



A Parent's Guide to Resolving Concerns and Complaints

At Wallisdean Pre-School, Infant School and Junior School, we value our partnership with parents, carers, and the wider community. We know that choice, communication and transparency are vital. Most worries can be sorted out quickly and informally, but when they can't, we have a clear, fair process to help find a solution.

1. The Difference Between a Concern and a Complaint

We want to fix things before they grow into bigger problems. To help us help you, it is useful to know how we define the two stages:

- **A Concern:** An expression of worry or doubt over an issue you feel is important, where you are looking for reassurance. We try to resolve these informally and quickly.
- **A Complaint:** A formal expression of dissatisfaction about actions the school has taken, or a lack of action.

Our Promise: It is in everyone's interest to resolve issues as early as possible. If you find it difficult to talk to a specific member of staff, let us know. We will happily connect you with another objective, impartial member of staff.

2. Who is This Procedure For?

Anyone can use this policy—you do not have to be a parent or carer of a child at the school. Members of the public who use our facilities or services are also welcome to raise issues through this route.

🕒 Time Scales

- **The 3-Month Rule:** You must raise your concern or complaint within **3 months** of the incident happening. If it is a series of linked incidents, it must be within 3 months of the *last* incident. Exceptions will only be made in truly exceptional circumstances.
- **School Holidays:** If we receive a complaint during a school holiday, it will be officially recorded as received on the **first school day back**.

3. Quick Guide: Who Do I Contact?

To ensure your voice is heard by the right person, please look at the table below:

Type of Issue / Complaint	Who to Contact	Notes / Contact Route
General Concern or Worry	Class Teacher/Executive Head Teacher	Informal conversation, phone call or meeting.
School Staff Member	Mrs Cammish (Executive Head Teacher)	Via the School Office. Mark as Private & Confidential.
The Executive Head Teacher	Mr Robinson (Chair of Governors)	Via the School Office. Mark as Private & Confidential.
Governors or the Whole Governing Body	Mrs Tamblyn (Clerk to the Governing Body)	Via the School Office. Mark as Private & Confidential.
External Service Providers (Using school premises)	Contact the provider directly	They must use their own independent complaints procedures.

⊗ Matters Handled Under Separate Rules

Some specific issues cannot be handled by this school complaints policy because they are governed by separate legal frameworks:

- **Admissions, School Re-organisation, or SEN Statutory Assessments:** Contact Hampshire County Council Admissions or SEN teams.
- **Child Protection / Safeguarding:** Handled under our separate Safeguarding Policy. For serious external escalation, contact the LADO Team at 01962 876364 or LADO@hants.gov.uk.
- **School Exclusions:** Visit www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions. (Note: Complaints about the general Behaviour Policy can be handled by the school).
- **Data protection matters** - Complaints about potential infringement of data protection law are handled under our separate Data Protection Complaints Policy as required by the Data Protection Act 2018 and the Data (Use and Access) Act 2025. This includes dissatisfaction with the handling of personal data relating to subject access requests (SARs), data sharing, CCTV, safeguarding records, accuracy, retention, personal data breaches and security incidents.
- **Freedom of Information (FOI)** - Complaints about the school's handling of requests for general (non-personal) school information made under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 follow the Internal Review procedure required by the legislation.
- **Staff Grievances & Disciplinary Conduct:** Handled internally.
Please note: By law, we cannot inform you of any disciplinary actions taken against a staff member, but we will confirm that the matter is being addressed.

4. The 3 Steps to Resolving an Issue

Step 1: The Informal Stage (The Best Place to Start)

Most worries can be resolved by talking directly to your child's **class teacher** or the Executive **headteacher**. You can do this in person, via telephone, or in writing.

- *Please do not approach individual school governors.* They have no legal power to act alone, and doing so stops them from being impartial if your issue needs to go to a formal stage later.

📌 Step 2: Stage 1 (Formal Complaint)

If your informal discussion didn't resolve the issue, you can submit a formal complaint to the Executive Headteacher (or the Clerk, if the complaint is about the Executive Headteacher/Governors).

