

Woodlands Secondary School	<u>Guidance for handling complaints</u> - for Governors Refer to: Complaints Policy and Procedure	
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Date	Review Date	Author	Nominated Governors
October 2025	October 2026	Sandra Clarke	Governing Board
Website	Statutory Policy	Source	Ratification Date
Yes	Yes	Luton LA Governor Services	13.10.25

Guidance for handling complaints

All schools face complaints at some stage, and they are required by law to have a procedure for dealing with them. What should be contained within the procedure is less prescribed, although the Department for Education provides departmental advice for dealing with complaints in *Best practice advice for school complaints procedures*.

A thorough and straightforward complaints procedure should minimise time spent dealing with complaints in schools by providing a clear process from which they can be efficiently dealt with. Complaints must still be dealt with thoroughly and schools should aspire to ensure that all parties are satisfied with the outcomes.

Governors have an important role in ratifying their policies and procedures in order to ensure that they are effective. It is not a governor's role to write procedures, but instead to approve them and maintain oversight of their application. This document contains some key principles to bear in mind when reviewing or approving a new complaints procedure, followed by the recommended model complaints procedure on pages 4-12.

- LA Maintained Schools are required by section 29 of the Education Act 2002 to establish a complaints procedure and to publicise this, in line with any statutory guidance released by the Department for Education.
- Academies are required by the Independent School Standards 2014 to have a publicised complaints procedure with clear timescales and an informal stage that is available to parents and specifies that one member of any review panel must be independent from the school.

Support from Luton Governor Services

Luton Governor Services pride themselves on providing a discreet, professional and individual service for all aspects of governing body work, with all support underpinned by honest and reliable advice and professional support.

With the increased importance of governance as the national focus sharpens around governance, Governing Bodies are constantly under the Spotlight regarding school improvement.

Therefore, Governor Services has undertaken a complete review in order to better support schools and governing bodies and to develop a Luton Governor strategic voice.

We provide a Governor Support & Training Package which includes subscription to GovernorHub and to Governor E-Learning. The SLA includes direct support to governors, clerks, chairs and Head Teachers for governance issues, which encompasses support for parental complaints and concerns.

Principle 1: Know your procedure

Schools are not required to come up with an entirely new complaints procedure of their own and are able to use as a starting point the policies of other organisations, such as the Local Authority's complaints procedure. However, in doing so, it is crucial that schools adapt any policy to their own context. Governing boards must be familiar with and confident about their policies. The model procedure (see below) is for you to adapt to your school's context. It is important that the procedure is appropriate for your school. The model complaints procedure in this guidance can be used by both academies and maintained schools as it covers the statutory requirements for each. For example, while academies are required to have an independent member on a review panel and maintained schools are not, we feel that this is good practice and so have included it as a requirement in our policy. Maintained schools may take it out if they do not feel it would be feasible for them to comply. LA maintained schools could consider appointing associate members to sit on complaints panels.

Principle 2: Make it easily available

Schools should make their procedures as accessible as possible; parents and other relevant third parties should not be put off from making a complaint because they are not sure how to do so. It is a statutory requirement that schools publicise their complaints procedures (on the school website but the school should also make hard copies available in reception as well. The Department's *Best Practice Advice* also includes some further suggestions for making the policy available on page 11. So long as the procedure is easily accessible in the obvious places that individuals would think to look, you are fulfilling this criteria.

Principle 3: The procedure should be straightforward and easy to understand

It's not necessary to have a long and overly complex procedure. It should provide enough opportunity for a complaint to be considered thoroughly without drawing out the process for longer than is necessary. The procedure should be straightforward so that the individual making the complaint is clear what information they need to submit and to whom. A good procedure will set out the steps that will be followed along with the timescales for completion.

Principle 4: Most complaints should be dealt with by staff and never reach the governing board

The vast majority of complaints should be dealt with at the informal stage by school staff. There should not be a significant volume of complaints being dealt with by the governing board. This model procedure is based on a three stage process, one informal and two formal: in the first instance 'concerns' are dealt with by the relevant member of staff, if a parent is dissatisfied s/he complains formally to the Head Teacher who responds formally and if the parent remains dissatisfied there is a final stage which is a complaint to a panel of the governing board. Governors, including the chair, should only be involved in complaints at the final stage of the procedure i.e. when a review panel of governors would need to be convened.

In large schools or MATs/Federations it may be appropriate to appoint a member of staff to act as a complaints co-ordinator. This is not necessary in smaller schools where the Head Teacher or another member of the senior leadership team can fulfil this role.

Principle 5: Schools should always seek resolution

In ensuring that complaints do not escalate, staff should endeavour to resolve complaints informally wherever possible. It is important that they recognise the difference between a concern and a complaint:

- a concern is the raising of a potential issue that is an expression of some worry or apprehension
- a complaint is an actual statement of dissatisfaction that requires resolution. Staff should be clear on how to deal with complaints appropriately, depending on their seriousness.

Staff should be open and welcoming to parents and willing to discuss issues with them when they are raised. The aim is not to silence the complainant but to work together to resolve whatever issue there is. If schools adopt such an open culture it is less likely that 'concerns' will escalate into complaints. Complainants should always be asked what outcome to a concern or complaint they are seeking.

At every stage of the process, informal and formal complainants should be asked what resolution they are seeking and the individual investigating the complaint at that stage should consider whether the school is able to offer that solution.

Even where a formal complaint is required, resolution should be sought at every stage of the process, including at the governing board review.

Principle 6: As few people should be involved as possible

As few people as possible should be involved in complaints at each stage, partly for confidentiality purposes, but also to ensure that individuals who could be called upon to review the situation do not become tainted. By this, we mean that governors called upon to review complaints should have minimal prior knowledge about the situation in order to ensure that they have not formed any biases that may influence their ability to be impartial.

Principle 7: Records should be kept at each stage of the process

While escalation of the complaint will ideally not result in further investigation, it is important that those responsible for reviewing the complaint at each stage keep records of what the complaint was, any relevant evidence that was considered and the outcome. Ideally, this would be sent to the complainant to sign that it was a true reflection of what was said.

In doing this, the school is making it easier to review the complaint at any later stages of the procedure (saving time for governors on appeal panels in the process) and also ensuring that it has the strongest base possible from which to defend itself if the complaint is taken to the Department for Education. Any personal information recorded in regard to the complaint must be kept according to the principles of the Data Protection Act 2018 (see the Information Commission Office's [website](#)).

Principle 8: Review the procedure regularly

The governing board should be confident that its complaints procedure is thorough, clear and robust.

As a matter of good practice the governing board should review its procedure every two or three years to make sure it is still fit for purpose. The procedure may need to be amended before the review date if there are any changes to the law, or if it becomes apparent as a

result of a complaint that the procedure is not working effectively. The amendment of the procedure should usually be carried out by a staff member, and submitted to the governing board for approval.