



Complaints Policy

Approved by:	Full Governing Body	Date: December 2024
Last reviewed on:	December 2024	
Next review due by:	December 2025	

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Introduction

This Complaints Policy outlines the procedures for handling complaints at Willow Bank School. The policy is designed to ensure that all complaints are dealt with promptly, fairly, and in accordance with current legislation, including the Education Act 2002, the Equality Act 2010, and the Children and Families Act 2014.

We care about what you think. We take very seriously any opportunity to make things better and respond to any issues or problems that may arise.

At school we make many decisions every day. We try hard to do our best for all our pupils. Your views help us plan for the future. We like to know when things are going well. We also want parents to tell us about their worries, concerns, or complaints as soon as possible. It is much easier for us to sort out a recent problem than something that happened some time ago.

If you are unhappy with the way your child is being treated, or any of our actions or lack of action, please feel able to tell us your concern. We know it can be difficult to question what a school is doing, but if you do not tell us what is worrying you, we cannot explain our actions or put things right. Our support and respect for you and your child will not lessen in any way.

Our promise to you

- We will deal with your concern or complaint honestly and politely.
- It will be investigated thoroughly, fairly, and as quickly as possible.
- We will keep you up to date with what we are doing.

If appropriate, we will acknowledge that the complaint is upheld in whole or in part. In addition, we may offer one or more of the following:

- an explanation
- an acknowledgement that the situation could have been handled another way or better
- an assurance that we will try to ensure the issue/event/incident/nature of the complaint will not happen again.
- details of the steps that have or will be taken to help ensure that it will not happen again, and an indication of the timescales put in place for any changes to be implemented.
- an undertaking to review school policies if necessary
- an apology

What to do first

If you have a concern about anything we do you can tell us by telephone, in person or in writing. If any of these are difficult for you, a third party acting on your behalf can speak to us if they have appropriate consent to do so. Most concerns or complaints will be sorted out quickly either by putting things right or by explaining the school's actions to you.

Try to go to the member of staff involved or your child's class form tutor or subject teacher that will either deal with your issue or pass you on to someone who is more able to help.

Please remember the beginning or end of the school day can be a very busy time. If you talk to a teacher at these times, for practical reasons, it may not be possible to sort things out there and then. Be ready for the teacher to say she or he will see you or ring you as soon as possible. This is because we want to give your worries the attention they deserve.

You should not be asked to wait more than a week and often she or he will discuss things with you much sooner. We hope this will be enough to put things right. Sometimes the teacher will send you a brief note after the phone call or meeting with details of what we are doing about your concern.

If you have already told us about a concern but are not satisfied with how we have responded, you may wish to make a complaint. We have a complaints procedure to make sure we respond to complaints in the best possible way. Our aim is to resolve complaints as quickly and as effectively as possible.

Aims

The purpose of this policy is to:

- Encourage the prompt resolution of concerns at the earliest possible stage.
- Ensure complaints are handled in a clear, consistent, and equitable manner.
- Maintain the confidentiality of all parties involved throughout the complaints process.
- Comply with statutory requirements and relevant DfE guidance.

The policy of the school is to work in partnership with parents and the wider community. It is based on the belief that co-operation and a sense of joint purpose between staff, parents and the school will assist in ensuring open and positive relationships. From time to time, however, parents and members of the public may express concern or make a complaint, either orally or in writing, about some aspect of the conduct/operation of the school, the conduct of the Headteacher, an individual member of staff, the Governing Body or an individual governor.

The school will always give serious consideration to concerns and complaints that are brought to its attention. However, anonymous complaints will not normally be considered.

In considering concerns or complaints, the school will ensure that they are dealt with effectively and with fairness to all parties. Where possible complaints will be resolved informally.

Where a complaint has not been resolved informally, then the formal procedures set out below will be followed.

Scope

This policy applies to any complaint from parents, carers, or members of the public concerning the school, its staff, or any matters directly related to the school's provision of education, including SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) support.

A concern or complaint is defined as an expression of dissatisfaction about the conduct and/or operation of the school, the conduct of, actions or lack of action by a member of staff and/or the Governing Body/an individual governor, unacceptable delay in dealing with a matter or the unreasonable treatment of a pupil or other person.

Concerns or complaints relating to any of the following are not covered by these procedures, as separate procedures apply.

- Child Protection
- Collective Worship
- Freedom of Information Access
- Pupil Exclusions
- School Admissions
- Services provided by other organisations on the school site or through the school
- National Curriculum content
- Staff grievances
- Staff conduct
- Statutory assessments of special educational needs and the Educational Health care Plan procedure
- Whistleblowing by an employee
- Serious complaints or allegations relating to the abuse of children, assault, criminal or financial matters are also subject to separate procedures.

Making a complaint

- Who to complain to:

If the complaint is about:

- Something that has happened or failed to happen in School, contact the Headteacher.
- The actions of the Headteacher, contact the Chair of Governors via the School.
- The actions of a governor, contact the Chair of Governors via the School.
- The Chair of Governors, contact the Clerk to Governors via the School
- The actions of the governing body, contact the Clerk to Governors via the School.

In most cases, the School and Governing Body would hope to resolve concerns and complaints at an informal stage, but the procedures allow for formal consideration of a complaint and an appeal stage if matters cannot be resolved.

Where complaints are made against an individual member of the school staff, that person will be informed of the complaint at the earliest opportunity.

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

Stages of the Complaints Process

1. **Informal Stage**

Concerns should first be raised informally with the relevant member of staff or the headteacher. Every effort will be made to resolve the matter through discussion within 10 working days.

2. **Formal Stage 1: Written Complaint to the Headteacher**

If the concern cannot be resolved informally, a formal complaint should be made in writing to the headteacher. The headteacher will investigate the complaint and provide a written response within 15 working days.

3. **Formal Stage 2: Complaint to the Governing Body**

If the complainant remains dissatisfied, they may escalate the complaint to the chair of governors in writing. The governing body will investigate the matter and convene a panel to review the complaint, providing a response within 20 working days.

4. **Appeal Stage: Complaint to the Local Authority or Department for Education**

If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of the governing body's decision, they may refer the matter to the Local Authority or the Department for Education. This stage is applicable only if the complainant believes the school has not followed its complaints policy correctly.

Withdrawal of a Complaint

If the complainant wishes to withdraw their complaint, they will be asked to confirm this in writing.

Timescales

You must raise the complaint within three months of the incident or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within three months of the last of these incidents. We will consider complaints made outside of this time frame if exceptional circumstances apply.

We will consider complaints made outside of term time to have been received on the first school day after the holiday period.

Complaints Record

The school will maintain a written record of all formal complaints, how they were dealt with and the outcome in complaints register.

Serious Allegations or Complaints

If the allegations refer to criminal activity which may require the involvement of the Police, the Headteacher will normally inform the Chair of Governors.

If the allegations relate to financial or accounting irregularities involving misuse of public funds or assets or any circumstances which may suggest irregularities affecting cash, stores, property, remuneration or allowances, the Headteacher will inform the Chair of Governors and seek the advice of the School's HR Adviser or appointed auditors so that the complaint can be investigated under the procedures normally applied for suspected financial irregularities.

If the allegations relate to the abuse of children, the Headteacher may seek the advice of

the School's HR Adviser and/or other agencies such as Children's Social Care. Serious allegations of this nature must be referred under Child Protection Procedures to Children's Social Care. Reference should also be made to the separate procedures that deal with staff facing allegations of physical/sexual abuse.

In all the above, consideration needs to be given to the possible suspension from duty, on full pay, of any member of staff concerned in accordance with the school's Disciplinary Procedure. Investigations at school level and the stages set out in this procedure are unlikely to proceed where external agencies are involved. Subsequently, an internal school investigation and other procedures (eg Disciplinary) may be involved.

Managing Serial and Unreasonable Complaints

Willow Bank 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.

Willow Bank School defines unreasonable behaviour as that which hinders our consideration of complaints because of the frequency or nature of the complainant's contact with the school, such as, if the complainant:

- 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 complaint's investigation process
- refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of the complaint's procedure
- insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the complaint's procedure or with good practice
- introduces trivial or irrelevant information which they expect to be considered and commented on
- raises large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions, and insists they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales
- 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)
- 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

- uses threats to intimidate
- uses abusive, offensive, or discriminatory language or violence
- knowingly provides falsified information
- 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 will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying an '*unreasonable*' marking.

If the behaviour continues, the headteacher will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and ask them to change it. For complainants who excessively contact Willow Bank School causing a significant level of disruption, we may specify methods of communication and limit the number of contacts in a communication plan. This will be reviewed after six months.

In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, we will immediately inform the police and communicate our actions in writing. This may include barring an individual from Willow Bank School.

Legislation and Guidance

This policy is compliant with:

- The Education Act 2002
- The Equality Act 2010
- The Children and Families Act 2014
- DfE's guidance on handling school complaints
- SEND Code of Practice (2015)

Monitoring and Review

The governing body will review this policy annually to ensure it remains in line with current legislation and best practices. Complaints will be monitored and analysed to identify any patterns or trends that may require further action.

For further information or to request a copy of this policy, please contact the school office.

Willow Bank School
Winwick Road
Newton Le Willows
WA12 8DE

willowbank@sthelens.org.uk

www.willowbank.st-helens.sch.uk

COMPLAINT FORM

Please complete and return to the Headteacher who will explain what action will be taken.

Your name: _____

Address: _____

Postcode: _____

Mobile /telephone number: _____

E-mail address: _____

Pupil's name: _____

Please give details of your complaint

What action, if any, have you already taken to try and resolve your complaint?

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

Signature: _____

Date: _____