Woodley Primary School

Together we care, inspire and achieve

At Woodley, we CARE.

We CARE about each other.

We CARE about the world.

We CARE about our achievements.

School Complaints Policy

Created by:	Peter Langridge	**Date:** April 2025
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Who can make a complaint?

This complaint 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 the school 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 complaint procedure.

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 complaint procedure. We would like to reassure you that the school 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, you will be referred to another staff member. Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels unable to deal with a concern, you will be referred 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, we will attempt to resolve the issue internally, through the stages outlined within this complaint procedure.

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.

General concerns should be raised in the first instance with the class teacher or other relevant member of staff. If the issue remains unresolved, the next step is to speak to the Phase Leader, Assistant Headteacher or Deputy Headteacher. If the matter remains unresolved, you should then make a complaint to the Headteacher.

You should not approach Individual members of the governing body to raise concerns or complaints because they have no power to act on an individual basis and it may also prevent them from considering your complaint at a later stage in the procedure.

On this basis:

- Complaints against school staff (except the Headteacher) should be made in the first instance, to the Headteacher via the school office and preferably in writing (please mark them as Private and Confidential);

- Complaints that involve or are about the Headteacher should be addressed to the chair of governors, via the school office and preferably in writing (please mark them as Private and Confidential);
- Complaints about any individual governor, the chair of governors or the whole governing body should be addressed to the Clerk to the Governing Body via the school office (please mark them as Private and Confidential).

Please note: Complaints about staff conduct will be dealt with under the school's internal disciplinary procedure, if appropriate. You will not be informed of any disciplinary action against a staff member as a result of a complaint. However, you will be notified if the matter is being addressed.

For ease of use, a template complaint form is included at the end of this procedure. If you require help in 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 equality law, we will consider making reasonable adjustments if required, to enable you to access and complete this complaint procedure: for instance, providing information in alternative formats, assisting you in raising a formal complaint or holding meetings in accessible locations.

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.

Timescales

Complaints should be raised within three months of the incident or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within three months of the last of these incidents. Complaints made outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.

If at any point we cannot meet the timescales we have set out in this policy, we will:

- Set new time limits with the complainant.
- Send the complainant details of the new deadline and explain the delay.

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. If a complaint is received within 10 school days before a school holiday, the school will endeavour to respond before the commencement of the holiday. If this is not possible the school will advise you of the revised date of the response.

If legal action is commenced against the school in relation to the complaint, we will consider whether to suspend the complaint procedure in relation to the complaint until those legal proceedings have concluded.

Scope of this Complaint Procedure

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

Exceptions	**Who to contact**
● Admissions to schools ● Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs ● School re-organisation proposals	Concerns about admissions, statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs, or school re-organisation proposals should be raised with the relevant service within the local authority
● 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 (MASSH).
● 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 complaint procedure.* The school's Behaviour Policy is available on the school website.
● 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 complaint procedure. You may also be able to complain direct to the local authority or the Department for Education, 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. You will not be informed of any disciplinary action taken against a staff member as a result of a complaint. However, you will be notified that the matter is being addressed.
● Complaints about services provided by other providers who may use school premises or facilities	Providers should have their own complaint procedure to deal with complaints about service. Please contact them direct.
● National Curriculum - content	Please contact the Department for Education at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus

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 legal action is commenced against the school in relation to the complaint, we will consider whether to suspend the complaint procedure in relation to the complaint until those legal proceedings have concluded.

It is reasonable and legal for personal information relating to the child/parents/carer/complainant to be shared with professional personas supporting the school e.g. HR advisors, Data Protection advisors, Governor Services/school governors, the Inclusion Service etc. in responding to a complaint. Normal protocols in ensuring the security of that information should be observed.

Resolving complaints

At each stage in the procedure we want to work with you 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 acknowledgement that the situation could have been handled differently (this is not the same as an admission of unlawful or negligent action)
- 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.