- **How:** You can do this in person, by phone, or in writing. We provide a **Template Complaint Form** at the end of this document to make this easier for you.
- **Support:** You can ask the school office for help filling out the form, or seek free, independent advice from organisations like **Citizens Advice**. Under equality law, we will make any reasonable adjustments you need (eg, accessible meeting spaces or alternative formats).
- **The Timeline:**
 1. We will acknowledge your formal complaint in writing within **5 school days**.
 2. The Executive Headteacher will clarify what remains unresolved and what outcome you are looking for.
 3. A full investigation will take place.
 4. You will receive a formal written response within **20 school days**. If we need more time, we will tell you why and give you a new date.

Step 3: Stage 2 (Governing Body Complaints Committee)

If you are genuinely unhappy with the outcome of Stage 1, you have the right to escalate the matter to a panel of school governors. This is the **final school-based stage**.

- **How:** Write to the **Clerk to the Governing Body** via the school office within **5 school days** of receiving your Stage 1 response.
- **The Timeline:**
 1. The Clerk will acknowledge your request within **5 school days**.
 2. The Clerk will aim to set up a meeting within **20 school days**.
 3. You will be given at least **10 school days' notice** of the meeting date.
 4. Any additional written evidence you wish to submit must be sent **8 school days** before the meeting, and all paperwork will be shared with everyone **3 school days** before.
- **The Meeting Panel:** The committee will consist of 3 impartial governors who know nothing about your case. If necessary, we will bring in independent governors from other local schools.
- **Support at the Panel:** You are very welcome to bring a friend or relative to support you. This meeting is held in private. Covert electronic recordings are not permitted unless required for disability accommodation by prior agreement.
- **The Decision:** The panel will write to you within **5 school days** of the meeting with a full explanation of their final decision.

5. How We Work to Resolve Complaints

We want to find a positive way forward. If a complaint is upheld (fully or in part), the school will openly acknowledge this and may offer:

- A clear explanation of what happened.
- An admission that the situation could have been handled differently.
- An apology.
- An assurance and explanation of the steps taken to ensure it won't happen again.
- A formal review of school policies.

Note on Large Campaigns: If the school receives a massive volume of identical complaints (for example, from a wider internet campaign unconnected to parents at the school), we reserve the right to publish a single, blanket response on our school website rather than responding individually.

6. Next Steps: Escalation Beyond the School

If you have completed **Stage 2** and firmly believe that the school has either not followed its own published policy or has acted unlawfully/unreasonably under education law, you can contact the **Department for Education (DfE)**.

The DfE will *not* usually reinvestigate the details of your complaint or overturn the school's decision. Instead, they look at whether the school followed the law and its own processes correctly.

- **Online:** www.education.gov.uk/contactus
- **Phone:** 0370 000 2288
- **Post:** Department for Education, Piccadilly Gate, Store Street, Manchester, M1 2WD

Complaint Form:

Please complete and return to Mrs Cammish who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

Your name:
Pupil's name (if relevant):
Your relationship to the pupil (if relevant):
Address: Postcode: Day time telephone number: Evening telephone number:
Please give details of your complaint, including whether you have spoken to anybody at the school about it.

What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?

Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details.

Signature:

Date:

Official use

Date acknowledgement sent:

By who:

Complaint referred to:

Date:

Roles and Responsibilities

Complainant

The complainant will receive a more effective response to the complaint if they:

- explain the complaint in full as early as possible
- co-operate with the school in seeking a solution to the complaint
- respond promptly to requests for information or meetings or in agreeing the details of the complaint
- ask for assistance as needed
- treat all those involved in the complaint with respect
- refrain from publicising the details of their complaint on social media and respect confidentiality.

Investigator

The investigator's role is to establish the facts relevant to the complaint by:

- providing a comprehensive, open, transparent and fair consideration of the complaint through:
 - sensitive and thorough interviewing of the complainant to establish what has happened and who has been involved
 - interviewing staff and children and other people relevant to the complaint
 - consideration of records and other relevant information
 - analysing information
- liaising with the complainant and the complaints co-ordinator as appropriate to clarify what the complainant feels would put things right.

