St Edward's Prep School & Nursery

PARENTAL COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

This procedure applies to all Wishford Schools, including school-based Early Years settings

Last Reviewed:	Significant Changes: 24.09.26
January 2024	Clarification of timescales
October 2023	Complaint panel updates
January 2025	• Procedure centralised • Procedure for Stage 3 updated and clarified
September 2026	• ***Significant changes made – sent to schools as 'new' policy***

1. Scope

This procedure:

i. Applies to all Wishford schools, including their EYFS settings and any after-school and holiday clubs (run by the school).

ii. Is available for viewing and/or downloading on each school's website and is available in hard copy on request, including in large print or other accessible formats if required. The school will make other reasonable adjustments required to enable complainants to access and complete the procedure, such as holding meetings in accessible locations.

iii. Aims to support timely and informal resolution of all parental[1] complaints and, whenever this is not possible, a fair, transparent and formal process which respects confidentiality.

iv. Only applies to complaints made by adults with parental responsibility. School leaders cannot consider complaints made on behalf of adults with parental responsibility, e.g. complaints made by wider family members or complaints made 'on behalf' of a wider cohort/year group.

v. Only applies to matters/incidents that occurred whilst the associated child was a registered pupil at the school. Parents can still make a complaint about such matters/incidents after their child has left the school (been removed from the register). There is no strict time period for raising such a complaint but, in all cases, parents must give due consideration to the procedural challenges created by a lengthy delay in reporting any concern/complaint.

vi. Must be considered in relation to other school policies/documentation such as Safeguarding, Admissions, Parental Contracts, Behaviour, Bullying, Exclusions or Data Protection. The Headteacher will advise parents accordingly if a different policy and/or procedure applies to their concern.

vii. Must not be linked to any request to reduce or waive any fees or payments owed to the school by potential complainants. Communication relating to fee reduction/waiving needs to be separate and sent directly to the finance department by the complainant. School leaders will manage all complaints in the same manner, and a separate request to reduce/waive fees will not prejudice this process. In all cases, complainants should not assume that:

   a. The finance department will be made aware of any complaint
   b. Fees will not be due until a 'live' complaint is resolved
   c. A complaint being fully or partially upheld automatically warrants a reduction/waiving of fees due.

viii. Does not apply to pupil complaints. Each school will have a variety of mechanisms for engaging with pupil feedback and listening to pupil concerns. Schools with boarding facilities will have their own separate, written procedure for managing boarders' complaints.

ix. Does not apply to complaints made by current staff. Staff should refer to the group's Grievance Policy for guidance on such matters.

x. Does not apply to complaints made by external parties (e.g. former parents (aside from any complaint covered by point v above) and former staff, members of the public or contractors). In these cases, school leaders will always act on any safeguarding concerns and otherwise engage with a proportionate and reasonable response on a case-by-case basis. As a group, we are committed to promoting positive and collaborative relationships with all external parties.

xi. Does not cover Subject Access Requests (please refer to the Data Protection policy for further guidance on this matter). **However, all data subjects have the right to use this complaints procedure if there has been an infringement of the UK GDPR or Section 164A of the Data**

[1] The terms parent/parental throughout this procedure refer to any person who has legal parental responsibility for a pupil at a Wishford School.

Protection Act 2018. In such instances, the same procedure and timescales will apply.

xii. Does not apply to anonymous complaints as there is no complainant to address. Nevertheless, school leaders will always consider potential improvements to practice as a result of any concern raised directly to the school.

2. Principles

Due consideration should be given to the following principles whenever a parental concern emerges;

i. We expect our school leaders to actively encourage and engage with parental feedback and use this data to inform development planning. Regular and open communication around planned improvements to provision will offer reassurance to parents that minor concerns are being considered and acted upon.

ii. We expect our school leaders to engage openly and objectively with parental complaints and see them as an opportunity to reflect on provision, identify and address systemic issues and continuously build upon a culture of safety, equality and safeguarding.

iii. School leaders and wider staff teams will receive regular training and guidance on this procedure.

iv. Parents should give due regard to the 'reasonableness' of their complaint (see section 7) and whether the complaints procedure is the most appropriate and effective mechanism for achieving their desired outcomes/resolution.

v. There may be occasions when it is necessary to deviate from this complaints procedure if this is reasonable and justified. Complainants will be notified of any changes.

vi. All complainants should be aware that they are not entitled to details of any related sanctions imposed on staff, pupils or parents for reasons of data protection and confidentiality. When reporting findings/next steps, Headteachers can refer to 'reasonable measures' and outline any necessary training/support, but it is important to maintain separation between any related complaints and HR or disciplinary procedures.

