Do not go into classrooms or hallways before or after school without an appointment.

Homework

Homework is based on what was taught and learned in the classroom. Please understand that a teacher may not be able to compile homework on the same school day in which your child is absent. Unless your child has an extended absence, please allow the teacher to go over missed work and homework assignments when the child returns to school.

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4. Communicating with School Leadership

- Communication should be directed to the person responsible (see below)
- All feedback should be in writing (email)
- The Directors and Head of School will acknowledge communications in writing in a timely fashion and confirm the course of action and timelines that will be followed.

Director of Business Finance

Feedback, questions or concerns on matters of facilities, technology, tuition payments and privacy matters

Director of Advancement

Feedback, questions or concerns on matters of enrolment, communications

Director of Education

Feedback, questions or concerns regarding educational matters or staff

Head of School

Feedback, questions, or concerns related to leadership, strategic goals, community relationships and human resource complaints

5. Communicating with the Board of Trustees

- If the matter is related to overall school operations, the Board of Trustees will direct school community members to school operational faculty, staff or leadership
- If the matter is related to overall school governance, strategic planning, legal or fiscal oversight communication may be addressed to the Board of Trustees Chair and Head of School

The Board Chair will:

- acknowledge receipt of correspondence
- work collaboratively with the Head of School on the matter before:
- ensuring that correspondence is brought at the next available meeting of the Board

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6. Communicating 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: especially the weekly eNews, class newsletters and letters. 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.

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 into the office. 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.

7. Email & Online Communications

The best form of communication will always be an in-person meeting or conversation. This is what allows for true human relationships to be cultivated. However, in the practical world, emails are often necessary. Parents, staff, faculty and board members agree to our email policies.

Email correspondence should only be used for things such as:

- Exchanging factual information
- Asking respectful questions
- Arranging meeting times
- Informing about class events
- Circulation of meeting minutes
- Registering feedback, questions or concerns with school administration as in Section 4 of this document, "Communicating with Administration."

Email correspondence should not be used for:

- Lengthy pedagogical content
- Any emotional content
- Sarcasm, inflammatory content etc.
- Opinions or subjective statements

Responding to emails

As a rule of thumb, if you receive an email and notice that you have a reaction, let it sit and solicit confidential advice before you respond.

- For non-urgent messages, a response time of 48 hours is expected. At times this may only be an acknowledgment of receipt.
- For urgent or important messages, a response time of 24 hours is expected from parents and WWS faculty and staff.
- Emails relating to student behaviour or classroom incidents will be considered important. All correspondence related to student behaviour or discipline plans is considered important.

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Online Communications

Community members are expected to follow these guidelines in online environments and social media:

- Treat others with the same respect expected in the school environment
- Refrain from making disparaging remarks online about peers, teachers, parents, or the school
- Refrain from using the school name when creating groups online without prior consent of the school

8. Staff Communications

Faculty Meetings

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.

Subject Teachers

Specialist staff are responsible for speaking directly with students, a class, or parent:

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

High School Student-Faculty Email Correspondence

Interactions with students should primarily be in person during school hours. However, at times there may be reasons to email directly with students. When this occurs, the following guidelines should be followed:

- Only correspond with students by email if it is not possible to meet with them in person
- Any email to students must be copied to the parent/guardian of the student.

Use of Groups

- Emails are often sent to groups, for example when organizing an activity.
- When responding to these emails, carefully consider if the whole group needs to receive the response or just the original sender.
- Avoid personal 1 on 1 conversations within groups.

Other Guidelines

- Always ensure it is clear who the email is addressed to. Fill in subject lines on message headers.
- Refrain from addressing email to a group without identifying who it is really for.
- Before choosing to blind carbon copy a message consider the ethics behind the choice.
- Emails to class parents will use blind carbon copy to respect the privacy of personal contact information.
- Refer also to Personal Information Privacy Policy, Social Media Use Policy for Employees, and Crisis Communications Policy

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9. Addressing Communication and School Problems

The first step is to discuss the situation directly with the person in a space, and at a time, which allows for respectful exploration of the concern. If there is dissatisfaction with the communication, the next step in the process is to clearly outline the concern in writing (email) to the Head of School requesting that a facilitated meeting be established. The parents or staff members involved, along with the Director of Education or Business Finance/ Advancement or Chairs may 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(s) 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
- (vi) If an issue is not resolved at this stage, please refer to the **Grievance Procedure, Section 11.**

10. 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.

I.

Address your complaint in writing or in person to the Head of School and identify that you wish that it be addressed. The Head of School will acknowledge the communication and respond in a timely manner; within five business days, depending on the seriousness of the complaint.

