Woodlands Academy of Learning

Complaints Policy

Autumn 2026

Contents

1 Complaints Overview
- 1.1 Who can make a complaint?
- 1.2 The difference between a concern and a complaint
- 1.3 How to raise a concern or make a complaint
- 1.4 Use of Artificial Intelligence in complaints
- 1.5 Anonymous complaints
- 1.6 Principles of Investigation
- 1.7 Timescales
- 1.8 Complaints received outside of term time

2 Scope of this complaints procedure
- 2.1 Resolving complaints
- 2.2 Withdrawal of a complaint

3 Stages of a Complaint
- 3.1 Stage one – informal complaints
- 3.2 Stage two – formal complaints
- 3.3 Stage three – panel hearing
- 3.4 Referring Complaints on Completion of the Trust Procedure

4 Roles and responsibilities
- 4.1 Complainant
- 4.2 Investigator
- 4.3 The headteacher or senior leader
- 4.4 Clerk to the governing body/trust board
- 4.5 Committee chair
- 4.6 Committee member

5 Unreasonable and Persistent Complaints
- 5.1 Unreasonable Complaints
- 5.2 ‘Frivolous’ or ‘vexatious’ complaints
- 5.3 Steps We Will Take
- 5.4 Serial/Persistent Complaints
- 5.5 Duplicate Complaints
- 5.6 Complaint Campaigns

6 Record Keeping and Confidentiality

7 Learning lessons

8 Monitoring arrangements

9 Links with Other Policies

10 Equality Impact Assessment

Appendix One: Complaint template form

1 Complaints Overview

1.1 Who can make a complaint?

This complaints procedure is not limited to parents or carers of children that are registered at the school. Any person, including members of the public, may make a complaint to Woodlands Academy of Learning about any provision of facilities or services that we provide. Unless complaints are dealt with under separate statutory procedures (such as appeals relating to exclusions or admissions), we will use this complaints procedure.

1.2 The difference between a concern and a complaint

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’.

It is in everyone’s interest that concerns and complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. Many issues can be resolved informally, without the need to use the formal stages of the complaints procedure. Woodlands Academy of Learning takes concerns seriously and will make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.

If you have difficulty discussing a concern with a particular member of staff, we will respect your views. In these cases, the office team will refer you to another staff member. Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels unable to deal with a concern, the office team (following guidance from the headteacher or senior member of staff) will refer you to another staff member. The member of staff may be more senior but does not have to be. The ability to consider the concern objectively and impartially is more important.

We understand however, that there are occasions when people would like to raise their concerns formally. In this case, Woodlands Academy of Learning will attempt to resolve the issue internally, through the stages outlined within this complaints procedure.

1.3 How to raise a concern or make a complaint

A concern or complaint can be made in person, in writing or by telephone. 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. It is likely that the person making the complaint will be asked to put their complaint in writing using the complaint form template which is included at the end of this policy.

Complaints against school staff (except the head teacher) should be made in writing using the template complaint form in this policy to the head teacher via the school office**.** Please mark them as private and confidential.

Complaints that involve or are about the head teacher should be made in writing using the template complaint form in this policy and addressed to the chair of governors, via the school office. Please mark them as private and confidential.

Complaints about the chair of governors, any individual governor or the whole governing

body should be made in writing using the template complaint form in this policy and addressed to the clerk to the governing body via the school office. Please mark them as private and confidential.

The template complaint form is included at the end of this policy. If you require help in completing the form, please contact the school office. You can also ask a third-party organisation like the Citizens Advice to help you.

In accordance with equality law, we will consider making reasonable adjustments if required, to enable complainants to access and complete this complaints procedure. For instance, providing information in alternative formats, assisting complainants in raising a formal complaint or holding meetings in accessible locations.

1.4 Use of Artificial Intelligence in Complaints

Woodlands Academy of Learning recognises the increasing use of artificial intelligence (AI) tools to generate written content. To ensure that all complaints reflect genuine concerns and can be appropriately investigated, Woodlands Academy of Learning will not accept complaints that are generated wholly or predominately by AI.

