



Complaints Policy

Core Values

Readiness

Resilience

Respect

School Values

Independence

Ambition

Compassion

Co-operation

Initiative

Enjoyment

Responsibility

Confidence

Celebration

Kindness

Honesty

Individuality

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1. **Introduction**

1.1 **Aims of this Policy**

This policy outlines how our school receives, investigates, and resolves complaints from individuals who are not employed by the school. Its purpose is to:

- Provide a clear and accessible process
- Encourage early resolution wherever possible
- Ensure complaints are handled fairly, thoroughly, and without bias
- Support positive relationships between the school and its community

This policy is investigatory, not adversarial, and aims to resolve concerns efficiently while promoting reconciliation and learning.

1.2 **Statutory Requirements**

This policy meets statutory and regulatory requirements, including:

- Section 29 of the Education Act 2002, which requires schools to have and make available a procedure for handling all complaints relating to:
 - The school, and
 - Any community facilities or services the school provides
- Department for Education (DfE) guidance on school complaints procedures, including:
 - The DfE model complaints procedure
 - The DfE model procedure for handling unreasonable complaints
- The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) statutory framework, specifically the requirements for:
 - Handling concerns and complaints about the school's fulfilment of EYFS learning and welfare standards

2. **Definitions and Scope**

2.1 Key Terms

Concern

An early expression of worry or dissatisfaction. Concerns should be raised informally with the relevant staff member and are usually resolved quickly.

Complaint

A formal expression of dissatisfaction about an action, decision, or lack of action by the school, a member of staff, or a governor.

Allegation / Low-Level Concern

An allegation or low-level concern about staff conduct is handled under the Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy, not under this Complaints Policy, unless the complaint relates specifically to how the school responded.

Investigator

The person appointed to establish facts relating to a formal complaint.

Review Panel

A group of governors convened to consider a complaint at Stage 3.

2.2 Scope of This Policy

This policy covers concerns and complaints relating to:

- School operations, administration, and decisions, including in the EYFS
- Actions or decisions of staff
- SEN support provided by the school

If you have a concern or complaint about something which this policy does not cover, please follow the below guidelines.

EXCEPTION:	SIGNPOSTING:
Safeguarding or Child Protection Concerns	Concerns or disclosures relating to safeguarding or child protection are handled under our Safeguarding Policy and in accordance with statutory guidance.
Allegations or low-level concerns about staff	Allegations or concerns about the conduct of staff are managed under Safeguarding policy Appendix 2 following statutory procedures.
Admissions Decisions (after appeal)	Once the appeal process is complete, further complaints should be directed to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman who is responsible for reviewing maladministration in admissions processes.
Exclusions	The process for challenging exclusion decisions is set out in the statutory DfE Exclusions Guidance. Information is also available in the school's Suspensions and Permanent Exclusions Policy.
Staff grievances	Complaints relating to internal staff matters are dealt with under the school's staff grievance procedures.
Whistleblowing Concerns	Whistleblowing concerns from employees, contractors, and temporary staff are handled under our Whistleblower Policy. Additionally, staff can address Lewisham Council's Whistleblowing Policy. At the highest level, the Secretary of State for Education is the prescribed external person for whistleblowers in education who do not wish to raise matters directly with their employer.
SEND assessment decisions	Concerns specifically about decisions made during the SEND statutory assessment process should be directed to the KIDS Disagreement and Mediation Service, which provides impartial support and mediation between families and the local authority.
SEND assessment process	Questions, concerns, or challenges relating to the SEND assessment process itself (rather than school-based provision) should be directed to the Lewisham SEN Team, which oversees statutory assessments and Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs).

EXCEPTION:	SIGNPOSTING:
EYFS Statutory Provision	Concerns about the school's adherence to statutory Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) requirements should be raised directly with OFSTED who regulate and inspect early years provision.
Third-party providers (e.g. after school club)	Complaints about services delivered by external providers operating on school premises should be directed to the provider themselves. The school should be notified in writing (through the headteacher or clerk) of any such complaints.
Data Protection	The school has a separate Data Protection Policy, available on its website. In the first instance, issues should be addressed to the Head Teacher, who acts as the representative of the Data Controller on a day-to-day basis.

2.3 Time Limits

Complaints should be raised within 3 months of the incident unless exceptional circumstances apply

3. Who This Policy Is For

This policy may be used by:

- Parents and carers of current pupils
- Members of the public
- Visitors or external stakeholders
- Any individual not employed by the school

This policy is not for employees; staff should use internal HR policies.

