Wellington Primary School

Complaints Policy

	Print name	Date Approved	Review Date
Headteacher	Mrs Joy Wood	November 2025	November 2026
On behalf of Governing Body	Full Governing Body		

Every well governed and well managed school will, from time to time, have to deal with complaints. Governors will know that most parental concerns and complaints are resolved informally by school staff. Comparatively few complaints lead to a formal process, but some do, and governors must be sure that informal and formal procedures are in place, understood and followed. For the purpose of this policy, concerns and complaints are explained below:

- A concern: an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important.
- A complaint: an expression or statement of dissatisfaction about actions taken or a lack of action.

This paper describes a **model procedure for dealing with complaints**:

- It **can be used** to resolve complaints about the way school is run or about the way a school policy has been implemented. Most of these complaints are about decisions which affect a particular pupil or pupils.
- It **cannot be used** to resolve matters where other legal procedures already apply. For example, staff discipline, special educational needs / disabilities (SEND), admissions and exclusions.

Who can complain and when?

This model procedure applies to complaints made by:

- parents of pupils currently attending, or who have attended the school within the last 12 months, unless there are exceptional circumstances.
- people who either have 'parental responsibility' for a pupil or who care for him or her, but are not the pupil's parents.
- visitors to school.

This policy should not be used when a complaint is received from a member of staff. The staff complaints and grievance policy should be used in this case.

Complaints must be presented within 3 months of the action or matter complained of. Complaints relating to former pupils will only be considered if they were raised within 12 months of the pupil leaving the school.

The school may consider complaints outside of these timeframes where exceptional circumstances apply.

What action should the Governing Body take?

The Governing Body should:

- Approve and adopt a written Complaints Policy.
- The Chair of Governors will appoint a Complaints Appeal Committee comprised of

Parent and Co-opted Governors. Staff and Teacher Governors are advised not to serve on the Committee due to the potential for conflict of interest.

- It may be useful, where possible, to appoint several governors to the Complaints Appeal Committee and select two or three for a particular complaint. No governor who has any prior involvement in the matter being complained about should serve on the Committee dealing with that complaint.
- The membership of this committee should be reviewed at the first meeting in the autumn term in the same way as all other standing committees of the Governing Body.
- The Governing Body should give the Complaints Appeal Committee full delegated powers to investigate and make decisions about complaints which are referred to it.
- All the usual rules about governors' meetings apply, including declaration of interest. Minutes of the Committee meetings should be confidential and refer to the person making the complaint, the pupil, or anyone involved, by initials rather than by name.

How does the complaints procedure work?

The procedures outlined are based on informal and formal stages. The informal stage involves trying to resolve the matter as quickly as possible with the class teacher and / or senior leader / Headteacher. Only if the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome or the matter cannot be resolved by this individual should the matter be referred to the formal stage with the Headteacher or the Governing Body. Where a complaint is initially sent to the Chair of Governors s/he should refer the matter to the Headteacher for it to be dealt with under the procedures below.

Exceptions

There are two exceptions to the procedure above:

1. A complaint may appear to be sufficiently serious that it should be referred straight through to the formal procedure, or
2. A complaint may clearly relate to breaches of discipline by a staff member, in which case this procedure would not apply and personnel advice should be sought.

Informal Stage

Where to complain?

Stage 1 - Appropriate member of staff

- Parents should be given the opportunity to discuss their concerns with an appropriate member of staff, such as the class teacher.
- In many cases, parents' concerns and complaints are resolved at this early part of the informal stage.
- If the concern remains unresolved, the staff member should advise the parent that they may complain to a senior leader / Headteacher.

Stage 2 - Member of the Leadership Team

The member of the Leadership team should:

- Meet with the person making the complaint and obtain full details of the complaint.
- Discuss this with the member of staff involved.
- Where a complaint concerns a pupil, that pupil should normally be interviewed.
- Ensure written records are kept of all meetings, telephone discussions, and any other relevant documents.
- Consider all the evidence and reach a conclusion. The school aims to reach a conclusion within 30 school days (this does not include school holidays).
- Meet with the person making the complaint giving a full explanation of the decision, the reasons for it and, where appropriate, what action the school proposes to take.
- The Headteacher should be kept informed of the position.
- If the complainant is not satisfied and has dealt with a member of the leadership team, they may request to speak to the Headteacher.