All complaints must be submitted by a real individual with direct knowledge of the matter. Without this, the content of a complaint may include information generated via an algorithm as opposed to the reality of the matter in dispute. Complaints may be subject to AI detection software to confirm authenticity. Complaints identified as AI-generated will not be progressed, and the complainant may be asked to resubmit the complaint in their own words on the complaint template form. Complaints should also state clearly what and/or who the complaint refers to, so that it can be investigated fully.

Woodlands Academy of Learning will always endeavour to manage the complaints process in a fair and sensitive manner. It is for this reason that complainants should be aware that the contents of their complaint will typically be shared, verbatim, with the member of staff about whom the complaint refers. In order to investigate fully, and in order that a member of staff has a right to reply, Woodlands Academy of Learning cannot withhold material information from an employee who is the subject of the complaint.

1.5 Anonymous complaints

We will not normally investigate anonymous complaints. However, the head teacher or chair of governors, if appropriate, will determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation.

1.6 Principles of Investigation

When investigating a complaint, we will try to clarify:

- What has happened
- Who was involved
- What the complainant feels would put things right

At each stage, the person investigating the complaint will make sure they:

- Establish what has happened so far and who has been involved
- Clarify the nature of the complaint and what remains unresolved
- Meet with the complainant or contacts them (if unsure or further information is

required)
- Clarify what the complainant feels would put things right
- Interview those involved or witness to the matter and / or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish
- Conduct the interviews with an open mind and are prepared to persist in the questioning
- Keep notes of the interviews
- Contact the complainant once the investigation has been concluded.

1.7 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.

1.8 Complaints received outside of term time

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

2 Scope of this complaints procedure

This procedure covers all complaints about any provision of community facilities or services by Woodlands Academy of Learning other than complaints that are dealt with under other statutory procedures, including those listed below.

Exceptions	**Who to contact**
• Admissions to schools	Concerns about admissions should be handled through a separate process – either through the appeals process or via the local authority (LA).
• 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 LA designated officer (LADO) who has local responsibility for safeguarding or the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) The details for LADO and MASH can be found on Walsall website
• Exclusion of children from school*	Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions. *complaints about the application of the behaviour policy can be made through the school's complaints procedure.

• 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 whistle-blowers in education who do not want to raise matters direct with their employer. Referrals can be made at www.education.gov.uk/contactus. Volunteer staff who have concerns about our school should complain through the school's complaints procedure. You may also be able to complain direct to the LA or the Department for Education (see link above), depending on the substance of your complaint.
• Staff grievances	Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the school's internal grievance procedures.
• Staff conduct	Complaints about staff will be dealt with under the school's 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.

If other bodies are investigating aspects of the complaint, for example the police, 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 this happens, we will inform you of a proposed new timescale.

If a complainant commences legal action against Woodlands Academy of Learning in relation to their complaint, we will consider whether to suspend the complaints procedure until those legal proceedings have concluded.

2.1 Resolving complaints

At each stage in the procedure, Woodlands Academy of Learning wants to resolve the complaint. 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 admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better
- an assurance that we will try to ensure the event complained of will not recur
- an explanation 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

- an undertaking to review school policies in light of the complaint
- an apology on behalf of Woodlands

2.2 Withdrawal of a complaint

If a complainant wants to withdraw their complaint, we will ask them to confirm this in writing.

3 Stages of a Complaint

We have adopted a 3 stage process for dealing with complaints:

- Stage one – Informal complaint and resolution
- Stage two – Formal complaints
- Stage three – Review Panel

3.1 Stage one – informal complaints

It is to be hoped that most concerns can be expressed and resolved on an informal basis. In most cases, the class teacher or the direct individual will receive the first approach. The headteacher or investigating officer is expected to use their discretion to determine whether the official complaints procedure should be initiated or whether the complaint can be dealt with informally.

