THE EDUCATION SPACE

Complaints Policy and Procedure

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1. Policy information

1.1 Policy statement

Little Ilford School is committed to promoting a culture of openness, transparency, and continuous improvement, and recognises the importance of responding to concerns and complaints in a fair, timely, and respectful manner. This procedure is published in accordance with Section 29(1) of the Education Act 2002, which requires us to establish and publicise a complaints procedure for addressing concerns relating to the school and the services we provide.

1.2 Aims

The aims of our complaints policy are to:

- Ensure complaints made to Little Ilford School are handled consistently, fairly and proportionately, and in accordance with our responsibilities and relevant statutory requirements.
- For the benefit of the school, complainants and any other person(s) involved in a complaint matter; provide clear procedures, guidance and expectations for making and managing complaints, including expectations around communication, timescales, record-keeping, and resolution.
- Ensure the complaints process is practical, accessible and manageable, enabling concerns to be considered and resolved as efficiently as possible.
- Promote a constructive approach to complaints, ensuring that individuals feel safe and supported when raising concerns, and that such matters are viewed as opportunities to learn, improve and strengthen school practice.

1.3 Scope of Little Ilford School complaints procedure

This procedure covers all complaints about Little Ilford School and the provision and services we provide, except for those listed below, which are covered by separate statutory procedures;

- **Admissions to schools:** Please contact the relevant local authority: London Borough of Newham.
- **Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs (SEN):** Please contact the relevant local authority London Borough of Newham
- **School re-organisation proposals:** Please contact the relevant local authority London Borough of Newham.
- **Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation:** Complaints about child protection matters are handled under our child protection and safeguarding policy and in accordance with relevant statutory guidance. If you have serious concerns, you may wish to contact the local authority designated officer (LADO) who has local responsibility for safeguarding or the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH).

- **Exclusion of children from school:** Please see www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions.
- **Freedom of Information (FOI) requests and Subject Access Requests (SARs):** Requests for information held by the school should be made under our Data Protection and Privacy Policy. Please contact Nazmul Islam – n.islam@littleilford.org.
- **Whistleblowing:** We have an internal whistleblowing procedure for all our employees, including temporary staff and contractors. The Secretary of State for Education is the prescribed person for matters relating to education for whistleblowers in education who do not want to raise matters directly with their employer. Referrals can be made at www.education.gov.uk/contactus. Volunteer staff who have concerns about our school should complain through this complaints procedure. You may also be able to complain directly to the LA or the Department for Education, depending on the substance of your complaint.
- **Staff grievances:** Complaints from staff will be dealt with under our internal grievance procedures.
- **Staff conduct:** Complaints about staff will be dealt with under our internal disciplinary procedures, if appropriate. Complainants will not be informed of any disciplinary action taken against a staff member as a result of a complaint. However, the complainant will be notified that the matter is being addressed.
- **Complaints about services provided by other providers who may use School name premises or facilities:** Providers should have their own complaints procedure to deal with complaints about their service(s). Please contact them directly.
- **National curriculum content:** Please contact the Department for Education at www.education.gov.uk/contactus

If a complaint is received that falls outside the scope of this procedure, the complainant will be informed by Little Ilford School and redirected to the appropriate policy, process, or external body to address their concern.

1.4 Who can raise a concern or complaint

This complaints procedure is not limited to parents or carers of children enrolled at Little Ilford School. Any individual, including members of the public, may raise a complaint about the facilities or services provided by us.

1.5 Record keeping, confidentiality and GDPR

Confidentiality is essential to the integrity of our complaints process. Little Ilford School will document the progress of all complaints, including information about actions taken at all stages, the stage at which the complaint was resolved, and the final outcome. These records will also include copies or transcriptions of documents and/or discussions. All information will be handled with discretion, stored securely and retained only for as long as necessary, in accordance with UK GDPR, the Data Protection Act 2018 and our school's retention schedule or Record of Processing Activities (RoPA).

Electronic recording of meetings or conversations is not permitted without the explicit consent of all parties. This includes, but is not limited to, the use of mobile phones, microphones, screen recorders, dictaphones etc. On this basis we refuse to accept, as evidence, recordings (audio and/or visual) of conversations or meetings that were obtained covertly and without informed consent of all recorded parties. Little Ilford School reserves the right to refuse consent to record, however in such instances, we will ensure that alternative options (e.g. independent note taker or transcripts) are made available to the complainant.