This policy may also be used by pupils. Pupils may communicate concerns or complaints verbally to any trusted adult in school. Concerns raised by pupils will be addressed promptly and sensitively, following the same principles as adult complaints, with support appropriate to age and understanding. This includes, where appropriate, informing parents and carers when a pupil has raised a concern or complaint.

4. Accessibility and Reasonable Adjustments

We aim to ensure the complaints process is accessible to everyone. Reasonable adjustments may include:

- Support with written communication
- Interpreter or translation support
- Alternative meeting formats
- Information in alternative formats

Complainants should inform the school if any adjustments are required.

5. Roles and Responsibilities

5.1 Complainant

Complainants are expected to:

- Raise concerns promptly within the time limit outlined above
- Provide relevant information and evidence
- Communicate respectfully and cooperatively

5.2 Investigator

The investigator will:

- Establish facts through interviews and evidence gathering
- Keep accurate written records
- Provide a clear summary of findings

5.3 Clerk to the Governing Board

The clerk will:

- Coordinate formal hearings
- Circulate papers and minutes, ensuring all parties have access to the relevant information
- Provide procedural advice to the panel
- Take minutes of stage 3 panel hearings

5.4 Review Panel

The panel will:

- Consider the complaint impartially
- Review all evidence
- Reach findings based solely on evidence
- Communicate the outcome in writing

5.5 Panel Chair

The Panel Chair will:

- Chair the meeting, ensuring that everyone is treated with respect throughout
- Ensure all parties understand the purpose of the committee, and are allowed to present their case

6. Complaint Stages (General Complaints)

These stages apply to all complaints within the scope of Section 2.2, unless the complaint concerns the headteacher or governors (see Section 7).

Please note that complaints raised publicly on social media cannot be addressed through this policy. Complainants will be asked to follow the formal process.

6.1 Stage 1: Informal Resolution

Complainants should raise concerns with the headteacher or relevant staff member. The school will:

- Acknowledge within 3–5 school days
- Seek resolution through discussion or meeting with relevant parties
- Respond within 10 school days from acknowledgement of the concern

If unresolved, the complainant may progress to Stage 2.

6.2 Stage 2: Formal Complaint

Formal complaints should be submitted in writing to the headteacher.

The headteacher will:

- Acknowledge within 5 school days
- Meet with the complainant
- Conduct a full investigation (See 6.2.1)
- Provide a written outcome within 15 school days from the commencement of the investigation

If dissatisfied, the complainant may request a Stage 3 panel.

6.2.1 Investigation Process

The school will use discretion in deciding what scope and scale of investigation is appropriate to the information laid out by the complainant in writing.

Investigations may include:

- Meeting with the complainant
- Interviews with staff, pupils, witnesses, and/or governor if applicable.
- Review of documents (emails, logs, policies, notes)
- Examination of timetables, rotas, or arrangements
- Review of CCTV (where available and lawful)
- Site visits
- Review of relevant policies

Investigations aim to:

- Establish facts
- Clarify events in chronological order
- Consider multiple perspectives
- Keep clear written records
- Ensure all involved can share their account

6.3 Stage 3: Review Panel

Formal requests for a panel review must be submitted in writing to the Clerk to the Governing Board within 10 school days of receiving the Stage 2 outcome.

- The Review Panel and Hearing will be planned and conducted according to the guidance in Section 6.3.1.
- A written decision will be prepared by the panel and provided by the clerk within 15 school days of the hearing in line with Section 6.3.2.

This is the final stage of the school process.

If the complainant wishes to escalate the complaint further, see Section 9.

6.3.1 Planning and Conducting the Panel Hearing

Prior to the Hearing:

The clerk will:

- Acknowledge the request within 5 school days
- Identify three impartial governors who have had no prior involvement in the complaint
- If insufficient governors are available, source appropriately skilled, independent governors from another school or the local authority
- Arrange a hearing date (aiming for a date within 15 school days, where possible) agreed upon by the complainant, clerk, and the panel
- Offer the complainant reasonable notice of the hearing
- If the complainant cancels this date, a second date will be agreed. Should the complainant not attend for any reason, it will go ahead in their absence.
 - In this case, if the complainant has made the clerk aware they will not be attending within 5 school days' notice, the complainant will be able to submit a statement to be considered in their absence
- Circulate all written material to parties and panel members at least 5 school days before the hearing

At the Hearing:

The complainant and a representative of the school will be invited to attend and may submit both written and oral submissions. The complainant may be accompanied by a suitable companion. Legal representation is generally not encouraged, though may be permitted in exceptional cases.

