



School Complaints Policy

Category: Statutory (Section 29, Education Act 2002).	Approved by: Full Governing Body
Approved: March 2025	Next Approval due: March 2026
Reviewed by: Teaching Learning & Care Committee	
Linked Policies: Equality Policy, SEND (Special Educational Needs & Disabilities) Policy, Dealing with Persistent/Vexatious Complaints & Harassment.	

When monitoring and reviewing we ensure compliance with the school's Equality Information & Objectives Policy

Our Christian vision:

Built on the rock of Christian faith, we work as a community to create an environment which enables all to flourish. Jesus welcomed all and we embrace diversity, celebrating our different gifts and successes. Like St Peter, we are motivated by our values, learn from our mistakes and strive for the best outcome for everyone.

This document sets out the policy for dealing with comments, grievances and complaints. This policy adopts the procedures set out in the DFE best practice advice for school complaints procedure 2019 and includes a procedure for persistent complainants.

This policy should be used for:

- Complaints relating to the schooling of your child
- Complaints about the education and care provided to pupils at the school
- Complaints about the school's operational arrangements

This policy is limited to matters which can reasonably be investigated and therefore complaints should relate to matters which have occurred within the last 12 months.

This policy should **not** be used for:

- Complaints by staff relating to grievances about their employment
- Complaints about the actions of a governor
- Complaints about the actions of another parent
- Allegations of abuse
- Issues between the school and community groups / FoW

These matters will be dealt with by:

- Complaints by staff relating to grievances about their employment (There is a separate staff grievance procedure)
- Complaints about the actions of a governor (This should be reported to Chair of the Governing Body in the first instance, and considered with reference to the West Berkshire Governors Code of Conduct)
- Complaints about the actions of another parent (This should be reported to the Headteacher who will investigate whether action can be taken by the school)
- Allegations of abuse (Any allegations of abuse should be discussed with the Headteacher or a senior staff member in the first instance. For a definition of abuse, refer to the Child Protection / Safeguarding policies)
- Issues between the school and community groups / FoW (These will be resolved informally by discussion)

Status

Section 29 of the Education Act 2002 states the need to have in place a procedure to deal with complaints relating to the school and to any community facilities or services the school provides. The law also requires the complaints procedure to be publicised.

Purpose

The school's values are concerned with meeting the needs of pupils, parents and other stakeholders. The governing body believes that feedback is an important ingredient in self-evaluation and raising standards. All stakeholders should feel that their concerns or complaints can be voiced and will be considered seriously.

The school takes informal concerns seriously and aims to resolve them at the earliest stage in order to reduce the numbers that develop into formal complaints.

The underlying principle is that concerns will be handled, if at all possible, without the need for formal procedures. The requirement to have a complaints procedure will not in any way undermine efforts to resolve the concern informally. Staff will endeavour to resolve issues on the spot.

Formal procedures will be invoked when initial attempts to resolve the issue are unsuccessful and the person raising the concern remains dissatisfied and wishes to take the matter further.

Applicability

The policy shall apply to all employees and governors of the school. It is the shared responsibility of the headteacher and the Chair of the Governing Body to ensure that these groups are made aware

of the policy and procedure.

The School Complaints Procedure will:

- encourage resolution of problems by **informal** means wherever possible;
- be easily **accessible** and **publicised**;
- be **simple** to understand and use;
- be **impartial**;
- be **non-adversarial**;
- allow **swift** handling with established **time-limits** for action and keeping people informed of the progress;
- ensure a full and **fair** investigation by an independent panel *where necessary*;
- respect people's desire for **confidentiality**;
- address all the points at issue and provide an **effective** response and **appropriate** redress, where necessary;
- provide **information** to the school's senior management team so that services can be improved.

The School Complaints Policy and Procedure are publicised to all stakeholders through:

- the school prospectus;
- the information given to new parents when their children join the school;
- the home-school agreement;
- home school e-bulletins or newsletters;
- the school website.

If, at any stage of the process, the complainant starts legal action in relation to the matters under consideration, the complaints process will automatically cease, and all further correspondence will be with the Schools' legal representatives.

Monitoring and evaluating the policy

All documentation regarding complaints (including notes of any related meetings and telephone calls), the action taken and the final outcome will be recorded and a summary included in the Headteacher's termly report to governors.

The governing body will monitor the level and nature of complaints and review the outcomes on a regular basis to ensure the effectiveness of the procedure and make changes where necessary. Complaints' information shared with the whole governing body will not name individuals.

The monitoring and review of complaints by the school and the governing body is a useful tool in evaluating the school's performance, and will contribute to school improvement. Any underlying issues identified will be addressed.

Record Keeping

- All concerns and complaints will be responded to in writing
- At Stage 1 - the complainant will receive a reply in writing and a copy should be retained by the school for reference
- At Stage 2 - there should be clear communication in writing throughout the handling of the complaint and a copy of all written communication should be retained by the school for reference.
- Only complaints relating to the schooling of the specific child would fall within the child's files.
- Other issues will be filed separately in a secure location and will be retained for a period of 7 years.



School Complaints Procedure

(Based on the DfE model complaints procedure 2019)

Who can make a complaint?

This School 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 Woolhampton C of E 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 School Complaints Procedure.

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. Woolhampton C of E Primary School takes concerns seriously and will make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as 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, Woolhampton C of E Primary School will attempt to resolve the issue internally, through the stages outlined within this complaints procedure.

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 or 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.

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.

Time scales

You must raise the complaint 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.

Complaints received outside of term time

We will consider complaints made outside of term time that have been received on the first school day after the holiday period.

Scope of this School Complaints Procedure

This procedure covers all complaints about any provision of community facilities or services by Woolhampton C of E Primary School, other than complaints that are dealt with under other statutory procedures, including those listed below.

Exceptions	Who to contact	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Admissions to schools Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs School re-organisation proposals 	<p>Concerns about admissions, statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs, or school re-organisation proposals should be raised with West Berkshire Local Authority</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation 	<p>Complaints about child protection matters are handled under our child protection and safeguarding policy and in accordance with relevant statutory guidance.</p> <p>If you have serious concerns, you may wish to contact the local authority designated officer (LADO) who has local responsibility for safeguarding or the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH). WBLSCB@westberks.gov.uk or tel. 01635 503090</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exclusion of children from school* 	<p>Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at: www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions.</p> <p><i>*complaints about the application of the behaviour policy can be made through the school's complaints procedure. (See school behaviour policy)</i></p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Whistleblowing 	<p>We have an internal whistleblowing procedure for all our employees, including temporary staff and contractors.</p> <p>The Secretary of State for Education is the prescribed person for matters</p>	

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	<p>relating to education for whistleblowers, who do not want to raise matters direct with their employer. Referrals can be made at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus.</p> <p>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.</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff grievances 	<p>Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the school's internal grievance procedures.</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff conduct 	<p>Complaints about staff will be dealt with under the school's internal disciplinary procedures, if appropriate.</p> <p>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.</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complaints about services provided by other providers who may use school premises or facilities 	<p>Providers should have their own complaints procedure to deal with complaints about service. Please contact them direct.</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National Curriculum - content 	<p>Please contact the Department for Education at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus</p>	

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 Woolhampton C of E 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.

Resolving complaints

At each stage in the procedure, Woolhampton C of E 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.

Withdrawal of a Complaint

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

Stage 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.

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

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.

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.

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.

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

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 Woolhampton C of E Primary School will take to resolve the complaint.

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

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 all the actions at Stage 1.

Complaints about the Headteacher or member of the governing body must be made to the Clerk, via the school office.

If the complaint is:

- jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair or
- the entire governing body or
- the majority of the governing body

Stage 1 will be considered by an independent investigator appointed by the governing body. At the conclusion of their investigation, the independent investigator will provide a formal written response.

Stage 2

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.

A request to escalate to Stage 2 must be made to the Clerk, via the school office, within 15 school days of receipt of the Stage 1 response.

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.

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

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.

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.

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 Woolhampton C of E 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.

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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.

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. 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. If necessary a meeting will take place virtually via Zoom due to social distancing rules.

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.

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

At least 5 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.

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. 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.

The meeting will be held in private. If the meeting has to take place virtually then all people present will be reminded to follow expected etiquette and asked to confirm confidentiality. 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.

The committee will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented. The committee can:

- uphold the complaint in whole or in part
- dismiss 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's systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future.

The Chair of the Committee will provide the complainant and Woolhampton C of E Primary School with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within 5 school days. 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 Woolhampton C of E Primary School.

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, co-opted governors.

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 Woolhampton C of E Primary School will take to resolve the complaint.

The response will also advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied.

Next Steps

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.

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

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.



What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?

Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details.

Signature:

Date:

Official use

Date acknowledgement sent:

By who:

Complaint referred to:

Date:



Roles and Responsibilities

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.

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.

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
- keep records.

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.

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
- 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

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

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.

- 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 and present during all or part of the meeting

Careful consideration of the atmosphere and proceedings should ensure that the child does not feel intimidated.

The committee should respect the views of the child and give them equal consideration to those of adults.

If the child is the complainant, the committee should ask in advance if any support is needed to help them present their complaint. Where the child's parent is the complainant, the committee should give the parent the opportunity to say which parts of the meeting, if any, the child needs to attend.

However, the parent should be advised that agreement might not always be possible if the parent wishes the child to attend a part of the meeting that the committee considers is not in the child's best interests.

- the welfare of the child is paramount.



Persistent Complainants Procedure

Purpose

- To identify complainants who are unreasonable or unreasonably persistent and/or prolific in pursuit of their complaint and manage their complaints appropriately.
- To ensure that all complainants are treated equitably and on an individual basis.
- To ensure that access to the complaints process as a mechanism for representation is not unlawfully barred.
- To ensure that individuals' needs are considered when deciding on a suitable approach to dealing with their complaints.
- To avoid perpetuating correspondence which is time consuming and not helpful to the complainant and/or other complainants and staff.

Applicability

This procedure shall apply to all employees and governors of the school. It is the shared responsibility of the Headteacher and the Chair of Governors to ensure that these groups are made aware of the procedure.

Roles and Responsibilities

- The Chair of Governors has overall responsibility for ensuring that unreasonable and unreasonably persistent complainants are managed appropriately in accordance with these agreed standards.
- The Governing Body is responsible for reviewing and ratifying this procedure on an annual basis and ensuring that there is effective consultation and communication on complaints.
- The Headteacher is responsible for the day-to-day management of complaints including ensuring implementation of this procedure.
- All staff and governors are responsible for familiarising themselves with, and ensuring that they comply with, this procedure.

Defining Unreasonable Complainant Behaviour

Unreasonable and unreasonably persistent complainants may have justified complaints or grievances but be pursuing them in inappropriate ways, or they may be intent on pursuing complaints which appear to have no substance or which have already been investigated and determined. Their contacts with the school may be amicable but still place very heavy demands on staff time, or they may be very emotionally charged and distressing for all involved.

However, raising legitimate queries or criticisms of a complaints procedure as it progresses, for example if agreed timescales are not met, should not in itself lead to someone being regarded as an unreasonably persistent complainant. Similarly, the fact that a complainant is unhappy with the outcome of a complaint and seeks to challenge it once, or more than once, should not necessarily cause him or her to be labelled unreasonably persistent. Responding to reasonable expressions of dissatisfaction and requests for information should not cause staff particular problems.

Behaviour which may lead to a complainant being considered as unreasonable can include some or all of the issues listed below.

- Refusing to specify the grounds for their complaint, or changing the grounds of their complaint while the complaint is under investigation.
- Introducing irrelevant or trivial issues into their complaint, or raising a large number of detailed but unimportant questions and insisting these are dealt with in detail.
- Refusing to accept that issues are not within the scope of the procedure, or insisting complaints are dealt with in ways not compatible with the complaints procedure or good practice.
- Refusing to co-operate with the complaints investigation process while still wishing their complaint to be resolved.
- Making apparently groundless complaints against staff dealing with the complaint and/or asking that they be replaced, or escalating a complaint to the Headteacher or Governing Body after receipt of a response with which they disagree.
- Pursuing a complaint or complaints with the school, and either contacting different staff about the same or similar issues, or contacting other organizations or individuals such as a Member of Parliament/a Councillor/the Local Authority.
- Making unnecessarily excessive demands on the time and resources of staff whilst a complaint is being investigated, by for example excessive telephoning or sending emails to

numerous staff, writing lengthy complex letters every few days and expecting immediate responses.

- Submitting repeat complaints, after the complaints process has been completed, essentially about the same issues, with additions/variations which the complainant insists make these 'new' complaints which should be put through the full complaints procedure.
- Despite all correspondence, explanations and meetings to resolve the case, refusing to accept the school/Governing Body or the Secretary of State's decision, and repeatedly arguing the point or complaining about the decision.

Resolving Unreasonable Complainant Behaviour

The Chair of the Governing Body, in consultation with the Headteacher, will determine the point at which a complaint is considered as prolific and/or persistent, following the criteria identified above.

The Headteacher will ensure each complaint is thoroughly assessed to ensure no items are overlooked and all issues raised have been previously addressed, where necessary in consultation with the Chair of the Governing Body. Once the Chair of the Governing Body and the Headteacher have jointly agreed that the complainant's correspondence fulfils the profile for persistent or prolific complaints, an action plan will be drawn up for future management, and a review date will be set. This will be led by the Headteacher, with input from all relevant staff. The draft action plan will be considered by the Governing Body, or a Panel of at least three members of the Governing Body convened for this purpose.

A letter will be drafted to the complainant setting out the key elements of the proposed future management of representations, and this will be signed and sent by the Chair of the Governing Body. A copy of the letter and action plan will be retained on file, and all relevant staff and governors likely to receive contacts will be notified of any actions they are required to take in the future – such as logging calls, not discussing the case, etc.

The action plan will be reviewed within the determined time scale, and at least at six monthly intervals.

Action Plan

Options available for selection to include in an action plan include:

Explanation

Make clear to a complainant the ways in which his/her behaviour is unreasonable, and the likely consequences of refusal to amend it, before taking more formal action. Liaise with all staff and Governors involved to reach an appropriate and coordinated decision. This is good practice and

should be done in all cases where overlapping correspondence has been sent to a number of people.

Coordination

Designate a key person as the single point of contact for the complainant to provide an arena to raise concerns direct and to receive all issues in the future (or all issues around this particular complaint). Advise the complainant of their role and contact details. All future representations and communications from the complainant regarding their issues subject to complaint will be fed through this one person to ensure all responses are coordinated and providing the same clear answers.

Record keeping

Where complainants are abusive or threaten staff, a formal written record shall be kept by all staff of all contacts made by the complainant, making careful record of any abusive behaviour or threats – preferably recording actual words used where possible. The Headteacher should keep a file of all these record sheets as evidence of the complainant's behaviour as this may be required for legal purposes at a later date.

Correspondence

Ensure that issues raised are quickly passed on to the appropriate staff member to ensure speedy resolution and a quick and firm response.

If the amount of correspondence is particularly large, the school may decide to collate all representations together, and acknowledge these and respond to these on an agreed regular basis – perhaps weekly or fortnightly – the time-scale in each case to be determined, recorded on the action plan, and adhered to and the complainant being advised of this approach.

The school may also wish to consider whether to omit from correspondence with the complainant a note of other staff or Governors the letter is copied to. Listing those copied in has been known to escalate the circle of contact and circulation used by the complainant.

In very exceptional circumstances the school may decide to decline to respond to further representations from the complainant on old issues. If this is the case then the complainant must be advised of this, with reasons. This advice should include an indication that all correspondence will be read, and information passed on if relevant, but that no response will be provided in future. If this strategy is adopted care must be taken to scrutinise all future

representations from the complainant to identify new issues that do need to be followed up formally with the complainant or be accepted into the complaints procedure, and this should always be done with the involvement of the Headteacher and the designated person. The complainant should be made aware that this will be done.

Staffing

Ensure all staff involved are aware of the action plan for managing the complainant's issues.

- Where required, the management of the complainant and case to date will be scrutinised by the Headteacher to identify any staff training issues which need to be addressed – and this will be progressed.
- Where required, the case may be included as a specific item for routine inclusion in the supervision sessions of involved staff.
- Where required, the Headteacher will consider all staff dealing with the complainant, on an individual basis, to identify any person who may need support to alleviate or minimise their own stress or anxiety – and that this support will be provided.
- Where required, schools may consider whether local Parish Councillors, Ward Councillors/Members or MPs may also be subject to persistent correspondence. Where appropriate they should be engaged in the management process by the school so that they understand how the complainant's issues are being addressed, and who to contact about correspondence.

Managing Behavioural Issues

The Headteacher and the Governing Body has a duty of care to all staff to ensure that they are safe from abuse or intimidation.

If the complainant's behaviour is abusive or provocative, the Headteacher and Chairman of Governors may *jointly* determine that only written representation will be acceptable, explaining why, and also explaining who to address any written representation to. Where this is not possible arrangements should be made for a named member of staff to take detail of complaints. Other specified single routes for representation may be determined, such as e-mail or calls to an answer phone during certain times, etc.

If the complainant presents himself/herself regularly at the school and behaves inappropriately, the above advice may be instigated to prevent face-to-face confrontation.

If the complainant behaves in a particularly aggressive or confrontational manner the Chair of the Governing Body will consider banning the complainant from the school site for a fixed period of time, subject to review.

Managing Representation on Behalf of Others

If the person making representation is purporting to do so on behalf of another person and this individual proves unwilling to have the representation progressed by the third party - the person making representation is barred from the process. Staff must ensure that the client is able to access the complaints procedure for himself/herself should they so wish, including advising them that an advocate could be found to support/assist any complaint should this be necessary. Staff should also make a full record of any discussions.