Concerns should be raised with either the class teacher, Phase Leader or a member of the Senior Management Team or a member of the Senior Leadership Team, verbally (in person or via telephone) or through email to the school office email address which is postbox@woodlands.walsall.sch.uk Please be aware that acknowledgement of receipt will be sent within 3 days.

Complaints will not be addressed through a year group email.

Complainants should not approach individual governors to raise concerns or complaints. They have no power to act on an individual basis and it may also prevent them from considering complaints at stage three of the procedure.

At the conclusion of their investigation, the appropriate person will provide an informal written response within 14 school days of the date of receipt of the complaint.

If the complainant feels that the issue remains unresolved, the next step is to make a formal complaint.

3.2 Stage two – formal complaints

Formal complaints must be made to the head teacher (unless they are about the head teacher), via the school office. This may be done in person or in writing (preferably on the complaint form).

The head teacher or senior leader 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.

Within this response, the head teacher will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, ask what remains unresolved and what outcome the complainant would like to see. The head teacher can consider whether a face-to-face meeting is the most appropriate way of doing this.

Note: the head teacher may delegate the investigation to another member of the school's senior leadership team but not the decision to be taken.

During the investigation, the head teacher (or investigator) will:

- if necessary, interview those involved in or witness to the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish

- keep a written record of any meetings/interviews in relation to their investigation.

At the conclusion of their investigation, the head teacher will provide a formal written response within 30 school days of the date of receipt of the complaint.
If the head teacher is unable to meet this deadline, they will provide the complainant with an update and revised response date.

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

The head teacher will advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of stage two. The complainant will have 5 school days to escalate the complaint to Stage 3 via the school office to the Clerk in writing.

If the complaint is about the head teacher, 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 two.

Complaints about the head teacher or member of the governing body must be made to the clerk, via the school office.

If the complaint is:

- jointly about the chair and vice chair or
- the entire governing body or
- the majority of the governing body.

Stage two 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.

3.3 Stage three – panel hearing

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome at stage two and wishes to take the matter further, they can escalate the complaint to stage three – a panel hearing consisting of at least three members of the governing body who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint or there could be one panel member who is independent of the management and running of the school. This is the final stage of the complaints procedure.

A request to escalate to stage three must be made to the clerk in writing, via the school office, within 5 school days of receipt of the stage two response.

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.

Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.

The clerk will write to the complainant to inform them of the date of the meeting. They will aim to convene a meeting within 10 school days of receipt of the stage two 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 2 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 of 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 Woodlands Academy of Learning the clerk will source any additional independent governors through another local school or through their Governor Services team, in order to make up the committee. Alternatively, an independent committee may be convened to hear the complaint at Stage 3.

Note: complaints about staff conduct will not generally be handled under this complaints procedure. Complainants will be advised that any staff conduct complaints will be considered under (human resources) staff disciplinary procedures, if appropriate, but outcomes will not be shared with them.

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

At least 5 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
- The notification to the complainant should also inform him/her of the right to be accompanied to the meeting by a friend / interpreter. Generally, we do not encourage either party to bring legal representatives to the committee meeting. However, there may be occasions when legal representation is appropriate which will be considered before the meeting.
- request copies of any further written material / evidence to be submitted to the committee at least 5 school days before the meeting.
- The School Lead or school witness also has the right to bring representation (union or legal) if so desired.

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 one 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.

At the committee meeting, each individual will have the opportunity to give their statements and present their evidence, and witnesses will be called, as appropriate, to present their evidence.

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

- 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.
- 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 must be recognised the complainant might not be satisfied with the outcome if the hearing does not find in their favour. 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.
- An effective panel will acknowledge that many complainants feel nervous and inhibited in a formal setting. Parents often feel emotional when discussing an issue that affects their child. The panel Chair will ensure that the proceedings are as welcoming as possible.

Intervention of parallel investigations relevant to the complaint by the Police or social services may cause variation to these time scales. Any such variation will be notified to the complainant.

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

- uphold the complaint in whole or in part
- 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 school's systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future.