1.6 Key definitions

A **concern** may be defined as '*an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought*'.

A **complaint** may be defined as '*an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action*'.

2. How to raise a concern or complaint

2.1 The difference between a concern and complaint

It is in everyone's interest that concerns and complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. We understand that *concerns* are often caused by misunderstandings, miscommunications or thoughts and feelings that have not been aired or acknowledged. We anticipate that these, and other issues can be quickly and informally resolved, without the need to use the formal stages of the complaints procedure.

Little Ilford School will make every effort to resolve concerns as quickly as possible. This may be via verbal discussion, a meeting or written correspondence, depending on the nature of the concern raised.

If you have difficulty discussing a concern with a particular member of staff, we will respect your views and refer you to another staff member. Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels unable to deal with a concern, you will be directed to another staff member. Please note that the ability to consider the concern objectively and impartially is more important than the seniority or job title of the person dealing with your concern.

We understand however, that there are occasions when people would like to raise their concerns formally. In such cases, Little Ilford School will attempt to resolve the complaint through the stages outlined within this complaints procedure.

2.2 Raising a concern or complaint

A concern or complaint should be made using the Google Form. They may also be made by a third party acting on behalf of a complainant, as long as they have appropriate consent to do so.

Concerns should be raised in the first instance with the class teacher or Pastoral Lead and if unresolved, escalated to the SLT Lead for the Year Group. If the issue remains unresolved, the next step is to make a formal complaint via the Headteacher. Please note, complainants should not approach individual governors to raise concerns or complaints. Governors do not have authority to act independently and doing so may compromise their ability to take part in a complaint review at Stage 3 of the procedure.

- Complaints about school staff (excluding the Headteacher) should be completed on the Google Form.
- Complaints involving or concerning the Headteacher should be addressed to the Simon Mares (Little Ilford School Chair of Governors), and emailed to s.mares@littlilford.org, marked Private and Confidential.
- Complaints about the Chair of Governors, an individual governor, or the entire governing body should be addressed to the Clerk to the Governing Body, and submitted via email to emma.cole@npwinet.co.uk also marked Private and Confidential.

If you need assistance completing the form, please contact the school office. You can also ask third party organisations like the Citizens Advice to help you.

In accordance with The Equality Act 2010, we will consider making reasonable adjustments as needed to support access to this complaints procedure. This may include providing documents in alternative formats, assisting complainants in raising a formal complaint or arranging meetings in accessible venues or online.

2.3 Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools

Little Ilford School recognises that Artificial Intelligence (AI), including generative AI tools, is increasingly available and may be used by complainants to help organise information, understand a process or communicate their concerns.

The School will consider complaints based on their substance and the issues raised, rather than whether AI has been used to prepare them. However, AI tools can sometimes produce inaccurate, outdated or irrelevant information, combine separate issues, or refer to legislation, statutory guidance or policies that do not apply. Complainants should ensure that any complaint submitted with the assistance of AI accurately reflects their own experience, concerns and the outcome they are seeking. When responding to AI generated or assisted complaints, Little Ilford School will disregard any references to incorrect, out of date, or misapplied statutes or guidance, and consider the complaint against the correct legal and policy framework only.

Where a complaint is unclear, contains conflicting or insufficient information, or does not identify the specific matters the complainant wants investigated, the School may ask the complainant to clarify their concerns. This will include asking them to explain, in their own words, what happened, what they are concerned about and what outcome they are seeking. If a complainant uses AI to provide further clarification but the response remains unclear, does not address the questions asked, or introduces further unrelated matters, the School may ask for direct clarification via a telephone conversation, meeting or another suitable method of communication instead.

Little Ilford School recognises that some individuals may use AI or other communication tools because of a disability, language barrier, literacy need or other circumstance affecting their ability to access the complaints process. We will consider reasonable adjustments and other appropriate support in accordance with the Equality Act 2010. This may include assistance to complete a complaint, discussing concerns by telephone or in person, or providing information in an alternative accessible format.

3. Formal complaint procedure

3.1 Stage one: Headteacher

Formal complaints must be made to the Headteacher (unless they are about the Headteacher) to Pamela Brown (Headteacher's PA); p.brown@littleilford.org. This may be done using the Google Form. The Headteacher will record the date the complaint is received and will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 5 school days.

If it is not already evident, within this acknowledgement, the Headteacher will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, ask what remains unresolved and what outcome the complainant would like to see. The Headteacher may propose a meeting (in-person, or virtual) as the most effective way to facilitate this discussion.

