Walton CEVC Primary School

Complaints and guidance procedure

Date policy last reviewed:	September 2026

Signed by:

Mr Lucas Upham	Headteacher	Date:	September 2026
Rev David Hatrey	Chair of governors	Date:	September 2026

Complaints Guidance and Procedure

Who can make a complaint?

This complaints procedure is mainly aimed at parents or carers of children who are registered at the school, but it is not limited to them.
Any member of the public may make a complaint to Walton CEVC School about any provision of facilities or services that the school provides.
Unless complaints are dealt with under separate statutory procedures (such as appeals relating to exclusions or admissions), the school will use this 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 opportunity. Many issues can be resolved informally, without the need to use the formal stages of the complaints procedure. Walton CEVC 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, the Headteacher will refer you to another staff member or himself. Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels unable to deal with a concern, the Headteacher will refer you to another staff member or himself. 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, Walton CEVC 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

An initial 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 head teacher in the first instance. In most cases concerns or complaints will be dealt with at this stage and the school will aim to work with parents to resolve any issues. However, 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.

Formal complaints against school staff (except the head teacher) should be made in the first instance, to the Headteacher via the school office**.** Please mark them as 'private and confidential'.

Formal complaints that involve or are about the head teacher should be addressed to the chair of governors, via the school office. Please mark them as 'private and confidential'.

Formal 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 all formal complaints, the complaint form included at the end of this policy should be used. If you require help in completing the form, please contact the school office. You can also ask third party organisations such as 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

The school will not normally investigate anonymous complaints. However, the Headteacher or chair of governors, if appropriate, will determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation.

Duplicate complaints

If, after closing a complaint at the end of the complaints procedure, we receive a duplicate complaint from a spouse, a partner, a grandparent or a child not attending this school, we will remind them that we have already considered the complaint and the local process is complete. Complainants will be advised to contact the DfE if they are dissatisfied with the school's handling of the complaint.

Complaint campaigns

If we receive what we consider to be a large volume of complaints, all based on the same subject and possibly from complainants not connected to the school, then we will treat these complaints as being part of a campaign and respond in one of the following two ways, depending upon the nature and scale of the complaint:

- send the same response to all complainants; or
- publish a single response on the school's website.

Timescales

Complainants must raise the complaint within 6 weeks of the incident, or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within 6 weeks of the last of these incidents. We will only 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 to have been received on the first school day after the holiday period.

Scope of this complaints procedure

This procedure covers all complaints about any provision of community facilities or services by Walton CEVC 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	Concerns about admissions, statutory assessments of special educational needs or school reorganisation proposals should be raised with Somerset County Council

proposals	Education Authority.
• Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation	Complaints about child protection matters are handled under our child protection and safeguarding policy 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 Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH). Please see **Safeguarding Policy** on the school website.
• 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	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 whistle-blowers 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 local authority or the DfE (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 directly.
• National curriculum - content	Please contact the DfE 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 Walton CEVC 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, Walton CEVC School wants to resolve the complaint as soon as possible. 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 formal complaint

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

Formal Complaint - Stage 1

Formal complaints must be made to the head teacher (unless they are about the head teacher), via the school office. **This should be done in writing using the complaint form included in this policy**. The head teacher will record the date the complaint is received and will acknowledge receipt of the complaint either by letter, by email, by telephone or in person, within 5 school days. Within this response, the head teacher will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, ask what remains unresolved from the initial concern and what outcome the complainant would like to see. The head teacher will consider whether a face to face meeting is the most appropriate way of doing this and may invite a governor or other member of staff to attend the meeting if appropriate.

Note: The head teacher 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 head teacher (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 head teacher will provide a written response within 15 school days of the date of receipt of the complaint. If the head teacher 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 the school will take to resolve the complaint.

The head teacher 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 head teacher 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 head teacher 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 its investigation, the independent investigator will provide a formal written response.

Formal Complaint - 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 chair of governors, via the school office, within 5 school days of receipt of the stage 1 response.

The Chair of Governors (or clerk) will write to the complainant to inform them of the date of a meeting to discuss the complaint. They will aim to convene a meeting within 10 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 is invited to the meeting and rejects the offer of three proposed dates without good reason, the governors 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 in the complaint. Prior to the meeting, they will decide among themselves who will act as the chair of the complaints committee. If there are fewer than three governors available, the clerk may source any additional, independent governors through another local school or through their local authority's governor services team, in order to make up the committee.

The committee will decide whether to deal with the complaint by inviting parties to a meeting or through written representations, but in making its decision it 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.

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

At least 5 school days before the meeting, the school 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 relevant written material to be submitted to the committee at least 3 school days before the meeting.

The committee will not 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. Electronic recordings of meetings or conversations are not 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 the 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 DfE if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled by the 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 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 the school will take to resolve the complaint.

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 DfE will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by the school. They will consider whether the school has adhered to education legislation and any statutory policies connected with the complaint.

The complainant can refer their complaint to the DfE online at www.education.gov.uk/contactus, or by writing to:

Department for Education
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

Policy for managing serial and unreasonable complaints

Walton CEVC School is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, and to providing a high-quality service to those who complain. We will not normally limit the contact complainants have with our school.

However, we do not expect our staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour and will take action to protect staff from that behaviour, including that which is abusive, offensive or threatening.

Walton CEVC School defines unreasonable behaviour as that which hinders our consideration of complaints because of the frequency or nature of the complainant's contact with the school, such as, if the complainant:

- refuses to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcomes sought by raising the complaint, despite offers of assistance;
- refuses to cooperate with the complaints investigation process;
- refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of the complaints procedure;
- insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways that are incompatible with the complaints procedure or with good practice;
- introduces trivial or irrelevant information that they expect to be taken into account and commented on;
- raises large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions, and insists they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales;
- makes unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues, and seeks to have them replaced;
- changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds;
- repeatedly makes the same complaint (despite previous investigations or responses concluding that the complaint is groundless or has been addressed);
- refuses to accept the findings of the investigation into that complaint where the school's complaint procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed;
- seeks an unrealistic outcome;
- makes excessive demands on school time by frequent, lengthy and complicated contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with;
- uses threats to intimidate;
- uses abusive, offensive or discriminatory language or violence;
- knowingly provides falsified information; and/or
- publishes unacceptable information on social media or other public forums

Complainants should try to limit their communication with the school that relates to their complaint, while the complaint is being progressed. It is not helpful if repeated correspondence is sent (either by letter, phone, email or text), as it could delay the outcome being reached.

Whenever possible, the head teacher or chair of governors will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying an 'unreasonable' marking.

If the behaviour continues, the head teacher will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and ask them to change it. For complainants who excessively contact causing a significant level of disruption, we may specify methods of communication and limit the number of contacts in a communication plan. This will be reviewed after six months.

In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, we will immediately inform the police and communicate our actions in writing. This may include barring an individual from Walton CEVC School.

Persistent correspondence

If complainants frequently contact the school, causing a significant level of disruption, but refuse to engage with the complaints procedure, Walton CEVC School can:

• restrict the complainant to a single point of contact via an email address; and/or
• limit the number of times the complainant can make contact.

This restriction will be limited to the complainant's capacity to complain. For all other issues the complainant can contact the school as normal.

Annex A

School Complaints Procedure Complaint Form

Your Name: **Pupil's name:** **Your relationship to the pupil:** **Address:** **Postcode:** **Daytime telephone number:** **Evening telephone number:**
Please give details of your complaint:

What action, if any, have you already taken to try and resolve your complaint. (who did you speak to and what was the response)?

What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?
Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details.
Signature: Date:
<u>School use</u> **Date acknowledgement sent: By** **whom:** **Complaint referred to:** **Date:**

Walton CEVC Primary School Complaints Procedure

Initial concerns should be raised with a member of the teaching staff or the Headteacher

→ Concern investigated and resolved-matter closed

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Stage 1- Formal Complaint
Made using the complaints form. A meeting will usually be arranged with the Headteacher and another member of staff and/or governor.

→ Complaint investigated and resolved. Outcome provided in writing to complainant-matter closed.

Stage 2- Formal Complaint
Referred to the governors' complaints committee. The complainant may be invited to a meeting with the committee to discuss the complaint.

→ Complaint investigated by the committee and resolved. Outcome provided in writing to complainant-matter closed.

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If the complainant feels that the matter has not been handled in accordance with the school's published complaint's procedure, they are entitled to contact the Department for Education who will check the school has followed its procedure reasonably.