Stage 3 Headteacher

The Headteacher should:

- Meet with the person making the complaint and obtain full details of the complaint.
- Discuss this with the member of staff involved.
- Where a complaint concerns a pupil, that pupil should normally be interviewed.
- Ensure written records are kept of all meetings, telephone discussions, and any other relevant documents.
- Consider all the evidence and reach a conclusion. The school aims to reach a conclusion within 30 school days (this does not include school holidays).
- Meet with the person making the complaint giving a full explanation of the decision, the reasons for it and, where appropriate, what action the school proposes to take.
- The Headteacher should inform the parent that if they are not satisfied with the outcome they may complain to the Chair of the Governing body within 3 months of the action or matter complained of.

Stage 4 - Chair of Governors

a) If a complaint has been through stages 1, 2 and 3, the Chair would normally pass the complaint straight to the Complaints Appeal Committee unless it is clear that the matter can be immediately resolved.
b) A complaint against the Headteacher should be referred straight to the Chair of Governors:
    - This would usually involve the Chair speaking with the person making the complaint and the Headteacher to ascertain whether or not the complaint can be resolved at this informal meeting.
    - If the matter cannot be resolved and the complaint falls within the scope of the procedure, the Chair should then refer the complaint straight to the Complaints Appeal Committee.
    - If the Chair has had some prior involvement in the matter which is being complained of, he or she should ask the vice-chair to undertake this role instead of the Chair.

Formal Stage

The Complaints Appeal Committee of the Governing Body deals with any complaint which has reached the formal stage. This involves:

1) Receiving the complaint.
2) Investigating the complaint.
3) Making a decision on the complaint.
4) Reporting the decision of the Complaints Appeal Committee to the Governing Body.

The Remit of the Complaints Appeal Panel

The panel can:

a) dismiss the complaint in whole or in part;
b) uphold the complaint in whole or in part;
c) decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint;
d) recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not reoccur.

There are several points which any governor sitting on a complaints appeal panel needs to remember:

a) It is important that the appeal hearing is independent and impartial and that it is seen to be so. No governor may sit on the panel if they have had a prior involvement in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it. In deciding the make-up of the panel, governors need to try and ensure that it is a cross-section of the categories of governor and sensitive to the issues of race, gender and religious affiliation.
b) The aim of the hearing, which needs to be held in private, will always be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant. However, it has to be recognized the complainant might not be satisfied with the outcome if the hearing does not find in their favor. It may only be possible to

establish the facts and make recommendations which will satisfy the complainant that his or her complaint has been taken seriously.

c) An effective panel will acknowledge that many complainants feel nervous and inhibited in a formal setting. Parents can feel emotional when discussing an issue that affects their child. The panel chair should ensure that the proceedings are as welcoming as possible. The layout of the room should set the tone and care should be taken to ensure the setting is informal and not adversarial.
d) Extra care needs to be taken when the complainant is a child. Careful consideration of the atmosphere and proceedings will ensure that the child does not feel intimidated. The panel needs to be aware of the views of the child and give them equal consideration to those of adults. Where the child's parent is the complainant, it would be helpful to give the parent the opportunity to say which parts of the hearing, if any, the child needs to attend.
e) The governors sitting on the panel need to be aware of the complaints procedure.

Roles and Responsibilities

The Role of the Clerk

The Department for Education (DfE) strongly recommends that any panel or group of governors considering complaints be clerked. The clerk would be the contact point for the complainant and be required to:

- set the date, time and venue of the hearing, ensuring that the dates are convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible.
- collate any written material and send it to the parties in advance of the hearing.
- meet and welcome the parties as they arrive at the hearing;
- record the proceedings (in certain circumstances it may be advisable to appoint a clerk independent to the school, to take the notes of the meeting);
- notify all parties of the panel's decision.

The Role of the Chair of the Governing Body or the Nominated Governor

The nominated governor role:

- check that the correct procedure has been followed;
- if a hearing is appropriate, notify the clerk to arrange the panel;

The Role of the Chair of the Panel

The Chair of the Panel has a key role, ensuring that:

- the remit of the panel is explained to the parties and each party has the opportunity of putting their case without undue interruption;
- the issues are addressed;
- key findings of fact are made;
- parents and others who may not be used to speaking at such a hearing are put at ease;
- the hearing is conducted in an informal manner with each party treating the other with respect and courtesy;

- the panel is open minded and acting independently;
- no member of the panel has a vested interest in the outcome of the proceedings or any involvement in an earlier stage of the procedure; each side is given the opportunity to state their case and ask questions;
- written material is seen by all parties. If a new issue arises, it would be useful to give all parties the opportunity to consider and comment on it.