Please note: The Headteacher may delegate the task of investigating the complaint to another senior leader, but the responsibility for deciding outcomes and issuing the written response will rest with the Headteacher.

During the investigation, the Headteacher (or investigator) will:

- If necessary, interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish; and
- Keep a written record of any meetings, interviews or communications in relation to their investigation.

At the conclusion of their investigation, the Headteacher will provide a formal written response within 15 school days of receiving the complaint. If it is not possible to meet this deadline, the complainant will be provided with an update and a revised response date.

The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions Little Ilford School will take to resolve the complaint. The formal

response will also advise the complainant how they may escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 1.

If the complaint is about the Headteacher, or a member of the governing body (including the Chair or Vice-Chair), a suitably skilled governor will be appointed to complete all the actions at Stage 1.

If the complaint is jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair, the entire governing body or the majority of the governing body, Stage 1 will be considered by an independent investigator appointed by the governing body. At the conclusion of their investigation, the independent investigator will provide a formal written response.

3.2 Stage two: Chair of Governors

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 1, they may request that their complaint is reviewed at Stage 2. This request should be made via the Google Form within 5 school days of the Stage 1 response.

The complainant must ensure that they include details of why they are still dissatisfied with the decision, and/or recommendations and actions of the Stage 1 complaint, and what they require to resolve the matter. They may also attach any evidence to support their complaint.

The Chair of Governors will acknowledge receipt of the Stage 2 request in writing within 5 school days. The Chair of Governors (or, where appropriate, the Vice Chair or a nominated governor not previously involved in the complaint) will:

- Meet with the complainant (virtually or in-person)
- Review the complaint, the Stage 1 investigation, and the response provided; and
- Consider whether the complaint was handled properly and fairly in accordance with this policy at Stage 1, whether the investigation was thorough, and whether the outcome was reasonable.

Depending on the nature of the complaint, they may also;

- Request additional information or clarification from the complainant, Headteacher, or any relevant party if required; and/or
- Offer to meet with the complainant (in person or virtually) where appropriate, to discuss the complaint further.

Stage 2 will not include a review of any new complaints or consider evidence unrelated to the initial complaint. New complaints must be dealt with from Stage 1 of the procedure.

To conclude Stage 2, the Chair (or nominated governor) may choose to:

- Uphold the outcome of Stage 1;
- Offer an alternative resolution or propose further action if deemed necessary;
- Refer the matter back to the Headteacher or other appropriate person for further investigation, if the Stage 1 process is found to have been incomplete or flawed.

A formal written response detailing the decision reached will be provided to the complainant within 15 school days. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions

Little Ilford School will take to resolve the complaint. The formal response will also advise the complainant how they may escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 2.

Please note: If the Chair or Vice Chair was involved in Stage 1, another governor or independent reviewer will be appointed to oversee Stage 2.

3.3 Stage three: Complaints committee

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome at Stage 2 and wishes to take the matter further, they can escalate the complaint to Stage 3 – a meeting with members of the governing body's complaints committee, which will be formed of the first three, impartial, governors available. This is the final stage of the complaints procedure.

A request to escalate to Stage 3 must be made to the Clerk, emma.cole@npwinet.co.uk within 5 school days of receipt of the Stage 2 response. Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply, as agreed by the governing body.

The Clerk will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 5 school days.

The Clerk will also write to the complainant to inform them of the date of the meeting. They will aim to convene a meeting within 20 school days of receipt of the Stage 3 request. If this is not possible, the Clerk will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed.
If the complainant rejects the offer of three proposed dates, without good reason, the Clerk will decide when to hold the meeting. It will then proceed in the complainant's absence on the basis of written submissions from both parties.

The complaints committee will consist of at least three governors with no prior involvement or knowledge of the complaint. Prior to the meeting, they will decide amongst themselves who will act as the Chair of the Complaints Committee. If there are fewer than three governors from Little Ilford School available, the Clerk will source any additional, independent governors through another local school or through a Governor Services team, in order to make up the committee. Alternatively, an entirely independent committee may be convened to hear the complaint at Stage 3.

The committee will decide whether to deal with the complaint by inviting parties to a meeting or through written representations, but in making their decision they will be sensitive to the complainant's needs.

