



# Complaints Policy

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## Complaints Procedure

Woodbridge Primary School endeavours to provide the best possible education for all of its pupils in an open and transparent environment. We welcome any feedback that we receive from parents, pupils and third parties, and we accept that not all of this will be positive. Where concerns are raised the school intends for these to be dealt with:

- Fairly
- Openly
- Promptly
- Without Prejudice

In order to do so, the governing board of Woodbridge Primary School has approved the following procedure which explains what you should do if you wish to make a complaint about the school. All members of staff will be familiar with the procedure and will be able to assist you.

We try to resolve concerns or complaints by informal means wherever possible. Where this is not possible formal procedures will be followed. This complaints procedure will be used except where separate statutory procedures exist (see Complaints that fall outside this procedure).

## Complaints that fall outside of this procedure

Complaints relating to the following issues are covered by a separate/specific policy.

Pupil admissions; please see the school's admissions policy or contact Suffolk County Council.

Pupil exclusions; please see the school's Behaviour Policy.

Staff grievance, capability or disciplinary; these are covered by the school's Grievance Policy.

Where the complaint concerns a third party used by the school; please complain directly to the third party themselves.

Subject Access Requests and Freedom of Information Requests – please contact the school

## Resolving concerns informally

For the purpose of this procedure concerns are defined as having a worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought. The majority of concerns can be dealt with without resorting to the formal stages of the complaints procedure (see below).

The governing board of Woodbridge Primary School encourages those that have concerns to raise them with the appropriate person at the school (e.g. the child's class teacher) and to work constructively with that person towards resolving them. The extent to which this was both attempted and followed may be taken into consideration when assessing the reasonableness of a complaint during the formal stages of the procedure.

The formal stages of the procedure should be followed when attempts to resolve concerns informally have proved unsuccessful, and in cases where individuals wish to raise their concern formally.

### **Complaints about the headteacher or the governors**

Where a complaint is about the headteacher, the complainant should notify the clerk to the governors. The stage one process (see the formal stages below) will then commence, but with the chair of governors as the individual responsible for the investigation, rather than the headteacher.

Where a complaint concerns a governor the complainant should contact the clerk to the governing board. The clerk will then determine the most appropriate course of action, seeking advice as appropriate. This will depend upon the nature of the complaint.

### **The timescale for making a complaint**

Notification of a complaint should be given as soon as possible after the issue that led to the complaint has occurred and after informal attempts to seek resolution have proved unsuccessful. Complaints that are submitted three months after the issue that led to the complaint occurred will not be considered under this procedure unless there are exceptional circumstances. Exceptional circumstances may include (but are not limited to) subsequent information about the complaint coming to light and a valid explanation of why it was not possible to give notification of the complaint sooner. In such cases the headteacher/chair of the governing board/clerk to the governing board (as appropriate) will review the circumstances, seek advice and determine whether the complaint should be considered under the formal procedure.

### **Maintaining records**

A confidential written record of all complaints that are made in accordance with this procedure will be kept by the school. The written record will include whether the complaint has been resolved following a formal procedure and whether it proceeded to a panel review meeting. It will also refer to any action taken by the school as a result of the complaint regardless of whether it has been upheld.

### **Maintaining confidentiality**

Confidentiality should be maintained all times by everyone involved. The governing board of Woodbridge Primary School requests that complaints are not discussed publicly, including via social media.

Actions taken in relation to school staff that arise as a result of the complaint will remain confidential to the school and the member of staff concerned.

Written records taken and used throughout the complaints process, including correspondence, notes of meetings, telephone calls etc., will be kept securely and in accordance with the principles of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and Data Protection Act 2018.

#### **Safeguarding**

Wherever a concern indicates that a child's wellbeing or safety is at risk, the school is duty bound to report this immediately to the local authority. Any action taken will be in accordance with the school's safeguarding policy <insert details of where this can be found>

### **The formal stages of the complaints procedure**

The majority of concerns can be dealt with without resorting to the formal stages of the procedure. If you need to raise a concern then please do so with the relevant member of staff who will be happy to talk to you and seek to resolve it.

There are two formal stages of the complaints procedure.

#### **Stage 1 – formal investigation by headteacher**

A request for a formal investigation of a complaint by the headteacher (or chair of the governing board as appropriate) should be made in writing c/o the school, or by completing the formal complaints form that is included as Appendix 1 of this procedure.

The headteacher (or chair of the governing board as appropriate) will acknowledge the request in writing no later than 10 working days (excluding those that fall in the school holidays) of receiving it.