Notification of the Panel's Decision

The chair of the panel needs to ensure that the complainant is notified of the panel's decision, in writing, with the panel's response; within 5 working days of the hearing (this does not include school holidays).

The letter will explain that there are no further rights of appeal to the governing body and if the parent wishes to take the matter further they need to write to

Secretary of State for Education
Department for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BT.

Receiving the complaint

The Complaints Appeal Committee should try to meet as soon as possible after the complaint is received to agree and be clear about what needs to be done and draw up a timetable for doing it.

The Chair of the Complaints Appeal Committee should write to the person making the complaint to:

- explain that the committee is now dealing with the complaint.
- confirm that the committee has received a copy of any written complaint.
- set out what appears to be the nature of the complaint and to invite the complainant to send any further written information about the complaint.
- set out the committee's timescale for dealing with the complaint.
- invite the person making the complaint to meet the committee to give full details of their complaint, and inform them they may be accompanied by a friend or representative.
- set a reasonable deadline for reply by the person making the complaint, and make it clear that if there is no response by this deadline the committee will proceed on the basis of the information it already has.

If the person making the complaint accepts the invitation to meet the Committee, arrangements should be made to make this as easy as possible. The Committee may wish to consider the most appropriate time and place for the meeting to take place and whether other facilities such as providing an interpreter would be helpful. The committee should

also write to the person(s) complained of informing him/her of the complaint and explaining that they will be given the opportunity to give their version of events.

The purpose of all the above is to find out precisely what the complaint is about and to inform the complainant of the procedure and timescale.

Investigating the complaint

- The Committee must meet to discuss the complaint and decide what information they need, who they may need to interview in addition to the person(s) complained of and what questions will need to be asked.
- The interviews can proceed with prepared questions followed by other questions if necessary, and the people being interviewed should be asked if they have anything to add. Answers to the questions should be carefully recorded and the people being interviewed should be asked to sign the record of answers.
- The investigation is not a staff disciplinary investigation.
- Following interviews with staff, it may be necessary to ask for further information from the person making the complaint.
- The complainant and the person(s) who is the subject of the complaint should be informed if there is any delay in the investigation process.
- When the Complaints Appeal Committee is satisfied that it has all the available information, it will consider the complaint and all the evidence. Governors serving on the committee should all try to reach an agreed decision and should decide what should be done to resolve the complaint.
- It may be possible for the Complaints Appeal Committee to recommend changes to school policies or procedures to prevent the same problem arising in the future.

Making the decision

- The Complaints Appeal Committee must make its decision on the basis of the information in their possession.
- It should produce an investigation report which documents its decision. This would need to be produced if the complainant was to refer the matter to the Secretary of State.
- This report is usually written by the Chair of the Committee.
- The investigation report will be brief and will usually keep the names of the pupil, parents and people interviewed confidential. Its purpose is to:
    - Summarize the evidence gathered.
    - Give the decisions made by the Complaints Appeal Committee.
    - Give any recommendations made by the Complaints Appeal Committee to prevent a recurrence.
- Where conflicting versions of events have been given it should be clear from the report why one version has been preferred over the other.
- In very few cases, it could happen that one of the recommendations is for the Governing Body to hold a formal disciplinary investigation to find out if staff disciplinary action is necessary. In this case, the Complaints Appeal Committee should seek the advice of the School Governor Service and/or the Human Resource Service before the investigation report is issued to the Governing Body.

The decisions and recommendations of the Committee should be:

- Sent to the person making the complaint with the information that if the Governing Body's response has failed to satisfy the person making the complaint he or she may complain to the Secretary of State for Education on the grounds that the Governing Body has failed to discharge its statutory duties. Contact details:

  Secretary of State for Education,
  Department for Education
  Sanctuary Building
  Great Smith Street
  London
  SW1P 3BT.

- Sent to the Headteacher.
- Sent to the person(s) complained of.

Reporting the decision

The outcome of the complaint should be reported to the Governing Body, for information only, as with any delegated decision.

The report back should take the form of a paragraph briefly summarizing the complaint, the investigation and the outcome. The Committee's recommendations should be given. No names should be given in the report back.