If the complainant is invited to attend the meeting, they may bring someone along to provide support. To maintain confidentiality and avoid conflicts of interest, any accompanying persons should not be an employee, parent/carer, or stakeholder of the school. Please see Representation and accompanying persons for more information

At least 10 school days before the meeting, the Clerk will:

- Confirm and notify the complainant of the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that, if the complainant is invited, the dates are convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible; and
- Request copies of any further written material to be submitted to the committee at least 5 school days before the meeting.

Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least 3 school days before the date of the meeting. The committee will not normally accept, as evidence, recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.

The committee will also not review any new complaints at this stage or consider evidence unrelated to the initial complaint to be included. New complaints must be dealt with from Stage 1 of the procedure.

The meeting will be held in private. Electronic recordings of meetings or conversations are not normally permitted unless a complainant's own disability or special needs require it. Prior knowledge and consent of all parties attending must be sought before meetings or conversations take place. Consent will be recorded in any minutes taken. Please see Record keeping, confidentiality and GDPR

The committee will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented. The committee can:

- Uphold the complaint in whole or in part; or
- Dismiss the complaint in whole or in part.

If the complaint is upheld in whole or in part, the committee will:

- Decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint.
- Where appropriate, recommend changes to the Little Ilford School systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future.

The Chair of the Committee will provide the complainant and Little Ilford School with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within 20 school days.

The letter to the complainant will include details of how to contact the Department for Education if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled by Little Ilford School.

If the complaint is:

- Jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair; or
- The entire governing body; or
- The majority of the governing body;

Stage 3 will be heard by a committee of independent governors.

The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions Little Ilford School will take to resolve the complaint. The response will also advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied.

3.4 Next steps

Complainants dissatisfied with Little Ilford School's handling of a complaint may wish to escalate the matter to the London Borough of Newham via the corporate complaints portal here. Please note, that complaints which have not followed the escalation procedure above will not be responded to.

If the complainant believes Little Ilford School has not handled their complaint in accordance with this published complaints procedure or that we acted unlawfully or unreasonably in the exercise of our duties under education law, they can contact the Department for Education after they have completed Stage 3.

The Department for Education will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by our school, but they will consider whether we have adhered to education legislation and any statutory policies connected with the complaint.

The complainant can refer their complaint to the Department for Education online at: **https://www.gov.uk/complain-to-dfe** or by writing to:

Ministerial and Public Communication Division
Department for Education
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

4. Roles and responsibilities

4.1 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.

4.2 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/young people 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, Chair of Governors or complaints committee that sets out the facts, identifies solutions and recommends courses of action to resolve problems.

The Headteacher, Chair of Governors 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.

4.3 Complaints Co-ordinator **(this could be the Headteacher / Chair of Governors / 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, Headteacher, 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 or young person
- Keep records.

4.4 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.

4.5 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/young person
- 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).

4.6 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/young person and present during all or part of the meeting
    - Careful consideration of the atmosphere and proceedings should ensure that the child/young person does not feel intimidated.
    - The committee should respect the views of the child/young person and give them equal consideration to those of adults.
    - If the child/young person is the complainant, the committee should ask in advance if any support is needed to help them present their complaint. Where the child/young person's parent is the complainant, the committee should give the parent the opportunity to say which parts of the meeting, if any, the child/young person needs to attend.
    - However, the parent should be advised that agreement might not always be possible if the parent wishes the child/young person to attend a part of the meeting that the committee considers is not in the child/young person's best interests.
- The welfare of the child/young person is paramount.

5. Resolving complaints

Complainants should try to limit their communication with the school that relates to their complaint, while the complaint is being progressed, as repeated correspondence (either by letter, phone, email or text) could delay the outcome being reached.

At each stage of the complaints procedure, Little Ilford School aims to resolve the complaint fairly and constructively. Where appropriate, we will acknowledge if a complaint is upheld in full or in part. In doing so, we may offer one or more of the following:

- An explanation;
- An acknowledgment that the matter could have been handled differently or better;
- An assurance that we will try to ensure that the event complained of will not recur;
- An outline of the steps that have been or will be taken to help ensure that it will not happen again and an indication of the timescales within which any changes will be made;
- A commitment to review relevant school policies or procedures in light of the complaint;
- An apology.

If it is not possible to meet any deadlines as outlined within the formal procedure, the complainant will be provided with an update and a revised response date at the earliest available opportunity.