3. Reporting

i. A concern/complaint can be raised in person or in writing/via email.

ii. We encourage our parents to raise most matters of concern with the relevant member of staff as soon as possible after a concern or complaint emerges. Minor or emerging concerns can often be resolved before becoming a complaint, with timely and open communication. Additionally, any delay can undermine the school's ability to investigate any matter/incident effectively.

iii. For most cases, parents are advised to consult with their child's form tutor/teacher if they are unsure which member of staff should be the recipient of their concern/complaint.

iv. In all cases, the recipient will consider whether they are the most appropriate person to deal with the complaint and usually consult with the most relevant senior leader who may opt to take over the management of the complaint.

v. Complaints relating to staff conduct or capability should be raised directly with the Headteacher.

vi. Complaints relating to the Headteacher's conduct or capability should be raised directly with the Proprietor; Mr Sam Antrobus at governance@wishford.co.uk and/or the following address: 25-27 High Street, Corsham, SN13 0ES.

vii. If the complaint is about the Proprietor, the complainant should write to the Directors of Wishford Schools at the above postal address.

viii. The Headteacher will consider whether matters relating to Safeguarding need to involve consultation with the DSL.

ix. Parents of children in a school's Early Years Foundation Stage (if applicable) have the right to contact Ofsted and/or ISI if they believe the school is not meeting the EYFS requirements. Ofsted can be contacted on 0300 123 4666 or at enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk. ISI can be contacted on 020 7600 0100 or at concerns@isi.net.

4. Recording & Escalation

i. As part of normal home/school communication, parents will regularly seek clarification and/or reassurance around an aspect of school provision/performance and/or a specific incident/issue. Such concerns are often resolved immediately as a result of the required clarification and/or reassurance and so would not usually reach the threshold for being logged as a Stage 1 complaint (see procedure below), even if the clarification/reassurance is delivered by a senior leader.

ii. The appropriate management of each concern needs to be considered individually. However, parental concerns are unlikely to immediately reach the threshold for the complaints procedure if they are:

   a. Based on misunderstanding/misinformation and/or simply require clarification/reassurance.
   b. Related to factors beyond the school's control, e.g. the weather or traffic.
   c. Related to any conduct or behaviour which is beyond the school's responsibility, e.g. behaviour of members of the public (albeit the school will always look to support with such matters).
   d. Related to other policies/procedures, e.g. specific complaints about another child's behaviour would be investigated using the school's behaviour, anti-bullying and/or safeguarding policies (whereas complaints relating to pupil behaviour management by staff would fall under this procedure).
   e. Solely related to any 'teething problems' around, for example, changes to procedures or start of term logistics (N.B. These sorts of incidents might attract widespread parental communication and often simply require a wider apology/holistic solution, rather than individual responses/logging).

iii. Equally, Headteachers need to ensure effective recording and reporting systems are in place to accurately and comprehensively capture and oversee emerging parental concerns, so that such concerns are escalated to the complaints procedure in a timely and appropriate manner. Such systems also support the early identification and resolution of any issues and the analysis of any emerging patterns and trends.

iv. Parental concerns which might justifiably reach the complaints procedure threshold include:

   a. Concerns which continue despite initial clarification/reassurance.
   b. Any concern which flags staff conduct or capability which is clearly misaligned with the school's policies and procedures.
   c. Any concern which fairly and accurately highlights an area of provision/school performance which falls below expectations.

v. Neither list above is exhaustive. They simply offer a guide so that schools can become increasingly effective at identifying:

   a. Minor concerns which can and should be dealt with at teacher/tutor level.
   b. More serious concerns/complaints which need the immediate attention of senior leaders.
   c. Patterns and trends so that a series of minor concerns (either from one parent or across a parent cohort) are not all dealt with in isolation and potentially hidden issues around provision, conduct or capability are identified and dealt with as early as possible.
   d. Concerns which are based on a misunderstanding of the school's policies and procedures.

e. Concerns which relate to a different policy/procedure, e.g. safeguarding.

vi. Staff meetings/training sessions should include regular scenario discussion relating to escalation and reporting procedures as well as training on best practice relating to the tone and content of any communication and internal logging (particularly from the perspective of potential future subject access requests).

vii. The aim should always be to resolve complaints at the lowest possible Stage. Most complaints will therefore move sequentially through the stages of this procedure (N.B. the use of the word 'formal' in initial parental communication does not automatically escalate the case to Stage 2). Indeed, the need to fast-track the escalation process might indicate that a different procedure is more relevant/appropriate (complainants will always be informed if this is the case). For example, whenever there are serious concerns relating to safeguarding or staff conduct.

viii. To avoid escalation, Headteachers and other senior leaders might support (directly or indirectly) their staff with the management of emerging parental concerns. However, once a complaint is in process, Headteachers will need to delegate investigation and decision-making duties effectively to ensure there are no conflicts of interest, and that independence of roles/duties is maintained to ensure a fair process, i.e. the involvement of senior leaders at Stage 1 might limit their ability to independently investigate the issue at Stage 2.

5. Timescales

i. Our schools will aim to resolve each Stage of any complaint within **25 working days** (term-time days, when the school is operating) of confirmation that the complaint has reached that Stage. We always aim to avoid any unnecessary delays to resolution and therefore respond to complaints as soon as is practicably possible.

ii. If a complaint is communicated during the school holiday, then the first day of attempted resolution will be the first day of term following the school holiday.

iii. Whenever time scales need to be extended, the school will inform the complainant of the reasons for this extension at the earliest possible convenience.

iv. We recognise our statutory duty (as set out in the Early Years Framework) to ensure that complainants are notified of the outcome of any complaint relating to early years' provision within 28 days of receiving the complaint.

6. Confidentiality & Record Keeping

i. The expectation is that all concerned parties will deal with the matter confidentially and will not discuss the complaint publicly/on social media. A breach of this expectation may result in a separate conduct-related investigation/process.

ii. The school will maintain written records of all complaints that reach Stage 2 or Stage 3 of this procedure. Records will include:

a. The stage at which the complaint was resolved
b. The dates that complaints were officially received and deemed resolved
c. Any action taken/lessons learned by the school (regardless of whether the complaint is upheld)
d. Whether the complaint relates to either early years or boarding provision.

iii. Records of complaints (Stages 2 and 3) relating to safeguarding will be stored securely, confidentially and indefinitely (and so only be deleted with the approval of the serving DSL, Headteacher and Proprietor).

iv. Records of all other complaints (Stages 2 and 3) will be stored securely and confidentially for at

least seven years and only deleted by the Headteacher in consultation with the Proprietor.

v. The Headteacher will maintain records of Stage 1 complaints (which are not escalated to stages 2 or 3) for as long as they deem necessary (usually after the child/parents are no longer registered with the school).

vi. All personal data will be stored securely and managed in line with our Data Protection Policy.

vii. Correspondence, statements and records relating to the individual complaint will be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 108 or 109 of the 2008 Act requests access to them.

viii. The number of formal (Stages 2 and 3) complaints registered during the previous academic year is made available at the bottom of this policy.

7. Procedure

Stage 1: Informal Resolution

i. We hope and expect that most complaints can be resolved informally without the need to use the formal stages of this complaints procedure.

ii. An initial complaint should be raised directly (via email or in person/over the phone) with the most appropriate person (see section 3 above).

iii. To support timely and effective resolution, we encourage any potential complainant to avoid the use of AI/language tools to communicate a complaint (at any stage) and to keep communication as specific and as brief as possible. As a guide, effective complaint communication would include:

   a. **The exact complaint (e.g. provision, communication, staff conduct, etc.)**
   b. **Whether the complaint is specifically in relation to a member(s) of staff**
   c. **How the complaint can be resolved**
   d. **A list of any evidence, either linked or attached (whenever necessary).**

iv. Complaints relating to a specific incident/series of incidents should be raised by the complainant at the earliest possible convenience. It might be necessary to conduct interviews as a response, and the validity of such an investigation is therefore time-sensitive.

v. Stage 1 complaints will be acknowledged in writing/via email within **three working days** of receipt.

vi. The next steps will be determined by the nature and context of the complaint and the level of investigation needed. However, they will invariably involve the following:

   a. Clarification (if necessary) on the specific complaint(s) that is (are) being made, i.e. the matter(s) that needs resolving and confirmation that the matter(s) falls within the remit of this procedure (see scope and principles above);
   b. Timely, regular and open communication with the complainant, including, when appropriate, engagement with the parent's views on the appropriateness of the proposed course of action and how the complaint might be best resolved;
   c. Reference to school policies and procedures and/or previous school communication around provision, aims or ethos. This may either provide a point of clarification or else an acceptance that the school's own published processes were not followed;
   d. Recorded discussions/communication with relevant stakeholders, including the complainant.

vii. The complainant will be informed of the outcome of their Stage 1 complaint within **25 working days** of receipt (or sooner, whenever possible).

viii. The outcome/resolution will be explicitly focused on the subject/matter of the complaint and not

go beyond this scope.

ix. The school will normally acknowledge if a complaint is upheld (partially or wholly) or not. In addition, it may offer an explanation/an apology/an admission that the situation could have been handled differently/better and an explanation of the steps taken/planned improvements including a review of policy/procedure.

x. The aim should be to resolve all complaints at Stage 1; either by the school acknowledging unsatisfactory provision/performance and articulating a plan for improvement or by the school generating sufficient evidence to demonstrate that it is unreasonable to uphold the complaint. All parties should work together to avoid unnecessary escalation.

Stage 2: Formal Resolution

i. If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of their Stage 1 complaint, they may make a formal complaint under Stage 2 of this procedure.

ii. Complainants should escalate a complaint to Stage 2 via the Headteacher's email. We request that complainants include the following content/details in the email:

   a. Confirmation that the complainant is escalating their concern to a formal complaint at Stage 2 of this procedure.
   b. Name and year group of the child(ren) related to the complaint.
   c. Brief overview of the complaint and the reasons for the escalation, i.e. why the complainant deems the matter to be unresolved following attempted Stage 1 resolution.
   d. A summary of the further action the complainant deems necessary to consider the matter resolved.

iii. Stage 2 complaints will be acknowledged in writing/via email within **three working days** of receipt.

iv. The Headteacher will initially explore whether the complaint is 'reasonable' (see section 7) and whether due process has been followed at Stage 1. Any new/different complaints will be moved back to Stage 1. It is undesirable but possible, for example, for a parent to have three separate complaints at each of the three stages of this procedure. The Headteacher will inform the complainant at the earliest possible convenience if their complaint will not be managed at Stage 2 and give clear reasoning for this decision.

v. If deemed appropriate for Stage 2, the Headteacher will then appoint a senior leader to investigate the complaint and communicate this point of contact to the complainant.

vi. At Stage 2, a formal investigation is usually necessary. It is important that the investigation is reasonable, proportionate and only focused on the issues deemed to be unresolved following the Stage 1 outcome. The Headteacher will either lead this investigation or delegate the responsibility to a member of their Senior Leadership Team or the Wishford Governance Team. Deciding on the person to lead the investigation will always consider any 'conflicts of interest' relating to the matter.

vii. To support an objective and fair outcome, whenever possible, the investigator and decision maker (i.e. the person who publishes the findings/outcomes of the investigation) will be different people. One of these roles will likely be filled by the Headteacher, but this is not essential. Anyone filling these roles needs to be appropriately senior within the school or organisation.

viii. The designated senior leader will initially explore the reasons for escalation with the complainant, any common ground on next steps and the complainant's view on a satisfactory resolution to the matter. This also presents an opportunity to manage expectations. They will then carry out the necessary investigation.

ix. Stage 2 investigations need to be thorough, fully recorded and stored securely and confidentially. The views of the complainant should always be considered. School leaders should refer to the

group's central guidance documents on conducting a fair investigation.

x. School leaders should be aware that redacted Stage 2 investigation records might subsequently have to be made available in full to all parties during a Stage 3 panel hearing or because of a subject access request.

xi. The complainant will be informed of the outcome of their Stage 2 complaint in writing within **25 working days** of receipt (and always, as soon as possible).

xii. The outcome/resolution will be explicitly focused on the subject/matter of the ongoing complaint and will not go beyond this scope.

xiii. The school will normally acknowledge if a complaint is upheld (partially or wholly) or not. In addition, it may offer an explanation/an apology/an admission that the situation could have been handled differently/better and an explanation of the steps taken/planned improvements including a review of policy/procedure.

Stage 3: Complaints Panel Hearing

i. If parents are not satisfied with the outcome of Stage 2, they may request that the matter be referred to a Complaints Panel.

ii. Parents should make their request in writing (within **25 working days** of receiving the Stage 2 outcome) to the group's proprietor, governance@wishford.co.uk, who will then oversee the process or delegate it to another senior member of the Wishford team.

iii. The parents' request will be acknowledged (via email) within **three working days** of receipt.

iv. The senior Wishford person will then confirm (to all involved) the date, time and location of the hearing and the names and roles of the panel members within **15 working days** of receipt. Fair consideration will be given to any reasonable objection to a particular member of the panel.

v. The aim is to convene the hearing in a timely manner so that the outcome can be communicated to the complainant within **25 working days** of their initial request. If this is not practically possible, then the complainants will be informed and an explanation given.

vi. The parents' written request for a panel hearing should include:

   a. **Name, school and year group of their child;**
   b. **The complainant(s) name(s) and full contact details;**
   c. **Reasons why the resolution(s) proposed at Stage 2 is/are considered unsatisfactory, including (if applicable) any procedural concerns relating to the Stage 2 process:**
   d. **Any further action(s) deemed necessary to consider the matter resolved;**
   e. **Any supporting documentation, i.e. specific documentation to support the dissatisfaction with the Stage 2 outcome/process. The Headteacher will already have a case file relating to Stage 1 and Stage 2 documentation/communication which can be shared with all parties. Any new information presented (relating to the original complaint) by the parents at this stage will likely need to be treated as a new complaint as the school has not had the opportunity to investigate and respond.**

vii. The complaints panel will:

   a. Only consider elements of the Stage 2 decision that the complainant(s) deem unsatisfactory.
   b. Consist of at least three persons, none of whom have been directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint at either Stage 1 or Stage 2 of the process (independence/absence of bias will be checked/verified before appointment).
   c. Include at least one person who is independent of the management and running of the school (independence/absence of bias will be checked/verified before appointment).

viii. The responsible person will circulate relevant documentation to all parties **no later than three**

working days before the hearing.

ix. If the Chair/Panel deems it necessary, they may require that further particulars of the complaint or any related matter be supplied in advance of the hearing. Copies of such particulars shall be supplied to all parties not later than **two working days** prior to the hearing.

x. The parents may be accompanied to the hearing. This may be a relative, teacher or friend. As this is an internal process, legal representation will not normally be appropriate.

xi. The hearing can take place remotely via video call.

xii. A person will be appointed to take minutes of the hearing, or a recording/transcribe function will be engaged if the hearing is held remotely.

xiii. If possible, the Panel will resolve the parents' complaint without the need for further investigation.

xiv. Where further investigation is required, the Panel will decide how it should be carried out. After due consideration of all facts they consider relevant, the Panel will reach a decision and may make recommendations, which it shall complete within **25 working days** of the hearing.

xv. If the complainant does not attend the hearing, the Panel will still consider all the available evidence and reach a fair and objective conclusion on whether to uphold the complaint (partially or wholly) or not.

xvi. The hearing is a private matter, and no notes, recordings or details can be shared publicly or with any form of media.

xvii. The decision of the Panel will be final and represents the conclusion of the school's complaints procedure.

xviii. The Panel's findings will:

a. Consider each complaint on the balance of probabilities, and may make recommendations.
b. Aim to find a 'way forward,' which might include an open discussion around the willingness to reconcile relationships.
c. Be made available to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about.
d. Be made available for inspection on the school premises by the Proprietor and Headteacher.
e. Be unable to enforce any financial reward or impose any sanctions on pupils, staff or parents, although the panel may make recommendations about these issues.

8. Unreasonable or Vexatious Complaints

i. Our schools will consider all complaints fairly and impartially. The presence of one or more of the following behaviours does not automatically mean a complaint is unreasonable or vexatious; however, school leaders do reserve the right to dismiss complaints where they reasonably believe this to be the case. Such behaviours include:

a. Abusive, threatening or offensive behaviour towards staff, pupils or other parents;
b. Repeated attempts to raise the same complaint, despite it being deemed to be resolved;
c. Refusal to cooperate with due process or articulate/specify the grounds of the complaint or the desired outcomes;
d. Refusal to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of the complaints procedure;
e. Demands for sanctions to be imposed on pupils, staff or parents;
f. Insistence on irrelevant questions being answered or trivial information/hearsay and/or further issues/complaints to be considered as part of the same procedure;
g. Attempts to raise a complaint on behalf of others or as a representative of a wider group of complainants. All parental concerns must be addressed directly, specifically and individually to facilitate an effective process. N.B. The Headteacher may choose to

oversee one investigation/process relating to multiple complaints around the same issue, if they feel this is the most effective approach.

h. Refusal to accept outcomes of any stage of the complaints procedure despite due process being followed and having no further evidence to support the case that the complaint should be escalated;
i. Making excessive demands on school time through an unreasonable level of contact;
j. Knowingly providing false/defamatory information;
k. Publishing details of the complaint through any public forum.

i. The Headteacher will always consult with the Proprietor before dismissing a complaint as unreasonable.

ii. When a complaint is deemed unreasonable or vexatious, there may be cause to contact the police, restrict the individual's access to the school and its community or agree on a communication plan for a set period to limit the level of contact the individual is entitled to. Headteachers have a duty to protect the wellbeing of staff and pupils, and this must always be considered alongside their duty to respond to complaints and listen to parental feedback.

Number of Formal Complaints

2025-2026: 1