

September 2025

Next Review date: September 2026

Complaints Procedure

This policy applies to all academies managed by Wootton Academy Trust (WAT).



Person responsible: Executive Headteacher

Approved by: Wootton Academy Trust Board of Trustees

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1. Introduction

This is the Complaints Procedure statement agreed by Wootton Academy Trust. A parent may raise a concern. 'Parent' includes any person who is not a parent of the pupil but who has parental responsibility for the pupil or who has care of the pupil.

Occasionally parents and students will have questions for a school, and these can give rise to concerns. A concern may be defined "as an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought". These matters will in most circumstances be resolved by discussion which will involve parents, students, and the relevant member of staff. Where this is not achieved, parents can follow the procedure outlined below. We understand that there are occasions when people would like to raise their concerns formally.

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

The Trust will attempt to resolve any issue internally, through the stages outlined within this complaints procedure and at each stage the person investigating the complaint will seek ways to resolve the complaint satisfactorily.

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.

For some issues it will not be appropriate to use this procedure. Individuals making complaints about issues relating to separate statutory procedures will be referred as follows, please see Appendix 1 for further information:

- Admissions to Schools
- School Re-organisation Proposals
- Statutory Assessments of Special Educational Needs
- Matters likely to require a child protection investigation
- Exclusions of children from school
- Whistleblowing
- Staff Grievances
- Staff Conduct Complaints
- Complaints about the Curriculum
- Complaints about collective worship
- Withdrawal from the curriculum

The objective is to conduct the process in a fair, impartial, objective and transparent manner. All correspondence, statements and records of complaints will be kept confidential.

All the documents referred to in this statement are published widely, including on Wootton Academy Trust's websites. Copies of the documents can also be obtained from the Executive Assistant to the Executive Headteacher, to whom any questions about this statement or any other document should be addressed. The Executive Assistant's contact details are at the end of the procedure.

The parties are expected to do their best to adhere to the timetable. If for any reason a party is unable to comply with the timetable, then they should write to the other party explaining why and saying when they will comply with the timetable.

Wootton Academy Trust's Complaint Procedure will follow the DfE's Best Practice Guidance for School Complaints Procedures 2020 [updated 12 March 2021]. If the Trust's Complaint's Procedure conflicts with the DfE's Best Practice Guidance, the DfE Best Practice Guidance will take precedence.

2. Stage One: Informal Resolution

It is in everyone's interest to resolve a concern as quickly as possible. The parent should raise their complaint with the relevant member of staff, or Head of School/ Head of College at the first opportunity, either in person, or by letter, telephone or email. The informal stage may involve a meeting between the parent and the relevant member

of staff. All reasonable endeavours will be made to resolve any informal complaint within 10 school days.

The parent will receive a written response by email or post setting out the conclusions reached.

Should the matter not be resolved, or in the event that the staff member and parent fail to reach a satisfactory resolution, then the parent can decide whether they wish to proceed with their complaint under Stage 2 set out below.

In the event that the complaint relates to the Head of School/ Head of College, the Executive Headteacher will look into the issues raised within the timescale set out above. If the complaint relates to the Executive Headteacher, it will be investigated by a Trustee. If the complaint relates to a Governor or Trustee, it will be investigated by a suitably skilled and impartial Governor/Trustee.

3. Stage Two: Formal Resolution

If the complaint is not resolved informally as set out in Stage 1, then the parent should put their complaint in writing addressed to Executive Assistant to Executive Headteacher within 10 school days of the conclusion of the Stage 1 process. The parent may either use the complaint form, or set out the same details in a letter. Parents must identify how they wish their complaint to be resolved and if applicable, which part of their complaint they are escalating. Copies of relevant documents should also be enclosed with the complaint form or letter. A formal complaint will be acknowledged within 3 working days.

The Executive Headteacher will thoroughly investigate the complaint. The Executive Headteacher may delegate the investigation to a senior colleague. However, the decision will be that of the Executive Headteacher. This may involve a meeting with the parents. All reasonable endeavours will be made to ensure the parents are advised of the outcome of their complaint within 20 school days. Where the investigation will take longer than this, the parents will be advised within 20 school days and be given a time by which it is anticipated the investigation will be concluded.

