

WOODLANDS PRIMARY SCHOOL, HEDGEHOGS NURSERY & SUNBEAMS CLUB



COMPLAINTS POLICY AND PROCEDURE 2026-2027

Woodlands Primary School, Hedgehogs Nursery and Sunbeams Club are committed to working constructively with parents, carers and the wider community. We welcome feedback and take concerns and complaints seriously.

In accordance with section 29 of the Education Act 2002, the Governing Body has established this procedure for dealing with complaints relating to the school and the community facilities and services it provides where no separate statutory procedure applies.

Our procedure is intended to be:

- clear, accessible and easy to use;
- impartial and non-adversarial;
- capable of providing a full and fair consideration of a complaint;
- proportionate to the matters raised;
- respectful of confidentiality and data protection;
- fair to complainants, pupils, staff and governors; and
- focused upon resolution and improvement.

Decisions made under this procedure will be lawful, rational, reasonable, fair and proportionate.

Concern or complaint?

A concern is an expression of worry or doubt about an issue for which reassurance is sought.

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about actions taken or a lack of action.

The school encourages concerns to be raised at the earliest opportunity. Many matters can and should be resolved informally through discussion with the appropriate member of staff.

Informal resolution is not a formal stage of the complaints procedure. A complainant who wishes to make a formal complaint will not be required to complete a succession of informal meetings before being permitted to do so.

Who may complain?

This procedure is not restricted to parents or carers of pupils currently attending Woodlands. Any person, including a member of the public, may complain about facilities or services provided by the school unless the matter falls within a separate statutory procedure.

Raising a concern informally

Where appropriate, parents and carers should normally raise day-to-day concerns initially with the class teacher and/or relevant member of staff. Depending upon the nature of the concern, it may subsequently be appropriate for a member of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT), SENDCo or Headteacher to become involved.

The purpose of informal discussion is to seek an early resolution. It does not create additional compulsory stages within the formal complaints process.

Making a formal complaint

The school formal complaints procedure has two stages:

Stage 1 - Formal investigation and written response

Stage 2 - Governing Body Complaints Panel

Stage 2 is the final stage of the school complaints procedure.

A formal complaint may be made in writing, by email, verbally or through a third party acting with the complainant consent. The school may ask the complainant to complete the complaint form appended to this policy to ensure that the issues and desired outcome are clearly understood.

Reasonable adjustments will be made where necessary in accordance with the Equality Act 2010.

Complainants must not approach individual governors about a complaint. Individual governors have no authority to investigate or determine complaints and prior involvement may prevent a governor subsequently sitting on a complaints panel.

Who receives a formal complaint?

A complaint about a member of staff other than the Headteacher should be addressed to the Headteacher, via the school office, marked Private and Confidential.

A complaint about the Headteacher should be addressed to the Chair of Governors, via the Clerk/Governance Professional, marked Private and Confidential.

A complaint about the Chair of Governors or an individual governor should be addressed to the Clerk/Governance Professional.

A complaint involving both the Chair and Vice-Chair, the majority of the Governing Body or the entire Governing Body will be referred to the Clerk/Governance Professional, who will arrange an appropriately independent process. This may include an independent investigator at Stage 1 and independent governors at Stage 2.

Timescales

Complaints should normally be raised within three months of the incident complained about or, where a series of related incidents has occurred, within three months of the most recent incident. Complaints outside this period may nevertheless be considered where exceptional circumstances apply.

Complaints received during school holidays will normally be treated as received on the first school day following the holiday. The school will apply timescales reasonably and will not operate a blanket refusal to consider late complaints.

Stage 1 - Formal complaint

The person responsible for Stage 1 will acknowledge the complaint within five school days.

They will establish:

- the nature and scope of the complaint;
- what has already occurred;
- what remains unresolved;
- what outcome the complainant seeks; and
- what evidence or investigation is necessary.

The Headteacher may delegate investigation of a complaint to an appropriate senior member of staff but retains responsibility for determining the Stage 1 outcome. Where the complaint concerns the Headteacher, a suitably skilled and impartial governor will undertake Stage 1.

The investigator may interview relevant individuals, consider records and other evidence and keep appropriate written records.

A formal written response will normally be provided within 15 school days of receipt of the complaint. Where this is not reasonably possible, the complainant will be informed of the reason and given a revised response date.

The response will explain:

- what has been investigated;
- the conclusions reached;
- whether the complaint is upheld, partially upheld or not upheld;
- the reasons for the decision;
- any appropriate action arising from the complaint; and
- how the complainant may request Stage 2.

Stage 2 - Governing Body Complaints Panel

If dissatisfied with the Stage 1 outcome, the complainant may request consideration by a Governing Body Complaints Panel. The request must normally be made to the Clerk/Governance Professional within 10 school days of receiving the Stage 1 response, explaining why the complainant remains dissatisfied. Late requests may be considered where exceptional circumstances apply.

The Clerk/Governance Professional will acknowledge the request within five school days and seek to arrange a panel within 20 school days.