II.

The Head of School will request permission that the written record of the information provided is shown to the person(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 Head of School cannot process anonymous complaints.

III.

The Head of School will then, in collaboration with 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.

IV.

The Head of School and nominated senior staff member will assess the complaint. See process which follows.

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In assessing the complaint, the Head of School and nominated senior staff member will consider:

- The grounds for the complaint
- The complaint as a symptom of an underlying issue relating to responsibilities occurring, in some combination, in the three levels: organization, teacher, parent/family.

Following the above assessment, they may:

- 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.
- Share the details of the complaint with the person/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.
- Should there be more than one complainant, or should another subsequent new complainant raise the same or similarly related issues, the Head of School will initiate a review of the program or issue in question. In this case, the response to the complainants will come from the Head of School, who indicate how the issues will be addressed and in what time frame. The Head of School is will then follow up with both the complainants and staff/teachers within the time frame.

If, after this response, the complainant is still dissatisfied:

The complainant may follow up with the **Grievance Procedure**.

11. Grievance Procedure

a. Rationale

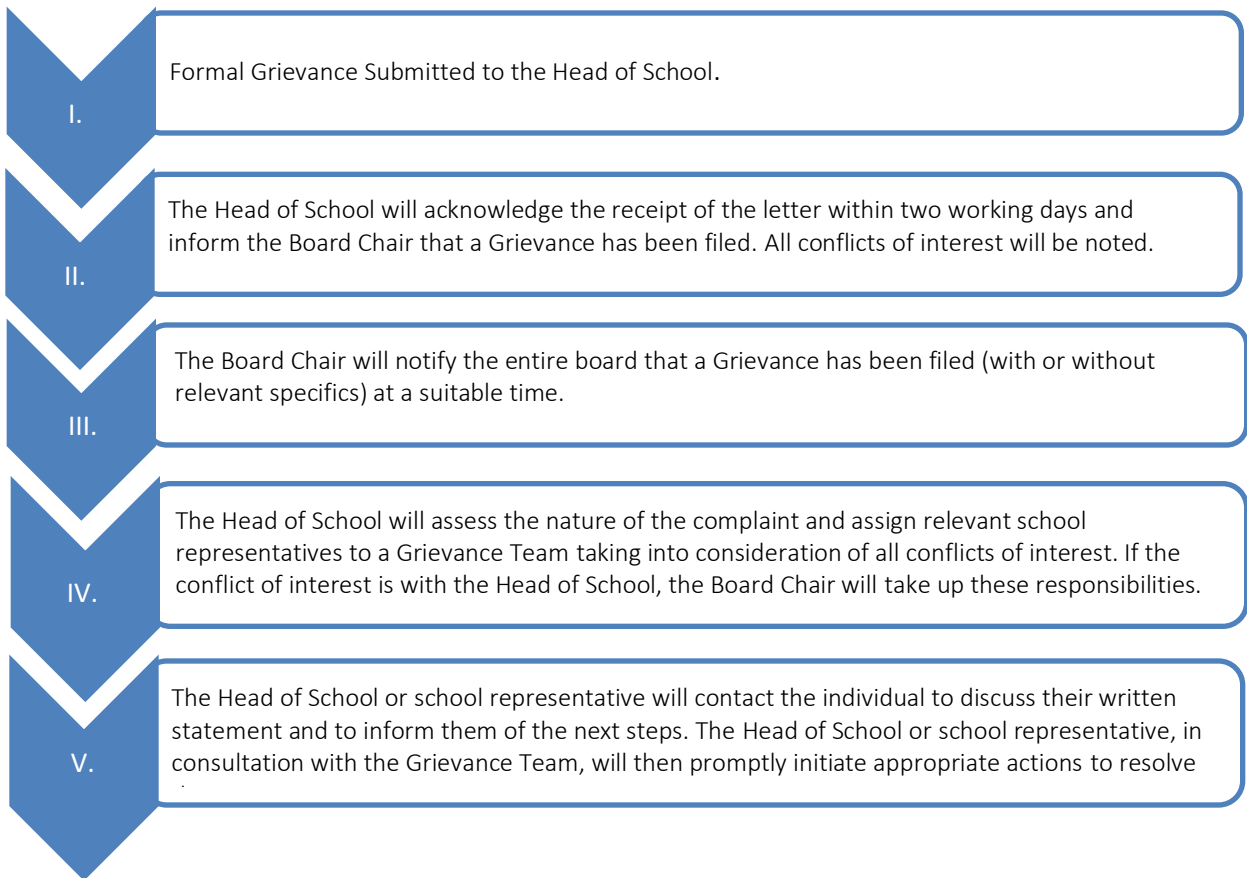
This Grievance Procedure is invoked only in situations when the previously prescribed steps have been followed and one or both participants are still unhappy with the outcomes on the grounds that they were:

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

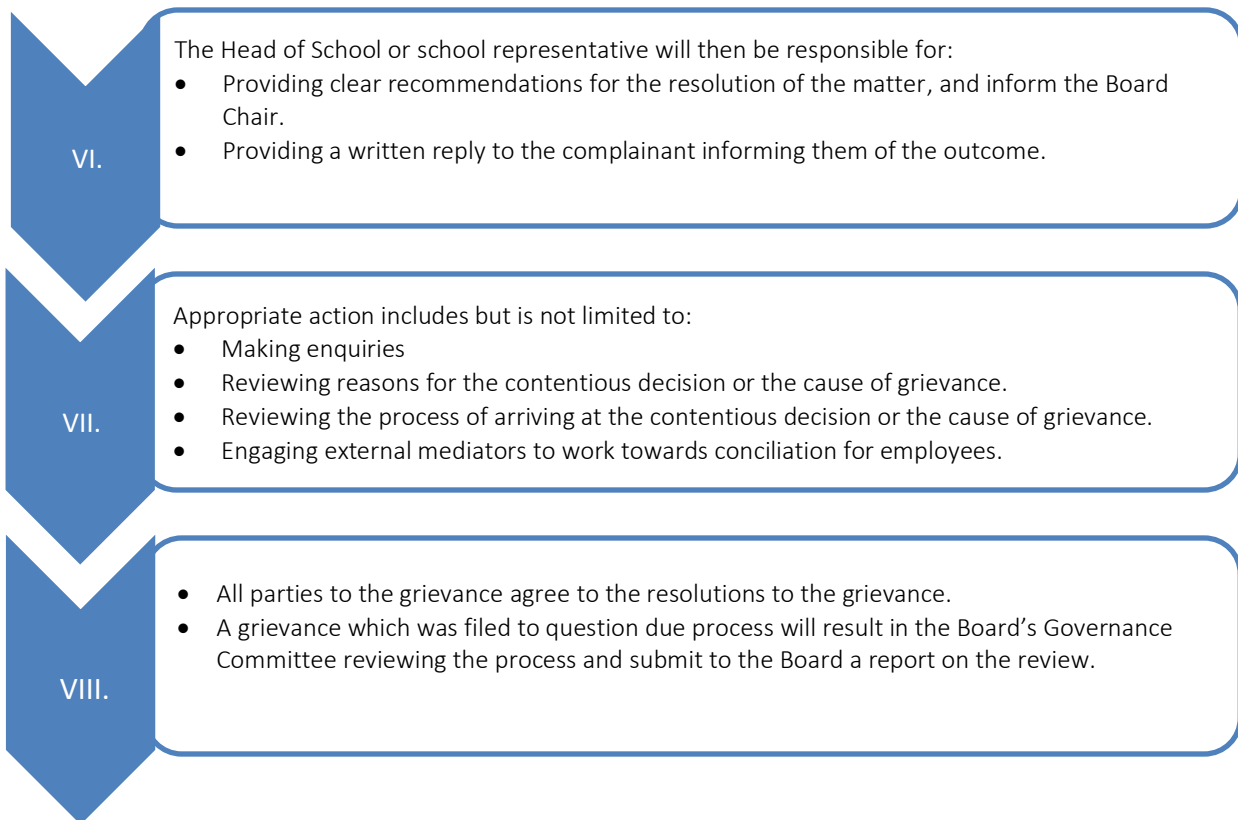
Grievance procedures may be followed in issues of communication between staff members and between staff members and parents. The school will not attempt to resolve disputes between parents.

b. Grievance Procedure

To begin a formal Grievance Procedure a written request must be filed with the Head of School or with the Board Chair if the grievance is with the Head of School, and 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. The process is outlined below.



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12. Board Human Resources and Governance Grievance Procedure

- The Board Human Resources and Governance 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:
 - (i) unfair or unreasonable and/or
 - (ii) that they believe that due process as described above was not followed.
- Board Human Resources Grievance procedures essentially follows the same steps as outlined in the Grievance Procedure, 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 Business Finance, in collaboration with the Director of Education, may request a re-consideration of the enrolment of the child at the school.

13. Federation of Independents Schools (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 Ombudsperson for the AMG group is Tako van Popta and he can be reached through the President of the Associate Member Group, Kent Dykstra, through the FISA BC Office (info@fisabc.ca).

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