A log of all correspondence in relation to the complaint will be kept in accordance with the Data Protection Principles.

The headteacher will consider all relevant evidence. This may include, but is not limited to:

obtaining statements from the complainant and those involved with the complaint

meeting with the complainant and those involved in the complaint

reviewing correspondence and other document relating to the complaint

After considering the available evidence, the headteacher can decide to:  
uphold the complaint and direct that certain action be taken to resolve it  
uphold the complaint in part (in other words find an aspect or aspects of the complaint to be valid, but not the whole complaint) direct for certain action to be taken, or  
dismiss the complaint entirely

The headteacher will inform the complainant of their decision in writing, the grounds on which it was made and any actions taken as a result of the complaint. This will be within 20 working days (excluding those that fall in the school holidays) of having issued written acknowledgement of receipt of the complaint (see 2 above). The written notification shall also advise the complainant of their right to escalate the complaint to stage 2 of the formal complaints procedure if they are not satisfied with the outcome at stage 1.

Stage 2 – Review by a panel of the governing board

The complainant is entitled to request a review of the decision taken at stage 1 and the actions taken. The review is carried out by a panel of the governing board.

Requests for a review of the decision taken at stage 1 should be made in no later than 4 weeks after written notification of the decision taken has been received. The request should include;

a brief summary of the complaint

why the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of stage 1

the outcome they are seeking.

The following steps are taken at stage 2:

The written request for the complaint to be reviewed will be acknowledged no later than ten working days (not including the school holidays) after receiving it.

A panel of three school governors will be convened to review the complaint. All three panel members will have no prior knowledge of the content of the complaint.

The review meeting will take place within 20 working days (excluding those which fall in the school holidays) of receipt of the written acknowledgement (see 1 above).

The panel may decide to invite the following to attend the review meeting:

the complainant

the headteacher (or chair of the governing board as appropriate) who investigated the complaint and made the decision at stage 1

relevant persons involved the complaint

persons whom, in the view of the panel, can provide relevant advice and information relating to the subject of the complaint and the review process at stage 2

Where the complainant, headteacher and/or relevant person involved in the complaint have been invited to attend the review meeting, they are entitled to be accompanied by a family member/friend/representative as appropriate. However, legal representatives are not permitted to attend the review meeting.

Where the complaint is about a governor/trustee/governing board the complainant may request that the review meeting is held by an independent panel. This is at the discretion of the governing body. Where an entirely independent panel is required, timescales may be affected while the school source appropriate individuals for the review.

After considering the complaint and reviewing the available evidence, the panel reviewing the complaint can decide to:

uphold the complaint and recommend action be taken to resolve it;  
uphold the complaint in part (in other words find an aspect or aspects of the complaint to be valid, but not the whole complaint) and recommend action to be taken, or  
dismiss the complaint entirely.

Irrespective of the decision taken, the panel may also recommend steps that the complainant and the school should take to move forward from the presenting issues in the best interests of all concerned. The panel may also recommend steps to be taken that reduce the likelihood of a similar complaint being made in the future.

The complainant, the headteacher (or chair of the governing board as appropriate) who investigated the complaint and made the decision at stage 1, and, where relevant, the person complained about will be informed in writing of the outcome of the review meeting no later than 10 working days (excluding those which fall in the school holidays) after the review meeting has taken place.

This is the final stage at which the school will consider the complaint. If the complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome of the complaints

procedure they may contact the local authority

### **Serial, persistent and unreasonable complaints**

For the purpose of this procedure a complaint may be viewed as serial and/or persistent if it relates to the same issue that was the subject of a previous complaint (made by the same complainant) which has already been through a formal complaints procedure in which the complainant has been notified of the outcome. In such cases it is likely that the complainant will be informed that the matter is now closed and that Woodbridge Primary School will provide no further response.

For the purpose of this procedure a complaint may be viewed as unreasonable if it contains threatening abusive or offensive language and conveys unrealistic outcomes. In such cases the headteacher/chair of the governing board will consult with relevant parties and may decide that the complaint is not considered under this procedure. The complainant will be notified in writing that this is the case and that Woodbridge Primary School will provide no further response.

If the complainant feels that the governing board acted 'unreasonably' in the handling of the complaint, they can complain to the Department for Education after the complaints procedure has been exhausted. Please note that 'unreasonable' is used in a legal sense and means acting in a way in which no reasonable school or authority would act in the same circumstances. <https://www.gov.uk/complain-about-school>