The chair of the committee will provide the complainant and Woodlands Academy of Learning with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within 15

school days. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions Woodlands Academy of Learning will take to resolve the complaint.

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 Woodlands Academy of Learning.

If the complaint is:

- jointly about the chair and vice chair or
- the entire governing body or
- the majority of the governing body.

Stage three will be heard by a completely independent committee panel.

3.4 Referring Complaints on Completion of the Trust Procedure

If the complainant is unsatisfied with the outcome of the school's complaints procedure, they can refer their complaint to the DFE. The DFE will check whether the complaint has been dealt with properly by the school. The DFE will not overturn a school's decision about a complaint, but will intervene if a school has:

- Breached a clause in its funding agreement
- Failed to act in line with its duties under education law
- Acted (or is proposing to act) unreasonably when exercising its functions

If the school's complaints procedure is found to not meet regulations, the school will be asked to correct its procedure accordingly.

For more information or to refer a complaint, see the following webpage:
www.gov.uk/complain-about-school
We will include this information in the outcome letter to complainants.

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 appropriate senior leader 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 head teacher or complaints committee that sets out the facts, identifies solutions and recommends courses of action to resolve problems.

The 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.

4.3 The headteacher or senior leader

The headteacher or senior leader should:

- ensure that the complainant is fully updated at each stage of the procedure

- liaise with staff members, head teacher, chair of governors or the Clerk to ensure the smooth running of the complaints procedure

- keep records

- 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

4.4 Clerk to the governing body/trust board

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 one 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 coordinator, 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 Unreasonable and Persistent Complaints

5.1 Unreasonable Complaints

Woodlands Academy of Learning is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, and to providing a high quality service to those who complain. Most complaints raised will be valid, and therefore we will treat them seriously.

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.

Woodlands Academy of Learning 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 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.
- 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 DFE.
- 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.

Please note: the above list is not intended to be exhaustive and is for guidance purposes only. It is at the discretion of the school as what is deemed to be unreasonable.

Complainants should try to limit their communication with the school 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.

5.2 ‘Frivolous’ or ‘vexatious’ complaints

Complainants should avoid ‘frivolous’ or ‘vexatious’ complaints.

The characteristics of a 'frivolous' or 'vexatious' complaint are:

- complaints which are obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific, repetitious or numerous
- insistence upon pursuing unmeritorious complaints and/or unrealistic outcomes beyond all reason
- insistence upon pursuing meritorious complaints in an unreasonable manner
- complaints which are designed to cause disruption or annoyance
- demands for redress that lack any serious purpose or value

5.3 Steps We Will Take

We will take every reasonable step to address the complainant’s comments and give them a clear statement of our position and their options. We will maintain our role as an objective arbiter throughout the process, including when we meet with individuals. We will follow our complaints procedure as normal (as outlined above) wherever possible.

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, refer them to this policy and remind them to act in accordance with it. For complainants who excessively contact the school causing a significant level of disruption, we may:

- Give the complainant a single point of contact via an email address.
- Limit the number of times the complainant can make contact, such as a fixed number per term.
- Ask the complainant to engage a third party to act on their behalf.
- Put any other strategy in place as necessary.

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 school premises and ensuring appropriate measures of support are provided to staff where they are the subject of aggression and/or violence.

5.4 Serial/Persistent Complaints

If the complainant contacts the school again on the same issue, the correspondence may then be viewed as ‘serial’ or ‘persistent’. We may stop responding to the complainant when the following conditions are met:

- We have taken every reasonable step to address the complainant’s concerns.
- The complainant has been given a clear statement of our position and their options.
- The complainant contacts the school repeatedly, making substantially the same points each time.

The case to stop responding is stronger if:

- The complainant's communications are often or always abusive or aggressive.
- The complainant makes insulting personal comments about or threats towards staff.
- We have reason to believe the individual is contacting the school with the intention of causing disruption or inconvenience.