The investigator should:

- conduct interviews with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning
- keep notes of interviews or arrange for an independent note taker to record minutes of the meeting
- ensure that any papers produced during the investigation are kept securely pending any appeal
- be mindful of the timescales to respond
- prepare a comprehensive report for the headteacher or complaints committee that sets out the facts, identifies solutions and recommends courses of action to resolve problems.

The executive head teacher or complaints committee will then determine whether to uphold or dismiss the complaint and communicate that decision to the complainant, providing the appropriate escalation details.

Complaints Co-ordinator (this could be the executive head teacher / designated complaints governor or other staff member providing administrative support)

The complaints co-ordinator should:

- ensure that the complainant is fully updated at each stage of the procedure
- liaise with staff members, head teacher, Chair of Governors, Clerk and LAs (if appropriate) to ensure the smooth running of the complaints procedure
- be aware of issues regarding:
 - sharing third party information
 - additional support. This may be needed by complainants when making a complaint including interpretation support or where the complainant is a child
- keep records.

Clerk to the Governing Body

The Clerk is the contact point for the complainant and the committee and should:

- ensure that all people involved in the complaint procedure are aware of their legal rights and duties, including any under legislation relating to school complaints, education law, the Equality Act 2010, the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act (DPA) 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)
- set the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that the dates are convenient to all parties (if they are invited to attend) and that the venue and proceedings are accessible
- collate any written material relevant to the complaint (for example; stage 1 paperwork, school and complainant submissions) and send it to the parties in advance of the meeting within an agreed timescale
- record the proceedings
- circulate the minutes of the meeting
- notify all parties of the committee's decision.

Committee Chair

The committee's chair, who is nominated in advance of the complaint meeting, should ensure that:

- both parties are asked (via the Clerk) to provide any additional information relating to the complaint by a specified date in advance of the meeting
- the meeting is conducted in an informal manner, is not adversarial, and that, if all parties are invited to attend, everyone is treated with respect and courtesy
- complainants who may not be used to speaking at such a meeting are put at ease. This is particularly important if the complainant is a child
- the remit of the committee is explained to the complainant
- written material is seen by everyone in attendance, provided it does not breach confidentiality or any individual's rights to privacy under the DPA 2018 or GDPR.

If a new issue arises it would be useful to give everyone the opportunity to consider and comment upon it; this may require a short adjournment of the meeting

- both the complainant and the school are given the opportunity to make their case and seek clarity, either through written submissions ahead of the meeting or verbally in the meeting itself
- the issues are addressed
- key findings of fact are made
- the committee is open-minded and acts independently
- no member of the committee has an external interest in the outcome of the proceedings or any involvement in an earlier stage of the procedure
- the meeting is minuted
- they liaise with the Clerk (and complaints co-ordinator, if the school has one).

Committee Member

Committee members should be aware that:

- the meeting must be independent and impartial and should be seen to be so
- no governor may sit on the committee if they have had a prior involvement in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it
- the aim of the meeting should be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant

We recognise:

- that the complainant might not be satisfied with the outcome if the meeting does not find in their favour. It may only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations.
- Many complainants will feel nervous and inhibited in a formal setting Parents/Carers often feel emotional when discussing an issue that affects their child.
- extra care needs to be taken when the complainant is a child and present during all or part of the meeting

Careful consideration of the atmosphere and proceedings should ensure that the child does not feel intimidated.

The committee should respect the views of the child and give them equal consideration to those of adults.

If the child is the complainant, the committee should ask in advance if any support is needed to help them present their complaint. Where the child's parent is the complainant, the committee should give the parent the opportunity to say which parts of the meeting, if any, the child needs to attend.

However, the parent should be advised that agreement might not always be possible if the parent wishes the child to attend a part of the meeting that the committee considers is not in the child's best interests.

The welfare of the child is paramount.

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