5.1 Mediation

Mediation can be a helpful and constructive tool within our complaints procedure, particularly in supporting resolution and rebuilding trust. It provides an opportunity for open, facilitated dialogue between parties, with the aim of achieving mutual

understanding and agreement. While mediation is not a substitute for formal investigation, Little Ilford School may offer mediation:

- As part of efforts to resolve complaints, where early resolution is possible;
- At the conclusion of a formal complaint, particularly where relationships have been affected or further dialogue may support closure.

Mediation is not a substitute for any stage of the formal complaints procedure, nor does it replace the school's responsibility to investigate and respond in line with this policy. Where a complaint progresses through the formal stages, a formal written outcome will still be issued in accordance with the procedure, regardless of whether mediation takes place.

Participation in mediation is voluntary and must be agreed to by all parties. Where used, the school will ensure:

- The purpose of the meeting is clearly explained;
- Participation by all parties is informed and voluntary;
- A neutral facilitator is identified where appropriate;
- Outcomes and actions are clearly recorded and followed up if necessary.

5.2 Representation and accompanying persons

Complainants may be accompanied or supported at any stage of the complaints process. This may include being joined by a friend or relative. To maintain confidentiality and avoid conflicts of interest, any accompanying persons should not be an employee, parent/carer, or stakeholder of the school.

In the event that a complaint progresses to a governors' complaints committee, we advise that neither the complainant nor the school brings legal representation, as these hearings are not legal proceedings.

The school reserves the right to decline the attendance of legal representatives at meetings held at any stage of the complaints process, unless exceptional circumstances apply. For example, if a school employee is asked to participate as a witness, they may be entitled to bring a union representative or legal adviser for support. Such exceptions will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend any meetings held in relation to a complaint.

6. Timeliness

Complaints should be raised and resolved as promptly and efficiently as possible. In line with Department for Education (DfE) guidance, Little Ilford School requires complaints to be made within three months of the incident or, in the case of a series of related incidents, within three months of the last incident. Complaints received outside of this timeframe will only be considered if there are exceptional circumstances, which will be assessed on a case-by-case basis by the school. Any decision made by Little Ilford School in relation to

this will also be made in line with the principles of administrative law, and with due regard given to The 7 Principles of Public Life. Where a complaint is submitted outside of the stated timeframe and is not accepted for consideration, the complainant will be informed of this decision in writing.

Complaints received outside of working hours (such as evenings or weekends), or during school holidays, will be treated as received on the next school day.

If other bodies are investigating aspects of the complaint, for example the police, local authority (LA) safeguarding teams or Tribunals, this may impact on our ability to adhere to the timescales within this procedure or result in the procedure being suspended until those public bodies have completed their investigations.

If a complainant commences legal action against Little Ilford School in relation to their complaint, we reserve the right to suspend the complaints procedure in relation to their complaint until those legal proceedings have concluded.

7. Anonymous complaints

We will not normally investigate anonymous complaints. However, the Headteacher or Chair of Governors, if appropriate, will determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation.

8. Withdrawal of a complaint

A complainant may withdraw their complaint at any time. In such cases, we will ask that requests to withdraw are put in writing.

9. Duplicate complaints

Once a complaint has been considered and closed at the conclusion of Little Ilford School complaints procedure, we may receive a duplicate complaint from the complainant, a relative or connected individual (e.g. spouse, partner, grandparent, or child) raising the same issue.

In such cases, Little Ilford School will advise that the complaint has already been investigated and concluded, and that the school's complaints process is complete. The complainant will be advised to contact the Department for Education if they are dissatisfied with how the original complaint was handled. However, if the duplicate complaint raises any new elements or information that was not previously considered, Little Ilford School will ensure these aspects are reviewed and investigated in accordance with Stage 1 of the procedure.

10. Managing serial and unreasonable behaviour and complaints

Please note, this section also applies to unreasonable or persistent contact not directly associated with, or resulting from, a formal complaint.

Little Ilford School is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, and to providing a high quality service to those who complain. We will not normally limit the contact complainants have with our school. However, we do not expect our staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour and will take action to protect staff from that behaviour, including that which is abusive, offensive or threatening or otherwise unreasonable.