Withdrawal of a Complaint

This can be done at any stage. If you wish to withdraw a complaint, we will ask you to confirm this in writing.

Stages of the complaint procedure

Informal Resolution: Discussion with Class Teacher (or relevant member of staff, such as the School Business Manager)

It is hoped that most concerns or complaints will be resolved quickly and informally. As a school, we are keen to address and learn from any feedback to improve experiences and processes for all.

If complainants have a concern or complaint, they should normally contact their child's class teacher or the relevant member of staff. This can be done in person, in writing or by telephone. In many cases the matter will be resolved immediately by this means to the complainants' satisfaction. In some circumstances however, the matter will require investigation or discussion with others and so it may take longer to respond to the complainants. The class teacher or relevant staff member will make a written record of all concerns or complaints and the date on which they were received. Notes must be added to the school's recording system (CPOMS) or emailed to the Headteacher should they not relate to a child in school.

The member of staff the complaint has been made against can discuss the concern with the Headteacher to seek support.

The school will use its reasonable endeavours to resolve any informal concerns or complaints within 10 school days of them being raised, except where they are raised during school holidays or in the 10 school days prior to their commencement. In these cases, the school will use its reasonable endeavours to resolve the concern or complaint as soon as possible after the commencement of the new term (usually within 10 working days).

If it is not possible to resolve the matter informally or complainants are not satisfied with the result at this stage, then complainants will be advised to proceed with their complaint in accordance with Formal Stage 1 of this procedure.

There may be occasion when some general matters are more appropriately directed to the School Business Manager.

The ability to consider the complaint objectively and impartially is crucial. Where the first approach is made to a Governor, the next step would be to refer the complainant to the appropriate person and advise them about the procedure. Governors should not act unilaterally on an individual complaint outside the formal procedure or be involved at the early stages in case they are needed to sit on a panel at a later stage of the procedure. Governors should seek advice where necessary.

Stage 1

Formal complaints must be made to the Headteacher (unless they are about the Headteacher), via the school office. This may be done in person, in writing (preferably using the complaint form), or by telephone. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

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 3 school days.

Within this acknowledgement, the headteacher may seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, ask what remains unresolved and what outcome you would like to see. The headteacher will consider

whether a face-to-face meeting is the most appropriate way of doing this and record their decision and rationale.

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

At the conclusion of the investigation, the Headteacher will provide a formal written response within 10 school days of the date of receipt of the complaint. If the Headteacher 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 provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions the school will take to resolve the complaint.

The Headteacher will advise you how to escalate your complaint should you remain dissatisfied with the outcome of stage 1.

Please note: Formal complaints involving the head teacher or a member of the governing body (including the chair or vice-chair) progress straight to stage 2.

Stage 2

If you remain dissatisfied with the Headteacher's response at stage 1, you can request the matter be progressed to the next stage and put your complaint in writing to the chair of governors, via the school office within 15 school days of receipt of the stage 1 response. Please include your desired outcome. Please mark as Private and Confidential. Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply. The school will forward the letter to the chair of governors within 3 school days.

The chair will acknowledge the complaint within 3 school days from receipt. Within this acknowledgement, the chair may seek to clarify the nature of the complaint and what outcome you would like to see. The chair will consider whether a face to face meeting is the most appropriate way of doing this, but this isn't always necessary.

During the investigation, the chair of governors will:

- where appropriate, interview those involved in the matter and / or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish. Interviews with pupils will not be carried out by the chair: these will be designated to an appropriate member of staff with no previous involvement, such as the deputy head or other senior member of staff.
- keep a written record of any meetings / interviews in relation to their investigation.

At the conclusion of the investigation, the chair of governors will provide a formal written response within 15 school days of the date of receipt of the complaint. The response will outline their decision,

any actions that have, or will be taken as a result of the complaint, and any recommendations to the school or governing body.

If the chair of governors is unable to meet the deadline, they will provide you with an update and revised response date.

