

GOVERNANCE

Complaints Policy

Fair, accessible and timely resolution



(Incorporating the Policy for Managing Serial, Persistent and Unreasonable Complaints)

Vision Statement: *Grow • Learn • Persevere • Succeed*

Review Date: September 2027

Ratified by Governing Board: Autumn Term 2026

Headteacher: James Garlick

Chair of Governors: Richard Thomas

Headteacher's Statement

At Great Leighs Primary School, we value the strong partnership that exists between home and school. Open communication, mutual respect and a shared commitment to achieving the very best outcomes for children underpin everything we do.

We recognise that concerns may occasionally arise and welcome the opportunity to address them promptly, professionally and constructively. In most cases, concerns can be resolved quickly through discussion with the member of staff most closely involved. We therefore encourage parents, carers and members of the wider community to raise concerns at the earliest opportunity so that we can work together to find a positive resolution.

Where concerns cannot be resolved informally, this policy provides a clear, transparent and fair process for making a formal complaint. Throughout the process, we are committed to listening carefully, investigating thoroughly and responding respectfully and within published timescales.

We view complaints not only as an opportunity to resolve individual issues but also as a valuable source of feedback that helps us strengthen our provision and continually improve our school for the benefit of all children.

James Garlick

Headteacher

1. Introduction

Great Leighs Primary School is committed to ensuring that concerns and complaints are dealt with fairly, openly and effectively.

We believe that the vast majority of concerns can be resolved through early discussion and positive communication. Resolving concerns at the earliest possible stage helps maintain trusting relationships between families and the school, prevents misunderstandings from escalating and ensures that issues affecting children are addressed quickly.

This policy distinguishes between a concern and a complaint:

Concern

An expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered important for which reassurance is sought.

Complaint

An expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about actions taken or a lack of action by the school.

The school is committed to:

- treating complainants with courtesy and respect;
 - ensuring complaints are investigated impartially;
 - resolving concerns at the earliest possible stage;
 - maintaining confidentiality wherever possible;
 - learning from complaints to improve practice;
 - complying with statutory guidance and legal requirements.
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2. Who Can Make a Complaint?

This procedure is open to:

- parents and carers;
- pupils (through an appropriate representative where necessary);
- members of the public;
- community users of school facilities;
- any individual affected by the provision of services by the school.

This procedure applies unless separate statutory procedures exist.

3. Guiding Principles

The school will ensure that complaints are:

Accessible

Reasonable adjustments will be made where required, including:

- translated documents;
- interpreter support;
- large print versions;
- alternative formats;
- additional support for individuals with disabilities or SEND.

Fair

Complaints will be investigated objectively and without prejudice.

Timely

Complaints will be dealt with within published timescales wherever possible.

Confidential

Information will be shared only with those individuals necessary to investigate and resolve the complaint.

Solution Focused

The aim of the procedure is resolution, improvement and positive outcomes rather than assigning blame.

4. How to Raise a Concern

Most concerns can be resolved informally. 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.

We encourage complainants to follow these steps:

Stage A – Class Teacher

Raise concerns with the class teacher or staff member involved.

Stage B – Senior Leader

If the matter remains unresolved, contact:

- Headteacher
- Deputy Headteacher
- SENCO (where appropriate)

Only where informal resolution is unsuccessful should a formal complaint be initiated.

5. How to Make a Formal Complaint

Complaints may be made:

- in person;
- by telephone;
- in writing;
- by email;
- through a representative acting on behalf of the complainant (with consent).

Formal complaints should be addressed to the Headteacher via the school office.

Complaints regarding the Headteacher should be addressed to the Chair of Governors, via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Complaints regarding the Chair or Governing Board should be addressed to the Clerk to Governors via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

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.

For ease of use, a 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.

6. Anonymous Complaints

The school will not normally investigate anonymous complaints.

However, the Headteacher or Chair of Governors may determine that an anonymous complaint warrants investigation where:

- safeguarding concerns are raised;
- serious misconduct is alleged;
- there is sufficient evidence available to investigate.

7. Time Limits

Complaints should be raised within:

Three months of the incident

or

Three months from the last occurrence of a series of incidents.

Complaints outside this timeframe will only be considered in exceptional circumstances.

8. Complaints During School Holidays

Complaints received during school holidays will be considered received on the first school day following the holiday period.

9. Confidentiality

All parties involved in a complaint are expected to maintain confidentiality throughout the process.

Information obtained during investigations will be shared only with individuals who need access to fulfil their responsibilities.

Complaint records will be processed and retained in accordance with:

- UK GDPR;
- Data Protection Act 2018;
- the school's Data Protection Policy;
- the school's Records Retention Schedule.

The school expects concerns and complaints to be raised through this procedure rather than via social media. The school will not normally engage in responding to complaints raised solely through social media platforms.

10. Complaints Not Covered by This Procedure

Scope of this Complaints Procedure

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

Exceptions	Who to contact
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• Admissions to schools • Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs • School re-organisation proposals	Concerns about admissions, statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs, or school re-organisation proposals should be raised with Essex County Council.
• Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation	Complaints about child protection matters are handled under our Safeguarding and Child Protection 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. The LADO can be contacted using: 03330 139 797
• Suspension or permanent exclusion of pupils*	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. Please refer to our Behaviour and Anti-Bullying Policy on the school website.
• 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 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 directly.
• 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 Great Leighs 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.

11. Resolving Complaints

Where appropriate, outcomes may include:

- an explanation;
- an acknowledgement that mistakes were made;
- an apology;
- actions to prevent recurrence;
- staff training;
- review of procedures;
- policy revisions;
- other reasonable remedial actions.

The school will always seek proportionate and constructive resolutions.

Withdrawal of a Complaint

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

12. Stage 1 – Formal Investigation

The Headteacher will:

Acknowledge Complaint

Within **five school days**.

Clarify Issues

The Headteacher will:

- clarify concerns;
- identify desired outcomes;
- agree investigation scope.

The Headteacher can consider whether a face to face meeting is the most appropriate way of doing this.

Investigation

The Headteacher may:

- interview individuals involved;
- review records;
- seek written statements;
- gather evidence.

The investigation may be delegated to another senior leader; however, the decision remains the responsibility of the Headteacher.

Outcome

A written response will normally be provided within **ten school days**.

Where this cannot be achieved, an updated timescale will be provided.

The response will include:

- findings;
- rationale;
- actions taken;

- information regarding escalation.

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.

13. Stage 2 – Governors' Complaints Committee

The Clerk to Governors will act as the complaints coordinator for Stage 2, arrange the meeting, circulate papers, advise on procedure and ensure an accurate record is taken.

If dissatisfied with the Stage 1 response, complainants may request a review by the Governing Board's Complaints Committee. This is the final stage of the complaints procedure.

Requests must be received within:

Ten school days of the Stage 1 outcome.

The committee meeting will normally be convened within 20 school days of receiving the Stage 2 request. If this is not possible, the Clerk will explain the reason and provide a revised date.

Committee Membership

The committee will consist of:

- at least three impartial governors;
- governors with no prior involvement;
- suitably skilled independent governors from another school where necessary, including where the complaint concerns the whole or majority of the Governing Board, or both the Chair and Vice-Chair.

Hearing

The committee may consider:

- written submissions;
- documentary evidence;
- verbal representations.

Complainants may bring a friend or supporter.

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.

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.

Media representatives are not permitted.

At least five school days before the meeting, the Chair of Governors 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 three school days before the meeting.

Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least two 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. 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.

Conduct Expectations

The Chair may adjourn or terminate a meeting where behaviour becomes:

- abusive;
- threatening;
- discriminatory;
- aggressive;
- persistently disruptive.

Outcome

The Committee may:

- uphold the complaint;
- partially uphold the complaint;
- dismiss the complaint.

A written decision will be issued within **ten school days**.

The Committee's decision represents the final stage of the school's complaints process.

14. 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 Great Leighs Primary School. They will consider whether Great Leighs 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.

The Local Authority (Essex County Council) has no powers to intervene in complaints against schools. You can complain to Ofsted if you think a school isn't run properly and needs inspecting. However, they won't look into problems with individual pupils, e.g. exclusions or not getting a place at the school.

Complaint form:

Great Leighs Primary School:

Please complete this form and return it the school office for the attention of the Headteacher or Chair of Governors.

Your name:

Relationship with school (e.g. parent):

Pupil's name (if relevant to your complaint):

Your address:

Telephone number:

Email address:

Please give concise details of your complaint (including dates, names of witnesses, etc) to allow the matter to be fully investigated:

What action, if any, have you already taken to resolve your complaint?

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

Please continue on a separate sheet, or attach additional documents if you wish.

Number of additional pages attached =

Signature:

Date:

Complaint review request form *(must be sent within 10 school days of receiving outcome notice):*

Great Leighs Primary School:

Please complete this form and return it the school office for the attention of the Headteacher or the clerk for the attention of Chair of Governors.

Your name:

Relationship with school (e.g. parent):

Pupil's name (if relevant to your complaint):

Your address:

Telephone number:

Signature:

Date:

Dear Sir/Madam,

I submitted a formal complaint to the school on, and I am dissatisfied with the Stage 1 response, findings, outcome and/or the procedure that has been followed.

My complaint was submitted to and I received a response from on

I have attached copies of my formal complaint and the response(s) from the school. I am dissatisfied with the way in which the procedure was carried out, because

You may continue on separate paper, or attach additional documents if you wish.

Number of additional pages attached =

15. Complaints Records

The school will maintain a complaints log recording:

- date received;
- complaint category;
- stage reached;
- outcome;
- actions taken.

Records will be retained securely in accordance with data protection and records management requirements.

The Governing Board will receive anonymised information on complaint trends where appropriate to support school improvement.

16. Serial, Persistent and Unreasonable Complaints

Great Leighs Primary School is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially. However, staff have the right to work in an environment free from harassment, abuse and unreasonable demands.

Great Leighs Primary 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 co-operate 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 which are incompatible with the complaints procedure or with good practice
- introduces trivial or irrelevant information which 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 including referral to the Department for Education
- 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
- 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 headteacher or Chair of Governors will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying an 'unreasonable' marking.

If the behaviour continues, the headteacher will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and ask them to change it. For complainants who excessively contact Great Leighs Primary School 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 Great Leighs Primary School.