The panel will consist of at least three suitably skilled and impartial governors who have had no prior involvement in the complaint or the circumstances surrounding it. The members of the panel will decide between themselves who will act as Chair.

Where insufficient impartial governors are available, appropriately independent governors may be sourced from another school or through Governor Services.

The panel is not a disciplinary tribunal or court hearing. Its purpose is to consider the complaint fairly and afresh, establish relevant facts, reach conclusions and, where appropriate, achieve resolution and recommend improvements.

The complainant may be accompanied by a friend, relative or other supporter. Legal representation is not normally necessary or encouraged, although there may be exceptional circumstances where it is appropriate.

The panel may:

- uphold the complaint in whole;
- uphold it in part;
- dismiss it;
- determine appropriate action to resolve the matter; and/or
- recommend changes to systems, policies or practice.

Its written decision and reasons will normally be issued within five school days. The Stage 2 decision concludes the school internal complaints procedure.

Evidence and the scope of Stage 2

The Clerk/Governance Professional will circulate relevant documentation to the parties and panel at least five school days before the hearing wherever practicable.

Stage 2 concerns the complaint considered at Stage 1. It is not an opportunity continually to expand the complaint by introducing unrelated allegations. The panel will not normally consider new complaints or evidence unrelated to the original complaint. A genuinely new complaint should ordinarily commence at Stage 1.

Electronic recordings will not normally be permitted without prior agreement. Reasonable adjustments will be made where recording is required because of disability or other particular need. Covert recordings will not normally be accepted as evidence.

Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Woodlands recognises that complainants may use artificial intelligence tools, including generative AI such as ChatGPT, to assist them in organising, drafting or expressing a complaint. The school does not prohibit such use and recognises that AI may be a useful accessibility and communication aid.

However, the complainant remains responsible for the accuracy, relevance and tone of anything submitted in their name. Complainants are therefore asked to ensure that submissions:

- accurately represent their own concerns and experiences;
- identify clearly what is alleged and what outcome is sought;
- are no longer than reasonably necessary to explain the complaint;
- do not contain unnecessarily aggressive, confrontational or inflammatory language;
- avoid excessive, repetitive or irrelevant material; and

- avoid unnecessary legal or pseudo-legal argument that does not assist the school in understanding or determining the complaint.

The school is required to consider the substance of a complaint fairly. It is not required to provide a line-by-line response to repetitive, irrelevant or unnecessarily lengthy material.

Where an AI-assisted submission is unusually lengthy or unclear, the school may ask the complainant to identify succinctly the specific complaint(s), relevant facts and outcome sought before the investigation proceeds. The school may also seek clarification directly from the complainant at a meeting or in writing.

Use of AI will not of itself cause a complaint to be rejected or treated less favourably.

Expectations of complainants

To enable complaints to be considered fairly and efficiently, complainants are expected to:

- explain their complaint clearly and as early as possible;
- identify the resolution they seek;
- cooperate with reasonable requests for information;
- respond reasonably promptly;
- treat staff, governors and others with dignity and respect;
- maintain appropriate confidentiality;
- avoid repeatedly contacting multiple members of staff or governors about the same matter; and
- refrain from publishing confidential details concerning the complaint, pupils or staff on social media.

Serial, persistent and unreasonable complaints and behaviour

Woodlands is committed to dealing fairly and impartially with complaints and will not normally restrict a complainant contact with the school. However, the school complaints procedure must not be used to harass staff, repeatedly revisit concluded matters, consume a disproportionate amount of school resources or disrupt the education and welfare of pupils.

Behaviour may be considered unreasonable where, for example, a complainant:

- repeatedly raises substantially the same issue after it has been considered;
- refuses to identify the substance or desired outcome of a complaint;
- refuses reasonably to cooperate with the procedure;
- insists that the complaint be handled outside the published procedure;
- repeatedly changes the substance of the complaint;
- introduces large volumes of irrelevant or repetitive material;
- makes excessive demands through frequent or lengthy correspondence;
- contacts numerous members of staff or governors about the same issue;

- makes unjustified complaints against those dealing with the complaint and demands their replacement;
- seeks unrealistic outcomes;
- makes threats or uses abusive, offensive, discriminatory or intimidating language or behaviour;
- knowingly provides false information; or
- publishes inappropriate or confidential material relating to pupils, staff or the complaint.

A complaint will not be designated serial merely because it is difficult, persistent or strongly expressed. Ordinarily, the complainant must first have been permitted to complete the school complaints procedure.

Where behaviour or contact becomes unreasonable, the school may establish a proportionate communication plan, for example:

- requiring communication through one named person;
- restricting communication to a specified email address;
- setting reasonable intervals for responses;
- declining to respond to correspondence which simply repeats matters already answered; and/or
- requiring appointments for face-to-face contact.

Restrictions will be proportionate, recorded in writing and reviewed periodically.

Unacceptable behaviour and access to school premises

The school will not tolerate aggressive, abusive, threatening, intimidating or discriminatory behaviour towards pupils, staff, governors, visitors or other members of the school community.