The chair of governors will advise you how to escalate your complaint should you remain dissatisfied with the outcome of stage 2.

Stage 3

If you remain dissatisfied with the chair's response at stage 2 and wish to take the matter further, you can request the matter is escalated to stage 3: a meeting with members of the governing body complaints panel, which will be formed of three impartial governors. This is the final stage of the complaint procedure.

A request to escalate to stage 3 must be made in writing to the Clerk via the school office, within a maximum of 15 school days of receipt of the stage 2 response letter from the chairperson. Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered in exceptional circumstances. Your letter should outline the elements of the chair's response you remain dissatisfied with and your preferred outcome. The CRS will then liaise with the clerk of the governing body and commence arrangements for the meeting of the governing body complaints panel.

The Clerk will record the date the request is received and acknowledge its receipt in writing (either by letter or email) within 3 school days.

The Clerk will write to inform you of the date of the meeting of the complaint panel. 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 inform you of an anticipated date and keep you informed. If there is insufficient time for the meeting to be held before the end of a term, the earliest most convenient date will be arranged following the commencement of the new term and you will be advised accordingly.

The complaints panel will consist of 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 chairperson. If there are fewer than three governors available, the clerk will source any additional, independent governors through another local school or through the local authority's governor services team, in order to make up the panel. Alternatively, an entirely independent committee will be convened to hear the complaint at Stage 3.

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

The following criteria apply if you are invited to attend the meeting:

- If the offer of three proposed dates is rejected by you, without good reason, the Clerk will decide when to hold the meeting. It will then proceed in your absence on the basis of written submissions from both parties.
- you may bring someone along to provide support. This can be a relative or friend. 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. For instance, if a

school employee is called as a witness in a complaint meeting, they may wish to be supported by union and/or legal representation.

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

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

- confirm and notify you of the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that the dates are convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible
- request copies of any further written material to be submitted to the panel at least five school days before the meeting.

Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least 5 school days before the date of the meeting. **Please note: The panel will not normally accept as evidence, recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.**

The panel 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, and no formal minutes will be taken. 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 or notes taken.

Whilst it is the formal stage of the complaint process, the standard of proof applied by the panel will be the civil standard of, 'balance of probability' and not the criminal standard of, 'beyond reasonable doubt' as generated under police or Court processes.

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

- uphold the complaint in whole or in part
- not uphold the complaint in whole or in part.

If the complaint is upheld in whole or in part, the panel 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 panel will provide you and the school with a full written explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it within 15 school days. The response will include details of how to contact the Department for Education if you are dissatisfied with the way the complaint has been handled.

Recording meetings – audio-visual evidence

Where there may be communication difficulties, the school may wish to use recording devices to ensure all parties are able to access and review the discussions at a later point.

The school is a data controller in its own right and has the discretion to decide whether to allow meetings to be recorded, if it is not required for the purposes of a reasonable adjustment.

It is also responsible for ensuring there is a fair and reasonable purpose for allowing meetings to be recorded as there may be various levels of identifiable personal information recorded.

Consent from all parties present at a meeting should be sought before recording conversations or meetings.

Complaints against the headteacher

Where a complaint relates specifically to the actions / inactions of the headteacher the complaint should be directed in the first instance, via the school, to the Chair of the Governing Body. The letter should specify the nature of the complaint, the actions which you are dissatisfied with and an indication of what outcome is being sought. These complaints do not cover the following, where more specific procedures apply and should be followed:

• Allegations of child abuse

• Financial impropriety

• Other criminal activity

Further information should be sought from the Complaints Service.

Depending on the nature of the complaint the parent, or Chair, may request the involvement of the LA to advise them in the resolution of the complaint.

On receipt of the letter the Chair will notify the LA immediately and seek advice to establish whether the complaint falls within the scope of the schools' complaint procedure, or other existing Council procedures. If the complaint does fall within the school's procedure the Chair will act as complaints officer.

The Chair will acknowledge the letter and confirm their understanding of the exact nature of the complaint itself. They will give a description of the complaints procedure and a target date for providing a response. A full response will be made within 15 school days. However, if the complaint requires an in-depth investigation, the Chair will acknowledge this and let you know that a full response will take longer than usual.

The Chair may decide to contact or meet with you in order to obtain / clarify specific points or gather additional information to assist in the investigation. You can be accompanied to the meeting by a friend, relative or representative and arrangements for any interpreting facilities should be considered where necessary.

The Chair will write to both you and headteacher to indicate the outcome of the investigation that the complaint is:

- Unsubstantiated and no further action will be taken or
- Justified in whole or in part and what action / recommendation will result In addition, you will be advised of your right to make a representation to the LA against either the decision or, the conduct of the investigation.

Representation to the Local Authority

Should you or the headteacher remain dissatisfied with the outcome of the Chair's investigation, a representation can be made in writing to the Corporate Director, Services to People. The matter will be allocated to a senior officer with no previous involvement, who will then write to all parties outlining the process to be followed. The senior officer will carry out a review of the Chair's investigation and response letter, relevant paperwork and any other submissions pertinent to the complaint and, if necessary, arrange meetings with the parties involved.

Once any meetings have taken place, and allowing time for deliberation, a response will be sent to all parties within 20 school days from the date of the final meeting. It should be noted that the LA has no power to re-investigate the complaint or to overturn the decision of the Chair. Its role is to review the rigour applied to the investigational process. Parents will be advised of their right of appeal to the Secretary of State or Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) if appropriate.

Next Steps

If you believe the school has not handled your complaint in accordance with the published complaint procedure or has acted unlawfully or unreasonably in the exercise of its duties under education law, you can contact the Department for Education after stage 3 has been completed.

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

You can refer your complaint to the Department for Education after stage 3 has been completed by going online at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus, by telephone on: 0370 000 2288 or by writing to:

Department for Education
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD.

Managing serial and unreasonable complaints

As a school we are 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 unreasonable behaviour and will act to protect them from that behaviour, including that which is abusive, offensive or threatening.

We define unreasonable behaviour as that which hinders our consideration of complaints because of the frequency or nature of the complainant's contacts 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 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;
- 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 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/or by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with;
- uses threats to intimidate;
- uses abusive, offensive or discriminatory language or violence;
- publishes unacceptable information on social media or other public forums;
- knowingly provides false or falsified information.

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 any restriction on contact.

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 the school or individual staff, 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 at the end of the school term following the term during which the plan was put in place, but no later than 6 months after the date of the plan.

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

Complaint Campaigns

Where the school 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.

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 our original handling of the complaint

If there are new aspects, we will follow this procedure again.

Barring from the Premises

School premises are private property and therefore any individual may be barred from entering the premises.

If an individual's behaviour is cause for concern, they can be asked to leave the premises and, in some cases, individuals can be barred from entering school premises, including playing fields and parking areas.

The Headteacher will notify the parties involved in writing, explaining that their implied licence for access to the premises has been temporarily revoked and why, subject to any representations that the individual may wish to make.

The individual involved will be given the opportunity to formally express their views regarding the decision to bar them. This decision to bar will be reviewed, taking into account any discussions following the incident. If the decision is made to continue the bar, the individual will be contacted in writing, informing them of how long the bar will be in place, and when the decision will be reviewed.

Anyone wishing to make a complaint regarding a barring order can do so in writing, including email, to the Headteacher or chair of governors.

Once the school's complaints procedure is completed, the only remaining avenue of appeal is through the Courts.

Complaint Form

Please complete and return to the school office. Please address the complaint to the Headteacher (for stage 1), the chair of governors (for stage 2, or complaints against the Headteacher). Please mark Private and Confidential.

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

What actions are you hoping for? What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?
Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details.
Signature: **Date:**
Official use
Date acknowledgement sent:
By who:
Complaint referred to:
Date:

Staged approach to complaint procedure – Complainants