If the complaint is about the Executive Headteacher, the Executive Assistant will forward the complaint form or letter to the Chair of the Wootton Academy Trust Board. The Chair will then delegate the investigation of the complaint to a director of Wootton Academy. The Chair of the WAT Board will have no involvement in the investigation of the complaint at this stage. The Executive Assistant will write to the parent informing them of the name of the person who will carry out the investigation.

Should a meeting take place it will be a formal meeting at which another member of staff may be present to take a note. The parent may be accompanied to the meeting.

The parent will receive a written response by email or post setting out the conclusions reached.

Where the parents are dissatisfied with the outcome of the Investigating Officer's response to their formal complaint, the parents have the opportunity to have their complaint heard by a panel as outlined in Stage 3 below.

4. Stage Three: Panel Hearing

If a parent wishes to have their complaint heard by a panel having gone through Stages 1 and 2 of the procedure described above, they must write to the Executive Assistant to Executive Headteacher within 10 working days of the date of the stage 2 outcome letter. The Executive Assistant will acknowledge the request for a review within 3 working days of receipt.

The parents must provide a list of their complaint(s) and explain why they feel their complaints have not been resolved satisfactorily.

The Executive Assistant to the Executive Headteacher will convene a meeting of the panel. The parties should cooperate with the intention of holding the panel within 20 working days of receipt of the parent's written request. The meeting can be held in person, remotely or hybrid, depending on attendees' availability.

The panel will comprise two members of the Trust Board and/or relevant Local Governing Board [i.e. either Wootton Upper School or Kimberley College] who have not been previously involved in the complaint and one person independent of the management and running of the Trust

If the complainant fails to attend the panel hearing without notice, the hearing will still be held at the designated time using the papers already submitted. Further evidence will not be accepted in lieu of attendance.

If the complaint concerns a governor of the pupil's Academy Local Governing Board, or a director of Wootton Academy Trust then the Chair, Vice-Chair or another director of Wootton Academy Trust will convene the panel.

Proceedings of the panel:

- The hearing will be closed to the public.
- Electronic recordings of meetings of conversations are not permitted unless a complainant's own disability or special needs require it. Prior knowledge and consent of all parties attending will be sought before meetings or conversations take place. Consent will be recorded in any minutes taken.
- The complainant will be invited to attend and can be accompanied in representing their own views. The hearing is not a legal proceeding and so legal representation will not be permitted.
- The relevant member of staff and Investigating Officer will be invited to attend.
- If witnesses attend they will only be present for that part of the hearing where they give their evidence. It is preferable that witness statements be sent to all the parties before the hearing in order to avoid the risk of the panel being adjourned.
- The EA to the Executive Headteacher will ensure any documents are circulated to all parties involved before the hearing,
- The panel may ask questions at any point.
- The panel may agree to the circulation and/or submission of documents less than 5 school days before the hearing.
- A note of the panel will be taken by a person appointed by Wootton Academy Trust.
- The panel will deliberate in private.
- The panel will reach a decision as quickly as possible and in no more than 10 working days following the hearing.
- The decision of the panel will be final.

Remit of the panel – the panel can:

- Dismiss the complaint in whole or in part.
- Uphold 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/college's systems or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not occur.

5. Referring Complaints on Completion of the Trust's Procedure

If the complainant is unsatisfied with the outcome of the school's complaints procedure, they can refer their complaint to the Department for Education (DfE). The DfE will check whether the complaint has been dealt with properly by the school/college. The DfE will not overturn a school/college's decision about a complaint, but will intervene if a school/college 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 Trust's complaints procedure is found to not meet regulations, the Trust 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

The Trust will include this information in the outcome letter to complainants.

6. Unreasonable & Persistent Complaints

6.1 Unreasonable Complaints

Most complaints raised will be valid, and therefore we will treat them seriously. However, a complaint may become unreasonable if the person:

- 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 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 Trust what is deemed to be unreasonable.

Complainants should try to limit their communication with the school/college 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.

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 Executive Headteacher or Chair of Governors will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying an 'unreasonable' marking. If the behaviour continues, the Executive 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/college 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, such as Citizens Advice
- 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/college premises and ensuring appropriate measures of support are provided to staff where they are the subject of aggression and/or violence.

6.2 Serial/Persistent Complaints

If the complainant contacts the school/college 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/college 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/college 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.

6.3 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 a duplicate complaint is raised which in the view of the school warrants further consideration, the procedure outlined in section 2 will be repeated.

6.4 Complaint Campaigns

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

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

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

7. Keeping Records of Complaints

A written record will be kept of all complaints, and of whether they are resolved at the preliminary stage or proceed to a panel hearing, along with what actions have been taken, regardless of the decision.

The Head of School/Head of College will:

- record the progress of the complaint and the final outcome;
- record whether the case progressed to a panel hearing;
- record the action taken by the school/college or the trust, regardless of outcome;
- be responsible for these records and make sure the data is kept secure;

- delete records of complaints after two years, unless statutory regulations apply;
- ensure that complainants have a right to copies of these records under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act 2018 and GDPR.

All correspondence statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential, except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the 2008 Act requests access to them.

The Head of School/Head of College will:

- determine on what occasions where complaints are made or continue to be escalated after a child has left the school/college records relating to ongoing complaints are retained. On changing schools, the pupil's educational record is transferred to the new school and no copies are retained.
- ensure that the school/college holds records of complaints separate to their pupil records (while a complaint is ongoing) so that access to them can be maintained.
- ensure that information generated by a complaint which does not form part of the pupil record, the school/college will store this information separately and securely.
- ensure that personal data will only be kept for as long as is necessary for the immediate purpose of processing. The data should be stored securely and, where appropriate, encrypted to maximise security.

8. Contact Details

Beccy Snape
Executive Assistant to Executive Headteacher
Wootton Upper School
Hall End Road
Wootton
Bedford
MK43 9HT

Telephone: 01234 767 123
Email: bsnape@wootton.beds.sch.uk

9. Wootton Academy Trust Review

The Board of Trustees will monitor the level and nature of complaints and review the outcomes at least annually to ensure the effectiveness of the procedure and make changes where necessary.

As well as addressing an individual's complaints, the process of listening to and resolving complaints will contribute to the process of school/college improvement. When individual complaints are heard, the school/college may identify underlying issues that need to be addressed. The monitoring and review of complaints by each academy and the Board of Wootton Academy Trust will provide a useful tool in evaluating each academy's performance.

APPENDIX ONE: Complaints not in Scope

A complaints procedure should cover all complaints about any provision of community facilities or services that a school/college provides other than complaints for which there are separate (statutory) procedures, including those listed below.

Admissions to Schools

For school admissions, it will depend on who the admission authority is (either the school or the local authority).

Complaints about admission appeals for local authority-maintained schools are dealt with by the appropriate ombudsman.

School re-organisation proposals

Contact the local authority or diocese, as appropriate, in the first instance and then escalate to us, if dissatisfied.

Statutory assessments of special educational needs

Concerns about statutory assessments of special educational needs should be raised directly with local authorities.

Matters likely to require a child protection investigation

Complaints about child protection matters should be handled:

- under the school's child protection and safeguarding policy
- in accordance with relevant statutory guidance

Refer to your local authority designated officer (LADO) or the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH).

Exclusion of children from school

Further information about raising concerns about exclusions is available in the [School discipline and exclusion guidance](#).

Complaints about the application of the behaviour policy can be made through the school's complaints procedure.

Whistleblowing

There is an internal whistleblowing procedure for employees, including temporary staff and contractors.

The Secretary of State for Education is the prescribed person for matters relating to education for whistle-blowers who do not want to raise matters direct with their employer. Concerns can be raised with DfE using its contact form.

Volunteers who have concerns about schools should complain through the school's complaints procedure. Depending on the substance of the complaint they may also be able to complain to:

- the local authority
- DfE using its contact form

Staff Grievances

Complaints from staff must be dealt with under the school's internal grievance procedures.

Staff Conduct Complaints

Complaints about staff are 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, complainants will be notified that the matter is being addressed.

Complaints about services provided by other providers who may use school premises or facilities

Complainants should follow the external provider's own complaints procedure.

Complaints about the Curriculum

Complaints about the content of the national curriculum should be sent to DfE using its contact form.

Complaints about the delivery of the curriculum are for schools to resolve through their complaint's procedure. This includes:

- religious education (RE)
- sex and relationships education

The duty on local authorities to consider complaints of this nature was removed under section 45 of the Education Act 2011.

If a school's complaint procedure signposts complainants to the local authority to resolve these and other types of complaints, then governing bodies should seek confirmation from the local authority that they can include these details in their complaint procedure.

Complaints about Collective Worship

Complainants who are dissatisfied with the content of the daily act of collective worship (DACP) should be signposted to:

- the local authority
- the local Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education
- any other relevant body