10.1 Unreasonable behaviour

We define *unreasonable behaviour* as that which, because of its frequency, persistence or nature, places disproportionate demands on the School, its staff or resources, prevents or hinders the proper consideration of complaints, or makes it difficult to bring matters to an appropriate conclusion. This may include, but is not limited to, where a complainant or individual;

- Refuses to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcomes sought by raising the complaint, despite offers of assistance
- Refuses to co-operate with the complaints investigation process
- Refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of the complaints procedure
- Insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the complaints procedure or with good practice
- Introduces trivial or irrelevant information which they expect to be taken into account and commented on
- Raises large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions, and insists they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales
- Continues to rely on lengthy or AI-generated correspondence to respond to requests for clarification where this does not clarify the substance of the complaint or instead introduces further unrelated matters.
- Raises complaints or concerns at a frequency that is disproportionate to the nature or seriousness of the matters raised, particularly where this creates a significant and repeated demand on staff time, resources and well-being
- Makes unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues, and seeks to have them replaced
- Changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds
- Repeatedly makes the same complaint (despite previous investigations or responses concluding that the complaint is groundless or has been addressed)
- Raises multiple formal complaints about minor, or substantially similar matters within a short period, particularly where the cumulative effect is to require repeated investigation and responses
- Refuses to accept the findings of the investigation into that complaint where the school's complaint procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed including referral to the Department for Education
- Seeks an unrealistic outcome

- Makes excessive demands on school time by frequent, lengthy and complicated contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with
- Escalates a complaint to external organisations before allowing the School a reasonable opportunity to consider and respond to the complaint through its published complaints procedure
- Repeatedly includes external organisations or third parties into routine correspondence about a complaint where this does not contribute to resolving the matter and appears intended to place additional pressure on the School or individual members of staff
- Makes threats, including threats of adverse publicity, complaints to external bodies or other action, where these are used primarily to place unreasonable pressure on staff rather than to pursue a legitimate right of review or escalation
- Uses abusive, offensive or discriminatory language, behaviour or violence
- Makes allegations or provides information which the complainant knows, or has been advised, is false, misleading or unsupported
- Publishes unacceptable information on social media or other public forums.

Complainants should try to limit their communication with the school that relates to their complaint, while the complaint is being progressed. It is not helpful if repeated correspondence is sent (either by letter, phone, email or text), as it could delay the outcome being reached.

Whenever possible, the Headteacher or Chair of Governors (or other appropriately delegated person) will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying an 'unreasonable' marking.

If the behaviour continues, the Headteacher, Chair of Governors (or other appropriately delegated person) will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and ask them to change it. For complainants who excessively contact Little Ilford School causing a significant level of disruption, we may specify methods of communication, designate a staff contact, and/or limit the number of contacts in a communication plan. Any communication plans initiated by Little Ilford School will be reviewed on a termly basis.

In some circumstances, it may be appropriate to initiate a communication plan as a result of unreasonable behaviour that is not directly associated with, or resulting from, a complaint. In addition, in response to any serious incident of aggression, violence, or harassment (irrespective of whether it is directly associated with, or resulting from a complaint), we will immediately inform the police and communicate our actions in writing. This may include barring an individual from the premises of Little Ilford School.

10.2 Complaint campaigns

On occasion, Little Ilford School may become the focus of a coordinated campaign, resulting in a large volume of complaints:

- All based on the same subject matter, and/or
- Submitted by individuals unconnected to the school

In such cases, we may adopt an alternative approach to manage the complaints efficiently and proportionately. This may include:

- Sending a template response to all complainants
- Publishing a single, comprehensive response on the school's website

Where complainants remain dissatisfied with our response, they will be signposted to the Department for Education.

11. Learning lessons

Little Ilford School is committed to using concerns and complaints as an opportunity for reflection, learning, and continuous improvement. We recognise that such matters, whether upheld, partially upheld, or not upheld, can highlight areas of practice, policy, or communication that may benefit from review or development. At the conclusion of a concern or complaint, the school will consider whether the issues raised indicate a need to:

- Make changes to procedures or systems
- Update or clarify policies
- Review staff training or communication practices
- Strengthen partnerships with parents and carers
- Address gaps in service delivery or accountability

Where appropriate, outcomes and lessons learned will be shared with relevant staff and governors to support transparency and promote a culture of openness and improvement. Trends or recurring themes arising from concerns or complaints may be analysed periodically by the senior leadership team and governing body to inform school development planning.

Little Ilford School will not share personal details or confidential information when using complaints to support wider learning.

12. Policy review

This policy will be reviewed by the Headteacher every year. At each review, the policy will be approved by the governing body.

Link to Complaints Form