Westbury-on-Trym CE Academy

Striving for Excellence, enriching our Faith and cherishing our Community

Complaints Procedure

Status	Date
Approved by FGB	Autumn 2026
Revision Due	Autumn 2028

Signed by: Stephanie Pritchett **Chair of Governors**

Westbury-on-Trym CE Academy endeavours to provide the best education possible for all of its pupils in an open and transparent environment. We welcome any feedback that we receive from parents/carers, pupils and third parties, and we accept that not all of this will be positive. Where concerns are raised the school intends for these to be dealt with:

- Fairly
- Openly
- Respectfully
- Promptly
- Without prejudice

In order to do so, the Governing Body of Westbury-on-Trym CE Academy has approved this procedure which explains what you should do if you have any concerns about the school. It applies to all sections of the school and sets out the overall procedure for handling concerns and complaints.

The Complaints Procedure has been prepared in accordance with the applicable provisions of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2014, Schedule 1, Part 7, the school's Public Sector Equality Duty (s.149 Equality Act 2010), and the Department for Education's Best practice guidance for academies complaints procedures.

Version 1

Complaints Procedure Overview

Who and what is covered by the procedure?

The requirements in Part 7 of the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 apply only to complaints from parents/carers of pupils at the school, regarding their child.

Academies are expected to handle complaints from people who are not parents of children at the school respectfully and expediently, but do not have to follow the full requirements of the legislation. Details of how the school will handle complaints from third parties can be found in Further guidance, Section C.

Some types of complaint are covered by other procedures such as:

- Admissions
- Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs
- Matters likely to require a child protection investigation
- Suspensions and permanent exclusions
- Staff grievances
- Whistleblowing
- Complaints about services provided by other providers using school premises or facilities

Please see Appendix B for other types of concerns/complaints which are beyond, or partly beyond, the scope of this procedure.

Procedure principles

- Initial concerns or enquiries will be dealt with at an informal level whenever possible. In most cases issues should be resolved with an individual member of staff.
- Complaints will be dealt with fairly, impartially and in a non-adversarial fashion.
- Complaints will be fully and thoroughly investigated, addressing the concerns raised and dealt with within the stated time limits. If more time is needed this will be communicated to the complainant.
- Wherever possible it is useful for the complainant to indicate what actions they feel might resolve the issue, as early as possible and at each Stage.
- Complainants will be kept informed of the progress of the complaints process.
- Complainants will be given the opportunity to complete the process in full, unless the provisions relating to persistent complaints, unreasonable behaviour, anonymous complaints or complaint campaigns apply.

Confidentiality

Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential save where disclosure is required by law, requested by the Secretary of State or Department for Education, required during an inspection, or otherwise lawfully necessary.

The school will retain complaint records securely in accordance with its records retention and data protection arrangements. Where a complainant asks to be assisted by a third party, information will not be disclosed without the complainant's consent unless there is another lawful basis to do so.

Organising Complaints

Informal complaints (referred to as Concerns) are dealt with based on a 'Ladder of Responsibility':

- Class teacher
- Phase Leader
- Headteacher

This is followed to provide alternatives for the complainant and the school in a bid to address concerns and reach a resolution, without them becoming a formal complaint.

The Headteacher, in conjunction with senior staff and the Clerk to Governors/Governance Professional, where appropriate, will co-ordinate the complaints procedures across the school, arrange assistance and reasonable adjustments where required, and ensure a written record is kept of formal complaints and their outcomes.

Accessibility

This procedure can be made available in large print or other more accessible formats, if required. If complainants require assistance with making a complaint, including a reasonable adjustment because of a disability, they should contact the school office, who will be happy to help.

Timescales

We would normally expect complaints to be made within 45 school days of the date of the last relevant incident. We will consider complaints made outside this period if exceptional circumstances apply.

Record Keeping and Complaints Log

For all formal complaints, the school will maintain a complaints log. This will record details of each complaint (regardless of whether it has been upheld), the stage each complaint is currently at, the stage it progresses to, and the action taken because of the complaint. A summary record of this log will be accessible to the Chair of Governors at any point they wish to view it.

Complaints Procedure

The Informal procedure

Any concern should be raised as soon as possible with the relevant member of staff (for instance, the class teacher) who will clarify the nature of the concern. A concern may be raised in person, in writing or by telephone. It can be helpful to identify at this point what outcome the individual is looking for.

The school will endeavour to acknowledge such concerns within 5 school days of receipt during term time/school days. Where any investigation is required a response will normally be given within 5 school days. Where this is not possible, the school will advise the individual of the reasons why and provide a revised timescale.

Where the individual is dissatisfied with the response to their concern, they can seek to escalate it based on the Ladder of Responsibility. When the informal avenues cannot achieve a resolution, the individual may ask for the concern to be treated as a formal complaint.

The Formal Procedure

The formal procedure comprises a three-stage process.

Stage 1

Complaint heard by a Senior Member of Staff/Headteacher

- The complaint should normally be made in writing and on the standard form in Appendix A. Where a complainant has sufficient reason to request a reasonable adjustment, the school will assist them to put the complaint in writing.
- The complainant should provide relevant dates, times, names, copies of relevant documents and details of what they feel would resolve the complaint.

- The complaint will be directed to the Headteacher, who will nominate themselves or a member/s of the Senior Leadership Team to consider the complaint.
- The school will endeavour to acknowledge the complaint within 5 school days of receipt during term time/school days.
- The nominated member of staff will ensure that the complaint is investigated and, where possible, a response is provided within 20 school days. Where this is not reasonably possible the complainant will be advised why and given a revised timescale.
- If the complainant remains dissatisfied, they may progress the complaint to Stage 2 in accordance with the procedure.

Stage 2

Complaint heard by the Headteacher (or Chair of Governors/or their delegated representative/s if relating to the Headteacher, or if the Headteacher led Stage 1)

Where the complaint is to be considered by the Chair of Governors, correspondence should be submitted via the Clerk/Governance Professional at clerk@westburyontrym.academy.

- Once notification has been received, full details of the complaint will be passed to the appropriate person together with relevant documents and contact details.
- The school will endeavour to acknowledge the complaint within 5 school days during term time.
- The nominated investigator/s will not have been directly involved in the matters complained about and must not have a conflict of interest. If there is reasonable doubt as to a person's ability to act impartially, they should not take part.
- The investigator may speak to the complainant and others who have knowledge of the circumstances and may seek appropriate advice.
- Following the investigation, the decision and reasons will be notified to the complainant.
- The school will aim to respond within 20 school days. If this is not reasonably possible, the complainant will be advised why and given a revised timescale.

Escalation to Stage 3

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the response to their Stage 2 complaint, they should submit a written request for the complaint to proceed to Stage 3 to the Clerk to the Governors/Governance Professional at clerk@westburyontrym.academy within 5 school days of the date of the Stage 2 response.

The written request should set out the issue(s) they wish the school to consider, why the Stage 2 outcome was not satisfactory, the outcome they are hoping to achieve, and any reasonable adjustments which may need to be considered.

Stage 3 - Complaint heard by a Complaints Appeals Panel

- The Clerk/Governance Professional will endeavour to acknowledge the request to proceed to Stage 3 within 5 school days of receipt, during term time.
- The Clerk/Governance Professional will convene the Appeals Panel as soon as reasonably practicable. Every effort will be made to enable the hearing to take place within 20 school days of receipt of the request.
- As soon as reasonably practical, and in any event at least 5 school days before the hearing, the Clerk/Governance Professional will send written notification of the date, time and place of the hearing.
- The complainant will be given the opportunity to attend the panel hearing and is entitled to be accompanied by a friend or relative if they wish.
- If reasonable attempts have been made to accommodate the complainant with dates for a panel hearing and they refuse or are unable to attend, the panel may convene in their absence and reach a conclusion in the interests of drawing the complaint to a close.

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The Appeals Panel

Panel Members / Chair

The Appeals Panel will consist of at least 3 people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint. At least 1 panel member will be independent of the management and running of Westbury-on-Trym CE Academy.

As Westbury-on-Trym CE Academy is a Single Academy Trust, the independent panel member should not be a member, trustee or employee of the school and should not have a clear connection with the school. The other panel members may include Governors who have had no prior involvement in the complaint or the circumstances surrounding it.

The hearing will be chaired by one member of the Appeals Panel, chosen by the Panel members. The Panel may engage an advisor to provide appropriate guidance.

Attendees

The complainant is entitled to attend and be accompanied by a friend or relative if they wish. The Clerk should be notified in advance where possible. DfE guidance recommends that neither the complainant nor the school brings legal representation, although there may be circumstances where legal or trade union representation is appropriate.

The Panel may invite witnesses, including representation from the school, where it considers their evidence relevant.

The role and conduct of the Complaints Appeals Panel

The purpose of the hearing is to consider the complaint following completion of the earlier stages and to seek to resolve the complaint wherever possible. The Panel will consider the documents and representations provided and will reach findings on the issues raised.

The Panel Chair will conduct the hearing so that the respective parties have the opportunity to raise their concerns, respond to issues raised and ask questions in an appropriate manner. The meeting will be independent, impartial and non-adversarial.

All those attending are expected to show courtesy, restraint and good manners. The Chair may adjourn the hearing where necessary. Where a person has a conflict of interest, or there is reasonable doubt about their ability to act impartially, they will not take part in the consideration of the complaint.

Complaints Appeals Panel Decision

- Reject the complaint in whole or part
- Uphold the complaint in whole or part
- Decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint
- Recommend changes to the school's systems, procedures or policies to ensure that similar problems do not recur

The Panel's findings, decision and any recommendations will be confirmed in writing to the complainant within 5 school days of the close of the panel hearing. A copy of the findings and recommendations will also be provided, where relevant, to the person complained about and will be available for inspection on the school premises by the proprietor and the Headteacher.

What happens if I do not believe my complaint has been handled properly at the end of Stage 3?

Referral to the Department for Education (DfE)

The Department for Education will normally expect the school's complaints process to have been completed first. DfE does not normally overturn the Panel's decision or re-investigate the original complaint. Its role is to consider whether the complaint was handled properly by following a published procedure that complies with Part 7 of the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

Further information and the current route for raising a complaint with DfE can be found on GOV.UK under 'Complain about a school to the Department for Education'.

Further guidance

Complaints about the school office

Where a complaint concerns the school office or a member of the office team, it should be addressed to the Headteacher but submitted via the Clerk/Governance Professional at clerk@westburyontrym.academy. The Clerk/Governance Professional will act as the administrative route and will not determine the complaint.

Section A: Complaints about the Headteacher

Complaints about the Headteacher should be directed to the Chair of Governors via the Clerk/Governance Professional at clerk@westburyontrym.academy in the first instance. This will be investigated by the Chair or Vice-Chair of Governors as appropriate. The person investigating must not have a conflict of interest or prior involvement which would prevent them acting impartially. The complaint may progress to a Panel Hearing if applicable.

Section B: Complaints regarding Governance

- Complaints against individual Governors are made to the Clerk to the Governing Body/Governance Professional. The Clerk/Governance Professional should then arrange for the complaint to be heard by the Chair of Governors and then a Panel Hearing if applicable.
- Complaints against the Chair, the entire Governing Body or complaints involving both the Chair and Vice-Chair should also be sent to the Clerk/Governance Professional, who should determine the most appropriate course of action.
- As Westbury-on-Trym CE Academy is a Single Academy Trust, this may involve sourcing an independent investigator to complete the formal stage and suitable people from other schools, who meet the requirements of the Regulations, to hear the Panel Hearing.
- Where a complaint concerns the Clerk/Governance Professional, this should be addressed to the Headteacher via info@westburyontrym.academy in the first instance, who will decide the appropriate course of action.

Section C: Complaints from Third Parties

Third party complaints are those received from people who are not parents or carers of pupils at the school. The school will handle such complaints respectfully and expediently. The full statutory requirements of Part 7 do not apply to third party complaints. The school may use the stages in this procedure where it considers this appropriate.

Section D: Persistent Complaints

Where a complainant tries to re-open an issue with the school after the complaints procedure has been fully exhausted and the school has done everything it reasonably can in response to the complaint, the Chair of Governors (or other appropriate person in the case of a complaint about the Chair) will inform the complainant that the matter is closed.

If the complainant subsequently contacts the school again about substantially the same issue, the complaint or subject may be regarded as serial or persistent and the school may choose not to respond. The marking will be applied to the complaint or subject rather than to the individual. The school will act reasonably and will consider any genuinely new complaint.

Section E: Unreasonable Complaints / Behaviour

Westbury-on-Trym CE Academy is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially. The school will not normally limit the contact complainants have with the school. However, staff are not expected to tolerate abusive, offensive, threatening, discriminatory or harassing behaviour.

Where the frequency or nature of contact causes a significant level of disruption, the school may put in place a proportionate communication strategy, for example a single point of contact, a particular method of communication or reasonable limits on frequency. Such arrangements will not prevent consideration of a new complaint and will not restrict statutory rights to information.

Section F: Anonymous Complaints

The school will not normally investigate anonymous complaints. However, the Headteacher or Chair of Governors, or their delegated representative if appropriate, will determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation.

Section G: Complaint Campaigns

Where the school receives large volumes of complaints based on the same subject, potentially from complainants unconnected with the school, it may use an alternative process set out in this procedure, including a template response or a single response published on the school website.

Section H: Recording of Interactions or Meetings

The school has the right to refuse to accept, as evidence, recordings of conversations obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded. Complainants should obtain informed consent before recording conversations or meetings. The school may consider a recording where this has been agreed as a reasonable adjustment.

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Appendix A - Formal Complaint Form

Please complete this form if you wish to make a formal complaint under the Westbury-on-Trym CE Academy Complaints Procedure. Please provide as much relevant information as possible. If you require assistance completing this form, or require a reasonable adjustment, please contact the school.

1. Your details

Full name:	
Address:	
Postcode:	
Telephone number:	
Email address:	

2. Pupil details (if applicable)

Pupil's name:	
Your relationship to the pupil:	
Pupil's class/year group (if known):	

3. Your complaint

Please describe your complaint clearly. Include relevant dates, times and names of those involved where known. It may be helpful to list separately each issue that you would like considered.

4. When did the incident(s) or matter you are complaining about take place?

5. What have you already done to try to resolve the matter?

Please tell us who you have already spoken or written to, approximately when you contacted them and what response you received.

6. What outcome are you seeking?

Please explain what action or outcome you feel would help to resolve your complaint.

7. Supporting information

Are you providing any documents or other information with this complaint? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, please list the documents or information you are providing:

Please only provide information that is relevant to the complaint.

8. Reasonable adjustments or assistance

Do you require any assistance or reasonable adjustments to enable you to participate fully in the complaints process? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, please tell us what would assist you:

9. Declaration

I confirm that, to the best of my knowledge, the information I have provided on this form is accurate and relates to the complaint I wish the Academy to consider.

Signed:	
Name:	
Date:	

Returning this form

Please send your completed complaint form to the appropriate address below. Formal complaints should be marked “Private and Confidential”.

Your complaint is about	**Please send the form to**
A member of staff	Headteacher via info@westburyontrym.academy
The school office or a member of the office team	Headteacher, via the Clerk/Governance Professional at clerk@westburyontrym.academy
The Headteacher	Chair of Governors, via the Clerk/Governance Professional at clerk@westburyontrym.academy
An individual Governor	Clerk/Governance Professional at clerk@westburyontrym.academy

The Chair of Governors, the Chair and Vice-Chair, or the whole Governing Body	Clerk/Governance Professional at clerk@westburyontrym.academy
The Clerk/Governance Professional	Headteacher via info@westburyontrym.academy

The Academy will acknowledge your formal complaint in accordance with the timescales set out in the Complaints Procedure.

Appendix B - Other types of complaint not in the scope of this procedure

Exceptions	Who to contact / procedure
Admissions to schools	Concerns about admissions should be handled through the statutory admissions/appeals process.
Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs	Concerns should be raised directly with the local authority.
Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation	Handled under the school's child protection and safeguarding policy and relevant statutory guidance.
Suspensions and permanent exclusions	Use the statutory suspension/permanent exclusion review process. Complaints about the application of the behaviour policy may be made through this complaints procedure where appropriate.
Whistleblowing	Employees, temporary staff and contractors should use the school's whistleblowing procedure or the appropriate prescribed-person route.
Complaints about Staff Members	A parent/carer complaint about a staff member will be dealt with by the Headteacher or someone they designate and will follow this complaints procedure, including a panel hearing if applicable. Any separate disciplinary action is confidential.
Staff grievances	Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the school's internal grievance procedures.
Services provided by other providers using school premises/facilities	Providers should have their own complaints procedure. Please contact the provider directly.
Withdrawal from Religious Education or Collective Worship	If a parent/carer is dissatisfied with the handling of a request to withdraw their child, they may use this complaints procedure.

Appendix C - Roles and Responsibilities

The Ladder of Responsibility

- Class teacher
- Phase Leader
- Headteacher

Complainant

- explain the complaint in full as early as possible
- co-operate with the school in seeking a solution
- respond promptly to reasonable requests for information or meetings
- ask for assistance as needed
- treat all those involved with respect
- respect appropriate confidentiality

Investigator/s

- provide a comprehensive, open, transparent and fair consideration of the complaint
- consider relevant records and information and speak to relevant people where appropriate
- keep notes and papers securely
- be mindful of the timescales
- declare any conflict of interest and act impartially
- prepare a clear outcome addressing the issues raised

Clerk to the Governing Body / Governance Professional

- ensure those involved are aware of the procedure and relevant duties
- set the date, time and venue of the panel hearing and consider accessibility
- collate relevant written material and send it to the parties in advance
- record the proceedings
- notify the relevant parties of the Panel's decision, findings and recommendations

Stage 3 Panel Chair and Panel Members

- ensure the hearing is independent, impartial and non-adversarial
- ensure no Panel member has prior involvement in the matters complained about
- ensure at least one member is independent of the management and running of the school
- give the complainant and school a fair opportunity to state their case
- ensure the meeting is minuted and findings and recommendations are made

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Appendix D - Complaints Procedure Flow Chart