The school does not permit audio or video recording of meetings or hearings unless agreed in advance by all parties. Covert recording is not permitted. If a request to record is made, the panel or meeting lead will decide whether this is appropriate and will confirm the decision in writing.

The panel will:

- Welcome all parties and explain the procedure
- Allow each side to present their case and supporting evidence
- Permit witnesses to give relevant evidence
- Provide all parties with an opportunity to ask and answer questions
- Ensure proceedings remain impartial, respectful, and non-adversarial

After both parties have presented their case, the complainant and school representative(s) part is finished, and they will be invited to leave. The panel then:

- Deliberates in private
- Reaches findings based solely on the evidence presented
- Agrees recommendations, where appropriate

A written outcome will be sent to the complainant within **10 school days** of the hearing (see Section 6.3.2).

6.3.2 The Written Decision

The committee can:

- **Uphold** the complaint, in whole or in part
- **Dismiss** the complaint, in whole or in part

If the complaint is **upheld**, the committee will:

- Decide the appropriate action to resolve the complaint
- Where appropriate, recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future

The decisions and recommendations made by the panel will be communicated to the complainant in writing (See section 6.3)

7. Complaints About the Headteacher

These stages apply to complaints against the Headteacher only. Please note that complaints raised publicly on social media cannot be addressed through this policy. Complainants will be asked to follow the formal process.

7.1 Stage 1: Informal Resolution

Complainants must send concerns directly to the Clerk to the Governing Board. The headteacher will take no role in the process.

The clerk will:

- Acknowledge within 5 school days
- Notify relevant parties in the school to address the complaint
 - This will normally be a member of the leadership team who is not involved in the complaint itself, but discretion will be applied by the school as to who is most appropriate to address any complaint

The relevant representative of the school will:

- Seek resolution through discussion or meeting with relevant parties
- Respond within 10 school days from acknowledgement of the concern

If unresolved, the complainant may progress to Stage 2.

7.2 Stage 2: Formal Complaint

Formal complaints should again be submitted to the Clerk to the Governing Board.

The clerk will:

- Acknowledge within 5 school days
- Notify relevant parties in the school to address the complaint
 - This will normally be a member of the leadership team who is not involved in the complaint itself, but discretion will be applied by the school as to who is most appropriate to address any complaint

An impartial governor will:

- Acknowledge within 5 school days
- Meet with the complainant
- Conduct a full investigation (See 6.2.1)
- Provide a written outcome within 15 school days from the commencement of the investigation

If dissatisfied, the complainant may request a Stage 3 panel.

7.3 Stage 3: Review Panel

Formal requests for a panel review must be submitted in writing to the Clerk to the Governing Board within 10 school days of receiving the Stage 2 outcome.

- The Review Panel and Hearing will be planned and conducted according to the guidance in Section 6.3.1.
- A written decision will be prepared by the panel and provided by the clerk within 15 school days of the hearing in line with Section 6.3.2.

This is the final stage of the school process.

If the complainant wishes to escalate the complaint further, see Section 9.

8. Complaints About a Governor

These stages apply to complaints against Governors, including the Chair of Governors. Please note that complaints raised publicly on social media cannot be addressed through this policy. Complainants will be asked to follow the formal process.

8.1 Stage 1: Informal Resolution

Complainants must send concerns directly to the Clerk to the Governing Board. The clerk will:

- Notify relevant parties in the school to address the complaint
 - This will normally be a member of the governing body who is not involved in the complaint itself, or will be the Chair of Governors where practicable. Discretion will be applied by the school as to who is most appropriate to address any complaint

The Chair of Governors or another independent governor will:

- Acknowledge within 5 school days
- Seek resolution through discussion or meeting with relevant parties
- Respond within 10 school days from acknowledgement of the concern

If unresolved, the complainant may progress to Stage 2.