Where we decide to stop responding, we will inform the individual that we intend to do so. We will also explain that we will consider any new complaints they make provided the concerns raised are materially different to those raised previously and/or are unconnected to the previous concern.

5.5 Duplicate Complaints

If we have resolved a complaint under this procedure and receive a duplicate complaint on the same subject from a partner, family member or other individual, we will assess whether there are aspects that we hadn't previously considered, or any new information we need to take into account.

If we are satisfied that there are no new aspects, we will:

- Tell the new complainant that we have already investigated and responded to this issue, and that the local process is complete.
- Direct them to the DFE if they are dissatisfied with the original handling of the complaint.

If a duplicate complaint is raised which in the view of the school warrants further consideration, the procedure outlined above will be repeated.

5.6 Complaint Campaigns

Where Woodlands Academy of Learning receives a large volume of complaints about the same topic or subject, especially if these come from complainants unconnected with the school, the school may respond to these complaints by:

- Publishing a single response on the school website.
- Sending a template response to all of the complainants.

If complainants are not satisfied with the school's response, or wish to pursue the complaint further, the normal procedures will apply.

6 Record Keeping and Confidentiality

The school will record 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. The records will also include copies of letters and emails, and notes relating to meetings and phone calls. This material will be treated as confidential and stored securely and will be viewed only by those involved in investigating the complaint or on the review panel.

This is except where the secretary of state (or someone acting on their behalf) or the complainant requests access to records of a complaint through a freedom of information (FOI) request or through a subject access request under the terms of the Data Protection Act, or where the material must be made available during a school inspection.

Records of complaints will be kept securely, only for as long as necessary and in line with data protection law, our privacy notices and our Trust Data Protection Policy.

The details of the complaint, including the names of individuals involved, will not be shared with the whole governing board in case a review panel needs to be organised at a later point. Where the governing board is aware of the substance of the complaint before the review panel stage, the school will (where reasonably practicable) arrange for an independent panel to hear the complaint.

Complainants also have the right to request an independent panel if they believe there is likely to be bias in the proceedings. The decision to approve this request is made by the governing board, who will not unreasonably withhold consent.

7 Learning lessons

The Governing Board will review any underlying issues raised by complaints with the Headteacher, where appropriate, and respecting confidentiality, to determine whether there are any improvements that the school can make to its procedures or practice to help prevent similar events in the future.

8 Monitoring arrangements

The Governing Board will monitor the effectiveness of the complaints procedure in making sure that complaints are handled properly. The Governing Board track the number and nature of complaints, and review underlying issues as stated in this policy.

The complaints records are logged and managed by the school.

This policy will be reviewed by the Senior Leadership Team every year. At each review, the policy will be approved by the Governing Board.

This policy will be reviewed Autumn 2027

9 Links with Other Policies

Policies dealing with other forms of complaints include:

- Child protection and safeguarding policy and procedures
- Suspension and permanent exclusion policy
- Parent and Carer Charter
- Staff grievance procedures
- Staff disciplinary procedures

- Special educational needs policy and information report
- Privacy notices

10 Equality Impact Assessment

Under the Equality Act 2010 we have a duty not to discriminate against people on the basis of their age, disability, gender identity, pregnancy or maternity, race, religion or belief and sexual orientation. An Equality Impact Assessment is not required on this revised policy as it doesn't have a disproportionate impact on a specific group of people who share a relevant protected characteristic.

Appendix One: Complaint template form

Please complete and return to Woodlands Academy of Learning either through the school office or electronically through postbox@woodlands.walsall.sch.uk

You will receive an acknowledgment of receipt and an explanation of what actions will be taken within five school days of the complaint being received by Woodlands Academy of Learning.

Your name:
Pupil's name (if relevant):
Your relationship to the pupil (if relevant):
Address: **Postcode:** **Day time telephone number:** **Evening telephone number:** **Email address:**
Please give details of your complaint
What action, if any, have you already taken to try and resolve your complaint. (Who did you speak to and what was the response)?

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:
Action taken:
Date: