Policy Title	**PROCEDURES FOR DEALING WITH SCHOOL COMPLAINTS**
Committee responsible	FGB
Last reviewed	July 2026
Next review due	July 2027
Who is governed by this policy	All staff, pupils and parents
Available on website	**YES**

Procedures for Dealing with School Complaints

1. Introduction

1.1 Aims of this policy are to:

- uphold the standards of courtesy and reasonableness that should characterise all communication between the school and persons who wish to express a concern or pursue a complaint
- support the well-being of children, staff and everyone else who has legitimate interest in the work of the school, including governors and parents
- deal fairly, honestly, openly and transparently with those who make persistent or vexatious complaints and those who harass members of staff in school while ensuring that other stakeholders suffer no detriment

1.2 Who can make a complaint?

This complaints 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 Warnham CE Primary 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 complaints procedure.

1.3 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 complaints procedure. Warnham CE Primary School takes concerns seriously and will make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.

In the first instance it is advisable to speak to the person who is the subject of the concern or complaint, if possible. If you have difficulty discussing a concern with a particular member of staff, we will respect your views. In these cases, the Headteacher will refer you to another staff member. Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels unable to deal with a concern, the Headteacher will refer you 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, Warnham CE Primary School will attempt to resolve the issue internally, through the stages outlined within this complaints procedure.

1.4 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.

Concerns should be raised with either the class teacher, a member of staff or the Headteacher. If the issue remains unresolved, the next step is to make a formal complaint.

Complainants should not approach individual governors to raise concerns or complaints. They have no power to act on an individual basis and it may also prevent them from considering complaints at Stage 2 of the procedure.

Complaints against school staff (except the Headteacher) should be made in the first instance, to the Headteacher via the school office. 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. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Complaints about the Chair of Governors, any individual governor 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.

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 complainants to access and complete this complaints procedure. For instance, providing information in alternative formats, assisting complainants in raising a formal complaint or holding meetings in accessible locations. Details of the complainant are not normally shared unless this is necessary to gain an understanding of the foundations of the complaint and the school cannot guarantee anonymity in these circumstances.

1.5 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.

1.6 Time Scales

A complaint must 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. We will consider complaints made outside of this time frame if exceptional circumstances apply.

1.7 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.

1.8 Scope of this Complaints Procedure

This procedure covers all complaints about any provision of community facilities or services by Warnham CE Primary 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 & Disabilities, or school re-organisation proposals should be raised with the appropriate team within West Sussex County Council
Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation	Complaints about child protection matters are handled under our Child Protection and Safeguarding policies 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 Integrated Front Door (IFD): **Local Authority Designated Officers (LADO)** LADO should be contacted either by email: LADO@westsussex.gov.uk or by phone 0330 222 6450 (Monday – Friday 9.00am – 5.00pm) **W Sussex Multi-Agency Integrated Front Door (IFD)** WSChildrenservices@westsussex.gov.uk Tel: 01403 229 900 Out of hours: 0330 222 6664 Referrals to IFD should be made on the following web-based forms which can be accessed here: https://www.westsussex.gov.uk/education-children-and-families/keeping-children-safe/raise-a-concern-about-a-child/

	Safeguarding in Education Team Safeguarding.Education@westsussex.gov.uk Telephone: 0330 222 4030
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 complaints procedure.*
Whistleblowing/Confidential Reporting	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 whistleblowers 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 complaints procedure. You may also be able to complain direct to the LA or the Department for Education (see link above), 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. Complainants will not be informed of any disciplinary action taken against a staff member as a result of a complaint. However, the complainant 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 complaints 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 a complainant commences legal action against Warnham CE Primary School in relation to their complaint, we will consider whether to suspend the complaints procedure in relation to their complaint until those legal proceedings have concluded.

1.9 Resolving complaints

At each stage in the procedure, Warnham CE Primary School wants 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 admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better
- 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

1.10 Withdrawal of a complaint

If a complainant wants to withdraw their complaint, we will ask them to confirm this in writing.

2. Persistent or Vexatious Complaints

2.1 Introduction

The headteacher and staff deal with specific complaints as part of their day-to-day management of the school in accordance with this Complaints Procedure. The majority of complaints are handled in an informal manner and are resolved quickly, sensitively and to the satisfaction of the complainant. However, there are occasions when complainants behave in an unreasonable manner when raising and/or pursuing concerns. The consequences are that the actions of the complainants begin to impact negatively on the day-to-day running of the school and directly or indirectly the overall well-being of the children or staff in the school. In these exceptional circumstances the school may take action in accordance with this policy.

2.2 Who is a persistent or vexatious complainant

For the purpose of this policy, a persistent complainant is a parent / carer or member of the public who complains about issues, either formally or informally, or frequently raises issues that the complainant considers to be within the remit of the school, and whose behaviour is unreasonable. Such behaviour may be characterised by:

- actions which are obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific or repetitious
- prolific correspondence or excessive e-mail or telephone contact about a concern or complaint
- uses Freedom of Information requests excessively and unreasonably
- an insistence upon pursuing unsubstantiated complaints and/or unrealistic or unreasonable outcomes
- an insistence upon pursuing complaints in an unreasonable manner
- an insistence on only dealing with the headteacher on all occasions irrespective of the issue and the level of delegation in the school to deal with such matters
- an insistence upon repeatedly pursuing a complaint when the outcome is not satisfactory to the complainant but cannot be changed, for example, if the desired outcome is beyond the remit of the school because it is unlawful

2.3 Harassment in pursuing complaints is the unreasonable pursuit of such actions as above in such a way that they:

- appear to be targeted over a significant period of time on one or more members of school staff and/or
- cause ongoing distress to individual member(s) of school staff and/or
- have a significant adverse effect on the whole/parts of the school community and/or
- are pursued in a manner which can be perceived as intimidating and oppressive by the recipient. This could include situations where persistent demands and criticisms, whilst not particularly taxing or serious when viewed in isolation, have a cumulative effect over time of undermining confidence, well-being and health

2.4 The school's actions in cases of persistent or vexatious complaints

In the first instance the school will verbally inform the complainant that his/her behaviour is considered to be becoming unreasonable or unacceptable and, if it is not modified, action may be taken in accordance with this policy. This will be confirmed in writing.

If the behaviour is not modified the school will take some or all of the following actions as necessary, having regard to the nature of the complainant's behaviour and the effect of this on the school community:

- inform the complainant in writing that his/her behaviour is now considered by the school to be unreasonable/unacceptable and, therefore, to fall under the terms of this policy
- inform the complainant that all meetings with a member of staff will be conducted with a second person present and that notes of meetings may be taken in the interests of all parties. All parties will sign the notes at the end of the meeting to agree they are an accurate record
- inform the complainant that, except in emergencies, all routine communication with the complainant to the school should be by letter only

- in the case of physical or verbal aggression take advice from the Local Authority HR / Legal Services and consider warning the complainant about being banned from the school site; or proceed straight to a temporary ban
- consider taking advice from the Local Authority on pursuing a case under Anti-Harassment legislation
- consider taking advice from the Local Authority HR / Legal Services about putting in place a specific procedure for dealing with complaints from the complainant, i.e. the complainant will not be able to deal directly with the headteacher but only with a third person to be identified by the governing body of the school, who will investigate, determine whether or not the concern / complaint is reasonable or vexatious and then advise the headteacher accordingly.

If a complainant's persistent complaining / harassing behaviour is modified and is then resumed at a later date within a reasonable period of time, the school may resume the process identified above at an appropriate level. In these circumstances advice may be sought from the Local Authority HR / Legal Services.

2.5 Parents' expectations of the school

Parents / carers / members of the public who raise either informal concerns or formal complaints with the school can expect the school to:

- regularly communicate to parents / carers in writing
  - how and when problems can be raised with the school
  - the existence of the school's complaints procedure
- respond within a reasonable time
- be available for consultation within reasonable time limits bearing in mind the needs of the pupils within the school and the nature of the complaint
- respond with courtesy and respect
- attempt to resolve problems using reasonable means in line with the school's complaints procedure, other policies and practice and in line with advice from the Local Authority (LA)
- keep complainants informed of progress towards a resolution of the issues raised

2.6 The school's expectations of Parents / Carers / members of the public

The school can expect parents / carers / members of the public who wish to raise issues with the school to:

- treat all school staff with courtesy and respect
- respect the needs and well-being of pupils and staff in the school
- avoid any use, or threatened use, of violence to people or property
- avoid any aggression or verbal abuse
- recognise the time constraints under which members of staff in schools work and allow the school a reasonable time to respond
- recognise that resolving a specific problem can sometimes take some time
- (in the case of a complaint) follow the School's Complaints Procedure (below)

3. Complaints Procedure – Stage 1

3.1 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 on the Complaint Form), or by telephone.

3.2 The Headteacher will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledgement of receipt will be made in writing (either by letter or email) within one school day.

3.3 Within this response, the Headteacher will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, ask what remains unresolved and what outcome the complainant would like to see. The Headteacher can consider whether a face to face meeting is the most appropriate way of doing this.
Note: The Headteacher may delegate the investigation to another member of the school's senior leadership team but not the decision to be taken.

3.4 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.

3.5 At the conclusion of their investigation, the Headteacher will provide a formal written response within 15 school days of the date of receipt of the complaint.

3.6 If the Headteacher is unable to meet this deadline, they will provide the complainant with an update and revised response date.

3.7 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 Warnham CE Primary School will take to resolve the complaint.

3.8 The Headteacher will advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 1.

3.9 If the complaint is about the Headteacher, or a member of the Governing Body (including the Chair or Vice Chair), a suitably skilled governor will be appointed to complete the actions at Stage 1.

3.10 Complaints about the Chair, Vice Chair or member of the Governing Body must be made to the Clerk, via the school office.

3.11 Stage 1 will be considered by an independent investigator appointed by the Governing Body if the complaint is:

- jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair or
- the entire Governing Body or
- the majority of the Governing Body

At the conclusion of their investigation, the independent investigator will provide a formal written response.

4. Complaints Procedure – Stage 2

4.1 If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome at Stage 1 and wishes to take the matter further, they can escalate the complaint to Stage 2 – a meeting with members of the Governing Body's complaints committee, which will be formed of the first three, impartial, governors available. This is the final stage of the complaints procedure.

4.2 A request to escalate to Stage 2 must be made to the Clerk, via the school office, within 20 school days of receipt of the Stage 1 response.

4.3 The Clerk will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 5 school days.

4.4 Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.

4.5 The Clerk will write to the complainant to inform them of the date of the meeting. They will aim to convene a meeting within 15 school days of receipt of the Stage 2 request. If this is not possible, the Clerk will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed.

4.6 If the complainant rejects the offer of three proposed dates, without good reason, the Clerk will decide when to hold the meeting. It will then proceed in the complainant's absence on the basis of written submissions from both parties.

4.7 The complaints committee will consist of at least 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 Chair of the Complaints Committee. If there are fewer than three governors from Warnham

CE Primary School available, the Clerk will source any additional, independent governors through another local school or through their LA's Governor Services team, in order to make up the committee. Alternatively, an entirely independent committee may be convened to hear the complaint at Stage 2.

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

4.9 If the complainant is invited to attend the meeting, they 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.

4.10 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.
Note: Complaints about staff conduct will not generally be handled under this complaints procedure. Complainants will be advised that any staff conduct complaints will be considered under staff disciplinary procedures, if appropriate, but outcomes will not be shared with them.

4.11 Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

4.12 At least 7 school days before the meeting, the Clerk will:
- confirm and notify the complainant of the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that, if the complainant is invited, 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 committee at least 5 school days before the meeting.

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

4.14 The committee 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.

4.15 The meeting will be held in private. 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 taken.

4.16 The committee will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented and can:
- uphold the complaint in whole or in part
- dismiss the complaint in whole or in part.

4.17 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's systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future.

4.18 The Chair of the Committee will provide the complainant and Warnham CE Primary School with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within 10 school days.

4.19 The letter to the complainant will include details of how to contact the Department for Education if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled by Warnham CE Primary School.

4.20 If the complaint is:

- jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair or
- the entire Governing Body or
- the majority of the Governing Body

Stage 2 will be heard by a committee of independent governors.

4.21 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 Warnham CE Primary School will take to resolve the complaint.

4.22 The response will also advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied. The complainant should do this within 10 school days.

5. Next steps

5.1 If the complainant believes the school did not handle their complaint in accordance with the published complaints procedure or they acted unlawfully or unreasonably in the exercise of their duties under education law, they can contact the Department for Education after they have completed Stage 2.

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

5.3 The complainant can refer their complaint to the Department for Education

- 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

6. Roles and Responsibilities

6.1 Complainant

The complainant will receive a more effective response to the complaint if they:

- explain the complaint in full as early as possible
- co-operate with the school in seeking a solution to the complaint
- respond promptly to requests for information or meetings or in agreeing the details of the complaint
- ask for assistance as needed
- treat all those involved in the complaint with respect
- refrain from publicising the details of their complaint on social media and respect confidentiality.

6.2 Investigator

The investigator's role is to establish the facts relevant to the complaint by:

- providing a comprehensive, open, transparent and fair consideration of the complaint through:
  - sensitive and thorough interviewing of the complainant to establish what has happened and who has been involved
  - interviewing staff and children/young people and other people relevant to the complaint
  - consideration of records and other relevant information
  - analysing information
- liaising with the complainant and the complaints co-ordinator as appropriate to clarify what the complainant feels would put things right.

The investigator should:

- conduct interviews with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning
- keep notes of interviews or arrange for an independent note taker to record minutes of the meeting
- ensure that any papers produced during the investigation are kept securely pending any appeal
- be mindful of the timescales to respond
- prepare a comprehensive report for the Headteacher or complaints committee that sets out the facts, identifies solutions and recommends courses of action to resolve problems.

The Headteacher or complaints committee will then determine whether to uphold or dismiss the complaint and communicate that decision to the complainant, providing the appropriate escalation details.

6.3 Complaints Co-ordinator *(this could be the Headteacher / designated complaints governor or other staff member providing administrative support)*

The complaints co-ordinator should:

- ensure that the complainant is fully updated at each stage of the procedure
- liaise with staff members, Headteacher, Chair of Governors, Clerk and LAs (if appropriate) to ensure the smooth running of the complaints procedure
- be aware of issues regarding:
  - sharing third party information
  - additional support – this may be needed by complainants when making a complaint including interpretation support or where the complainant is a child or young person
- keep records.

6.4 Clerk to the Governing Body

The Clerk is the contact point for the complainant and the committee and should:

- ensure that all people involved in the complaint procedure are aware of their legal rights and duties, including any under legislation relating to school complaints, education law, the Equality Act 2010, the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act (DPA) 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)
- set the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that the dates are convenient to all parties (if they are invited to attend) and that the venue and proceedings are accessible
- collate any written material relevant to the complaint (for example; stage 1 paperwork, school and complainant submissions) and send it to the parties in advance of the meeting within an agreed timescale
- record the proceedings
- circulate the minutes of the meeting
- notify all parties of the committee's decision.

6.5 Committee Chair

The committee's chair, who is nominated in advance of the complaint meeting, should ensure that:

- both parties are asked (via the Clerk) to provide any additional information relating to the complaint by a specified date in advance of the meeting
- the meeting is conducted in an informal manner, is not adversarial, and that, if all parties are invited to attend, everyone is treated with respect and courtesy
- complainants who may not be used to speaking at such a meeting are put at ease. This is particularly important if the complainant is a child/young person
- the remit of the committee is explained to the complainant
- written material is seen by everyone in attendance, provided it does not breach confidentiality or any individual's rights to privacy under the DPA 2018 or GDPR
- if a new issue arises it would be useful to give everyone the opportunity to consider and comment upon it; this may require a short adjournment of the meeting
- both the complainant and the school are given the opportunity to make their case and seek clarity, either through written submissions ahead of the meeting or verbally in the meeting itself
- the issues are addressed

- key findings of fact are made
- the committee is open-minded and acts independently
- no member of the committee has an external interest in the outcome of the proceedings or any involvement in an earlier stage of the procedure
- the meeting is minuted
- they liaise with the Clerk.

6.6 Committee Member

Committee members should be aware that:

- the meeting must be independent and impartial, and should be seen to be so
- no governor may sit on the committee if they have had a prior involvement in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it.
- the aim of the meeting should be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant
- many complainants will feel nervous and inhibited in a formal setting – parents/carers often feel emotional when discussing an issue that affects their child.

Extra care needs to be taken when the complainant is a child/young person and present during all or part of the meeting

- careful consideration of the atmosphere and proceedings should ensure that the child/young person does not feel intimidated
- the committee should respect the views of the child/young person and give them equal consideration to those of adults
- if the child/young person is the complainant, the committee should ask in advance if any support is needed to help them present their complaint
- where the child/young person's parent is the complainant, the committee should give the parent the opportunity to say which parts of the meeting, if any, the child/young person needs to attend, however, the parent should be advised that agreement might not always be possible if the parent wishes the child/young person to attend a part of the meeting that the committee considers is not in the child/young person's best interests
- the welfare of the child/young person is paramount.

We recognise that the complainant might not be satisfied with the outcome if the meeting does not find in their favour. It may only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations.

Warnham CE Primary School
Complaint Form

Please complete and return to the school office marked **Private & Confidential** to the Headteacher or Chair of Governors who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

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

What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?
Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details:
Signature:
Date:

For official use only

Date acknowledgement sent:
By who:
Complaint referred to:
Date: