

AINSLIE WOOD PRIMARY SCHOOL

Complaints Policy and Procedure

Maintained School | 2026-2027

We aim to resolve concerns early, fairly and respectfully. Where a concern cannot be resolved informally, this policy provides a clear and impartial formal complaints process.

School	Ainslie Wood Primary School
Headteacher	Julie Crouch
Chair of Governors	Bruce Roberts
Policy owner	Governing Body
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Approval	To be confirmed by the Governing Body
Review	September 2027, or sooner if required

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1. Statement of intent

Ainslie Wood Primary School values positive relationships with pupils, parents, carers and the wider community. We welcome feedback and aim to address concerns promptly, openly and fairly.

For the purposes of this policy:

- A concern is an expression of worry or doubt about an issue considered important, for which reassurance or clarification is sought.
- A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about actions taken or a lack of action.

Concerns will normally be considered informally first. Where a matter cannot be resolved informally, or where the complainant wishes to make a formal complaint, the formal procedure below will apply.

Our procedure aims to:

- be impartial, non-adversarial and accessible
- provide a full and fair investigation by an appropriate and, where necessary, independent person or panel
- address the points at issue and provide a clear and reasonably prompt response
- treat complainants and staff with respect and courtesy
- make lawful, rational, reasonable, fair and proportionate decisions
- keep complainants informed of progress and explain any unavoidable delay
- make reasonable adjustments where needed, including interpretation or communication support
- use learning from complaints to improve school practice where appropriate

The existence of this policy will be publicised and the policy will be available on the school website.

2. Legal framework

This policy is established by the Governing Body in accordance with section 29 of the Education Act 2002. Maintained schools must have and publish procedures for dealing with complaints about the school and community facilities or services it provides where no separate statutory procedure applies.

The Governing Body has had regard to Department for Education guidance for maintained schools, including the DfE model complaints procedure and guidance on managing serial and unreasonable complaints. The policy also reflects the current maintained-schools governance framework.

Early Years Foundation Stage

For complaints specifically about the school's fulfilment of Early Years Foundation Stage requirements, the school will investigate written complaints and notify the complainant of the outcome within 28 days. A record will be kept and made available to Ofsted on request. Parents and carers may contact Ofsted if they believe EYFS requirements are not being met.

3. Scope

This procedure may be used by parents, carers and other members of the school community to complain about the provision of facilities or services by Ainslie Wood Primary School, unless a separate statutory or other procedure applies.

This policy does not replace the specific procedures that apply to matters such as:

- school admissions and admission appeals
- statutory assessment and Education, Health and Care Plan matters
- child protection or safeguarding concerns
- suspensions and permanent exclusions
- whistleblowing

- staff grievances or disciplinary matters
- school reorganisation proposals
- matters for which another statutory appeal or complaints route applies

Complaints about services provided by an external provider using school premises should normally be directed to that provider. Where a complaint raises an immediate safeguarding concern, the school's safeguarding procedures take priority.

4. Roles and responsibilities

The complainant

A timely and effective response is more likely when the complainant follows this procedure, provides relevant information, responds to reasonable requests, treats those involved respectfully and allows the process to run. Complainants should not approach individual governors about an active complaint, as this may compromise governors' impartiality at a later review stage.

The investigator

- establish the facts fairly and proportionately
- consider relevant records and written evidence
- speak with relevant parties where necessary and keep appropriate notes
- prepare a clear report or response addressing the complaint and any appropriate recommendations

Complaints co-ordination

The Headteacher or an appropriate member of staff will co-ordinate complaints at school level. At governing-body stage, the Clerk to the Governing Body will co-ordinate the process. They will keep parties informed, manage records and timescales, arrange reasonable adjustments and ensure third-party information is handled appropriately.

Clerk and review-panel chair

The Clerk will arrange the panel, circulate papers, act as the contact point and record the hearing and outcome. The panel chair will ensure the meeting is fair, focused and respectful, that all parties understand the process and that each has an appropriate opportunity to present their case.

5. General principles and timescales

When considering a complaint, the school will clarify what happened, who was involved, the specific points of complaint and what the complainant considers would put matters right.

Complaints should normally be raised within three months of the incident or, for a series of related incidents, within three months of the last incident. The school may consider complaints outside this period where there are valid reasons for delay and the matter can still be investigated fairly.

Complaints received during school holidays will normally be treated as received on the first school day after the holiday period.

Where a published timescale cannot reasonably be met, the school will explain the reason and provide a revised timescale. References to 'school days' mean days when the school is open to pupils.

6. Informal concerns

Most concerns can be resolved quickly through open discussion. A concern should normally be raised with the member of staff most directly involved, their line manager or the Headteacher. If the complainant is unsure who to contact, the school office can assist: 020 8523 7913 or school@awp.waltham.sch.uk.

The school will normally acknowledge an informal concern within 3 school days and aim to respond or arrange a discussion within 10 school days. Some matters will need longer; if so, the school will explain this.

An informal response may include clarification, a meeting, an explanation, an apology where appropriate, practical action or an agreed way forward. If the concern remains unresolved, the complainant may make a formal complaint.

7. Formal complaints: Stage 1 - investigation

Formal complaints should preferably be made in writing by letter or email to the Headteacher, although complaints may also be made by telephone, in person or through a representative. The school will provide assistance where a complainant has difficulty making a written complaint.

A formal complaint should set out, as clearly as possible, what happened, relevant dates and people, any supporting information and what outcome is sought.

The Headteacher, or a suitably appointed person, will:

- record the date the complaint is received and normally acknowledge it within 3 school days
- clarify the complaint and the outcome sought where necessary
- consider whether a meeting would assist resolution
- conduct or commission a fair and proportionate investigation
- provide a written Stage 1 response normally within 15 school days of receipt

If the investigation cannot reasonably be completed within 15 school days, the complainant will be told why and given a revised date.

The Stage 1 response will address the substantive points raised, explain the conclusions reached and, where appropriate, set out action the school proposes to take. It will also explain how to request Stage 2.

8. Stage 2 - Governing Body review panel

If the complainant remains dissatisfied with the Stage 1 response, they may request a Stage 2 review by writing to the Clerk to the Governing Body within 10 school days of the Stage 1 response. Requests received later may be accepted where there are reasonable grounds.

The Clerk will normally acknowledge the request within 3 school days.

Convening the panel

The panel will normally comprise three impartial governors with no prior involvement in the complaint. If sufficient impartial governors are not available, suitably independent governors or other appropriate independent panel members may be sourced, including through the Local Authority or other schools.

The Clerk will aim to convene the panel within 20 school days of receiving the Stage 2 request. The complainant will be offered reasonable notice. If three reasonable proposed dates are declined without good reason, a date may be set and the panel may proceed on the basis of written submissions.

Relevant written material should normally be provided to the Clerk in time to be circulated to all parties at least 5 school days before the hearing.

The review meeting

The hearing will be held in private. The complainant may attend and be accompanied by a suitable companion. Legal representation is not normally necessary but will be considered case by case. Media representatives are not permitted.

Electronic recording is not normally permitted unless agreed in advance as a reasonable adjustment or for another justified reason. Any recording must be known to and agreed by the parties as appropriate.

The panel will consider the complaint, the Stage 1 response and relevant evidence. It may ask questions of the complainant, school representatives and witnesses. Once the evidence has been heard, the panel will deliberate in private.

Outcome

The panel may uphold the complaint in whole or in part, or dismiss it in whole or in part. Where appropriate, it may recommend action to resolve the complaint and changes to school systems or procedures.

The Clerk will normally send the panel's written findings and recommendations within 10 school days of the hearing. The letter will make clear that Stage 2 completes the school's internal complaints procedure.

9. Complaints about the Headteacher or Governing Body

A complaint about the Headteacher should be addressed to the Chair of Governors, via the school office, marked Private and Confidential.

A complaint about the Chair of Governors, an individual governor, or the Governing Body should be addressed to the Clerk to the Governing Body, via the school office, marked Private and Confidential.

Where the complaint concerns the Headteacher or one governor, including the Chair or Vice-Chair, a suitably skilled and impartial governor will carry out Stage 1. Stage 2 will be heard by governors with no prior involvement.

Where a complaint is jointly about the Chair and Vice-Chair, the whole Governing Body, or a majority of the Governing Body, the Governing Body will arrange an independent Stage 1 investigation and, if necessary, a Stage 2 panel of independent governors or other suitably independent persons. The school may seek support from the Local Authority in making appropriate arrangements.

The same core timescales in sections 7 and 8 will apply so far as reasonably practicable.

10. After the school procedure is complete

If a complainant believes the school did not handle the complaint correctly after completing the school's procedure, they may refer the matter to the Department for Education (DfE). The DfE does not normally re-investigate the merits of the original complaint; it considers matters such as whether the school followed its procedure, complied with education law and acted reasonably in exercising its functions.

The final Stage 2 letter will explain how to access the DfE school complaints service.

Ofsted may also receive complaints about issues affecting the school as a whole after the school's complaints procedure has been used. Ofsted does not resolve individual disputes or change the outcome of a school's complaint.

11. Unreasonable, persistent and serial complaints

Most complainants engage reasonably with the school and their concerns will be treated seriously. The school will not label a complaint unreasonable simply because it is challenging, persistent or ultimately not upheld. However, behaviour associated with a complaint may become unreasonable where it substantially interferes with the fair handling of the complaint, the school's operation or the wellbeing of staff and pupils.

Examples may include:

- refusing to identify the complaint, grounds or outcome sought despite reasonable assistance
- refusing to co-operate with the published process or insisting on a process incompatible with it
- repeatedly raising substantially the same matters after the procedure has been completed
- changing the basis of the complaint repeatedly as the investigation progresses
- making excessive, disproportionate or repetitive demands on staff time
- using abusive, threatening, offensive or discriminatory language or behaviour
- knowingly providing false information or using contact primarily to cause disruption
- publishing material that creates safeguarding, harassment or other serious concerns

Before restricting contact, the Headteacher or Chair of Governors, as appropriate, will normally explain the concern and seek a workable way forward. Any restriction will be proportionate, time-limited where appropriate, and confirmed in writing.

Possible measures include a single point of contact, agreed communication methods or frequency, or asking the complainant to use a representative. New and materially different complaints will still be considered.

Serious aggression, threats or violence may be referred to the police and may result in proportionate restrictions on access to school premises.

12. Duplicate complaints and complaint campaigns

Where a substantially duplicate complaint is received from another person, the school will consider whether it raises new information or issues not previously addressed. If not, the school may explain that the matter has already completed the local process and signpost the appropriate external route.

Where a large number of substantially identical complaints are received, the school may use a published or template response, while ensuring that genuinely individual or materially different issues are considered appropriately.

13. Record keeping, confidentiality and data protection

The school will keep an appropriate record of formal complaints, actions taken, the stage at which each complaint was resolved and the final outcome, together with relevant correspondence and notes.

Complaint information will be handled confidentially and shared only where there is a legitimate need to know, subject to safeguarding, legal, regulatory and information-rights obligations. Records will be retained in line with the school's records retention arrangements and data-protection requirements.

The substance of an active complaint will not normally be shared with the whole Governing Body where doing so could compromise the impartiality of a later panel. If governors have prior knowledge that creates a reasonable concern about impartiality, the school will seek suitably independent panel members.

Requests for access to information will be handled in accordance with applicable data-protection and freedom-of-information law; this does not mean all complaint records will automatically be disclosed.

14. Learning lessons and monitoring

The Governing Body will monitor the effectiveness of the complaints procedure and, while respecting confidentiality, consider themes, patterns and learning that may improve school systems or practice.

Complaints records will be administratively maintained by the school office under the oversight of the Headteacher, with governing-body records maintained by the Clerk where appropriate.

This policy will be reviewed annually by the Governing Body, or sooner if legislation, DfE guidance, school structure or experience indicates that a change is needed.

15. Summary of timescales

Step	Normal timescale
Informal concern acknowledgement	within 3 school days
Informal concern response/discussion	aim within 10 school days
Stage 1 acknowledgement	within 3 school days
Stage 1 written response	normally within 15 school days
Request Stage 2	within 10 school days of Stage 1 response
Stage 2 acknowledgement	within 3 school days
Stage 2 panel	aim within 20 school days of request
Papers circulated	normally at least 5 school days before panel
Stage 2 outcome	normally within 10 school days of hearing
EYFS written complaint	outcome within 28 days

16. Related policies and routes

- Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy
- Whistleblowing Policy
- Staff Code of Conduct and staff disciplinary/grievance procedures
- Suspensions and Permanent Exclusions procedures
- SEND Information Report and relevant SEND complaints routes
- Data Protection and Freedom of Information procedures
- Wellbeing, Relationship and Choice / Behaviour Policy

Approval and review record

Approved by	Governing Body - date to be confirmed
Policy owner	Governing Body
Operational lead	Headteacher
Next planned review	September 2027, or sooner if required