Parents and visitors ordinarily have an implied licence to enter school premises for legitimate purposes such as drop-off and collection, appointments and school events. Where behaviour gives rise to concerns about safety or the orderly operation of the school, the Headteacher may require an individual to leave the premises and/or take steps to restrict or withdraw that individual implied licence to enter the school site.

Barring or restricting access to the school site does not remove a person right to make or pursue a complaint. Alternative arrangements for communication and, where relevant, collection of a child will be made.

Except where an immediate temporary restriction is necessary to protect safety, the individual will be informed in writing of the proposed restriction and given a reasonable opportunity to make representations. Where an immediate temporary bar is imposed, the individual will subsequently be given an opportunity to make representations.

The Headteacher decision will then be reviewed by the Chair of Governors or an appropriate committee of governors, taking account of representations received.

Where the restriction is confirmed, the individual will be informed in writing of the decision and reasons, the nature and extent of the restriction, how long it will remain in force, and when it will be reviewed.

Suggested Headteacher wording - notice of restriction of access

I am writing to inform you that, following the incident(s) outlined below, I consider your behaviour on school premises/towards members of the school community to have given rise to a legitimate concern regarding the safety and/or orderly operation of the school.

With effect from [date], your implied licence to enter Woodlands Primary School premises is therefore temporarily withdrawn/restricted. This does not affect your child entitlement to attend school and does not prevent you from communicating appropriately with the school or using the school complaints procedure.

[Exactly what the restriction means and any arrangements for collection/communication will be set out.]

Before a final decision is made, you are invited to provide any written representations you wish the school to consider by [date]. Following consideration of those representations, I will confirm whether the restriction is lifted, varied or continued.

Any decision to continue the restriction will be subject to review by the Chair of Governors/an appropriate committee of the Governing Body. If confirmed, you will be informed of the duration of the restriction and the date upon which it will be reviewed.

Anonymous complaints

Anonymous complaints will not normally be investigated. However, the Headteacher or Chair of Governors, as appropriate, may determine that an investigation is warranted having regard to the seriousness of the matters raised, including any safeguarding concerns.

Duplicate complaints

Where the school has completed its complaints procedure and subsequently receives substantially the same complaint from another person, for example another family member, the school will consider whether any genuinely new issues have been raised. Where there are none, the school may inform the new complainant that the matter has already been considered and the school procedure has concluded.

Complaints outside the scope of this procedure

Separate statutory or employment procedures apply to matters including:

- school admissions;
- statutory assessment of SEND/EHCP matters which are the responsibility of the local authority;
- school reorganisation;
- matters requiring a child protection investigation;
- suspension and permanent exclusion;
- staff grievances;
- whistleblowing;
- staff disciplinary matters; and
- complaints concerning services provided independently by third parties using school premises.

Complaints about how the school behaviour for learning policy has been applied may be made through this procedure.

Where a complaint concerns staff conduct and it is appropriate for the matter to be considered under disciplinary procedures, the complainant will be informed that the matter is being addressed but will not be entitled to details of confidential employment or disciplinary action.

Concurrent investigations or legal proceedings

Where the police, local authority safeguarding services, a tribunal or another public body is investigating matters relevant to a complaint, the school may need to suspend or adjust its investigation and timescales.

The existence of legal proceedings does not automatically terminate a complaint. The school will consider whether continuing the procedure would prejudice those proceedings and will seek advice where necessary.

Resolving complaints

At either formal stage the school may, where appropriate:

- provide an explanation;
- acknowledge that something could have been handled differently;
- apologise;
- explain action already taken;
- agree to undertake further action;
- review a policy or procedure; or
- identify learning or improvement arising from the complaint.

An acknowledgement that something could have been handled better does not, of itself, amount to an admission of negligence or legal liability.

Confidentiality and records

Complaints will be handled with an appropriate degree of confidentiality. Records will be retained securely and processed in accordance with data protection legislation and the school records-management arrangements. Information concerning pupils, families and staff will only be disclosed where lawful and necessary.

Withdrawal

Where a complainant wishes to withdraw a formal complaint, the school will ask them to confirm this in writing.

Completion of the school procedure

Following the Stage 2 decision, the school internal complaints procedure is complete.

A complainant who believes that Woodlands has failed to follow its published complaints procedure or has acted unlawfully or unreasonably in exercising its duties under education law may refer the matter to the Department for Education. The Department for Education does not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn decisions made by the school; it considers whether the school has adhered to education legislation and relevant statutory policies.

Appendix 1 - Formal Complaint Form

Name	
Address	
Telephone/email	
Pupil name, if relevant	
Relationship to pupil, if relevant	

Please state clearly the matter(s) about which you are complaining:

When did the matter occur?

Who have you already spoken to about this matter and what happened?

What specifically remains unresolved?

What outcome would you consider would resolve the complaint?

Please identify any documents/evidence you are providing:

Have you used AI or another person to assist in drafting this complaint? You are not required to answer this question. Whether AI assistance has been used will not affect the consideration of the complaint.

Signature: _____

Date: _____