8.2 Stage 2: Formal Complaint

Formal complaints should again be submitted to the Clerk to the Governing Board. The clerk will:

- Acknowledge within 5 school days
- Notify relevant parties in the school to address the complaint
 - This will normally be a member of the leadership team who is not involved in the complaint itself, but discretion will be applied by the school as to who is most appropriate to address any complaint

An impartial governor will:

- Acknowledge within 5 school days
- Meet with the complainant
- Conduct a full investigation (See 6.2.1)
- Provide a written outcome within 15 school days from the commencement of the investigation

If dissatisfied, the complainant may request a Stage 3 panel.

8.3 Stage 3: Review Panel

Formal requests for a panel review must be submitted in writing to the Clerk to the Governing Board within 10 school days of receiving the Stage 2 outcome.

- The Review Panel and Hearing will be planned and conducted according to the guidance in Section 6.3.1.
- A written decision will be prepared by the panel and provided by the clerk within 15 school days of the hearing in line with Section 6.3.2.

This is the final stage of the school process.

If the complainant wishes to escalate the complaint further, see Section 9.

8.4 Complaints About the Governing Board (Whole or Majority)

If a complaint is made about a majority of, or the whole governing body, the process in Section 8 applies. However, in this case, the school or clerk will appoint:

- An independent investigator for Stage 2 (See Section 8.2)
- An independent panel for Stage 3 (See Section 8.3)

Generally, these will be made up of independent governors from other schools.

9. Referring Complaints Beyond the School

In the unlikely event that the complainant is unsatisfied after Stage 3, complaints should be referred to the Department for Education (DfE). The DfE reviews procedural compliance only.

In this case, the complainant should advise the clerk of their intent to escalate but is responsible for referring the complaint themselves.

Complaints about the school's fulfilment of the statutory EYFS requirements as set out in the EYFS framework may also be submitted to Ofsted.

10. **Unreasonable or Persistent Complaints**

The school may implement proportionate restrictions (e.g., limiting communication channels) where a complainant's behaviour becomes unreasonable. Any such decision will be communicated in writing.

Examples of unreasonable behaviour in relation to complaints are if a complainant:

- Has made the same complaint before, and it has already been resolved by following the school's complaints procedure
- Makes a complaint that is obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific, defamatory or repetitive
- Knowingly provides false information
- Insists on pursuing a complaint that is unfounded, or out of scope of the complaints procedure
- Pursues a valid complaint, but in an unreasonable manner e.g. refuses to articulate the complaint, refuses to co-operate with this complaints procedure, or insists that the complaint is dealt with in ways that are incompatible with this procedure and the time frames it sets out
- Changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation goes on
- Makes a complaint designed to cause disruption, annoyance or excessive demands on school time
- Seeks unrealistic outcomes, or a solution that lacks any serious purpose or value

These are examples of unreasonable behaviour; there may be more that fall within the scope of this policy which will be considered under the discretion of the school.

Unreasonable Complaints using Technology

The school appreciates that technology plays a significant role in people's lives and in how individuals communicate and share concerns. However, the use of technology must not undermine the fair and orderly operation of the school's complaints procedure.

If the use of technology during a complaint is unreasonable or vexatious, the school will implement proportionate restrictions (e.g., dismissing the complaint or requiring the complainant to clarify, amend, or resubmit the complaint in full in their own words). The use of technology during a complaint will be considered vexatious if the complainant:

- Uses social media or other online platforms to pursue, publicise or escalate a complaint, especially in a manner that is persistent, harassing, intimidatory, defamatory, or designed to apply undue pressure on the school or its staff; or which disrupts the proper complaints procedure
- Generates the wording of a complaint wholly or substantially through the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools such that the content demonstrates a lack of understanding of the school's complaints procedure, including (but not limited to) complaints that are excessively broad, outside the scope of the policy, based on inaccurate or outdated information, or that include irrelevant material

11. **Anonymous, Duplicate, and Campaign Complaints**

- Anonymous complaints may be considered if they raise serious issues.
- Duplicate complaints will not be re-investigated unless new evidence emerges.
- Campaign complaints may receive a single coordinated response.

12. Record Keeping

The school will keep secure records of all complaints, including:

- Dates
- Actions
- Evidence
- Outcomes

Records are stored in accordance with data protection legislation and in line with our Data Protection Policy.

13. Monitoring and Learning Lessons

Senior leaders and governors will analyse complaints annually to identify trends and improve practice.

14. Links with Other Policies

This policy links to:

- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy
- Behaviour Policy
- Staff Code of Conduct
- SEND Policy

Appendix A: Complaints Procedure Flowchart

