

Complaints Procedure

**Reviewed and approved by
the Trust Board
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Key terms

This policy applies to all schools within Wandle Learning Trust (WLT).

The terms Academy, School, Organisation and Trust are considered interchangeable in the context of all Trust policies.

Where appropriate, in this policy the term:

“Executive Team” means the Trust’s Co-Chief Executive Officers (Co-CEOs) and includes the Trust’s Chief Financial Operating Officer (CFOO) who manage the day-to-day business of the Trust.

“Head Teacher” includes the appropriate school Head Teacher.

“Trustees or Trust Board” are appointed trustees who oversee the business of Wandle Learning Trust, agreeing the overarching strategic direction and ensuring robust governance.

“Local Academy Committee (LAC)” includes appointed members at a local academy level who support each school’s leadership teams to implement policies and improvement plan priorities.

“Chair” heads the board of Trustees or LAC.

“Head of Governance” provides strategic oversight and administrative resource for the Trust Board and its committees, including local academy committees, and ensures the smooth running of its functions, processes, and meetings.

“Stakeholders” are any individuals or companies invested in the welfare and success of the Trust and its schools, including pupils, staff members, parents, community members, members of the governance community, trade unions, local business leaders etc.

Compliance

This policy is based on the model procedure from the Department for Education, and has regard to the Academy Trust Governance Guide and Academy Trust Handbook.

Who can make a complaint?

This 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 Wandle Learning Trust (WLT) 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 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 complaint procedure. The Trust 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 school's office will refer you to another staff member. Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels unable to deal with a concern, the school's office 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, the Trust 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 on a complainant, as long as they have appropriate consent to do so.

- **Complaints against staff** in our schools (except the head teacher) should be made in the first instance, to the head teacher via the school's office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

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- **Complaints that involve or are about the head teacher** should be addressed to the Chair of the Local Academy Committee, via the Head of Governance (governance@wandlelearningtrust.org.uk). Please mark them as Private and Confidential.
 - **Complaints about the Chair of the Academy Committee, any individual academy committee member or the whole Academy Committee** should be addressed to the Co-Chief Executive Officers via the Head of Governance (governance@wandlelearningtrust.org.uk) Please mark them as Private and Confidential.
 - **Complaints about the Co-Chief Executive Officers or a trustee**, should be addressed to the Chair of Trustees, via the Head of Governance (governance@wandlelearningtrust.org.uk). Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

For ease of use, a **template complaint form** is included at the end of this policy (Appendix A). If you require help in completing the form, please contact the school's office or the governance team (governance@wandlelearningtrust.org.uk). You can also ask a third-party organisation, for example, the Citizens Advice Bureau 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 co-Chief Executive Officers (co-CEOs), if appropriate, will determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation.

Time scales

A complaint must be raised 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 to have been received on the first school day after the holiday period.

Related processes

In some specific situations an alternative policy will need to be followed to deal with the concern appropriately. This is usually because a statutory process must be followed to meet our legal duty. The following list details some specific situations where this applies:

Area of concern	Appropriate policy	Available from
Pupil admissions	Individual school Admissions Policy	School website
Pupil exclusion	Individual school Behaviour Policy and Trust's Exclusions Policy	School website
Staff grievance, capability, conduct, disciplinary, whistleblowing	Trust wide policies for grievance, capability, conduct, disciplinary, whistleblowing	Internal policies (available from HR lead). Complainants will not be informed of the outcome of any investigation.
Subject Access (Data Protection) and Freedom of Information (FOI) requests	Trust's Data Protection Policy	Trust website
Safeguarding and Child Protection	Individual school Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy	School website
Statutory Assessments of Special Educational Needs and Academy reorganisation proposals	N/A	Raise directly with school's Local Authority
Third party companies used by the Trust	N/A	Raise directly with the third-party company and follow their complaints procedure.
National Curriculum – content	N/A	Raise directly with the Department of Education

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 this happens, we will inform you of a proposed new timescale.

If a complainant commences legal action against the Trust in relation to their complaint, we will consider whether to suspend the complaints procedure until those legal proceedings have concluded.

Resolving complaints

At each stage in the procedure, the Trust 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 Trust and 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 – Informal complaints

This is where a concern has been raised. It is to be hoped that most concerns can be expressed and resolved on an informal basis.

Concerns should be raised with either the class teacher, form tutor / subject lead or head teacher. Complainants should not approach individual members of the Local Academy Committee to raise concerns or complaints at the informal stage. The members of the Local Academy Committee have no power to act on an individual basis, and it may also prevent them from considering complaints at Stage 3 of the procedure.

The member of staff to whom the complainant is referred will carry out an investigation and decide on any appropriate action. The complainant and the head teacher will be informed of the conclusions drawn from the investigation and the subsequent action to be taken, together with details of how to make a formal complaint if they remain dissatisfied.

It is a precondition to the operation of this policy that the complainant shall have made reasonable attempts to seek an informal resolution and shall have acted in relation to the matter in a reasonable and measured way. The Chair of Trustees shall have a discretion, which will be exercised reasonably, not to allow a complaint to be pursued where this precondition has not been met.

Every effort will be made to resolve the problem to the satisfaction of the complainant at this informal stage. Possible outcomes include:

- (i) complaint resolved to the satisfaction of the complainant.
- (ii) complaint not resolved to the satisfaction of the complainant.
- (iii) complaint dealt with under another procedure.

If the issue remains unresolved, the next step is to make a formal complaint.

Stage 2 – Formal complaints

Formal complaints must be made to the head teacher (unless they are about the head teacher), via the school office or the Governance Team (governance@wandlelearningtrust.org.uk) by completing the Complaint Form (Appendix A).

If the complaint is about the head teacher or the co-Chief Executive Officer, the complaint will be escalated directly to Stage 3 of the Complaints Procedure.

The head teacher will record the date the complaint is received and will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 10 school days.

Within this response, the head teacher will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, ask what remains unresolved and what outcome the complainant would like to see. The head teacher can consider whether a face-to-face meeting is the most appropriate way of doing this. *Note: The head teacher may delegate the investigation to another member of the school's senior leadership team, but this person cannot take the final decision.*

The investigator will use Appendix B to record the investigation. 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 formal written response within 10 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 Trust or 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 2.

Stage 3 – Formal stage including involvement of the governance community

If the complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome to the Stage 2 investigation, they should use Appendix A to escalate their complaint to Stage 3 of the Complaints Procedure in writing to the Chair of the Academy Committee via the Head of Governance (governance@wandlelearningtrust.org.uk).

The Head of Governance will record the date the complaint is received and will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 3 school days.

The Head of Governance will seek to assign an investigating officer from amongst the members of the Trust's governance community to lead the Stage 3 investigation.

The investigator will use Appendix B to record the investigation.

Through their investigation, the investigating officer will seek assurance that due process has been followed at each of the previous stages of the complaint procedure. The investigating officer should seek to understand all action taken to date to resolve the complaint, establish from the complainant what remains unresolved and what outcome the complainant would like to see.

During their investigation, the investigating officer will:

- if necessary, interview those involved in the investigation at the previous stages 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 Stage 3 investigation.

At the conclusion of their investigation, the investigating officer will provide a formal written response within 15 school days of the date of receipt of the complaint. If the investigating officer 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 previous stages of 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 Trust or the school will take to resolve the complaint.

The investigating officer will advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 3.

Stage 4 – Panel hearing (final stage)

If they remain dissatisfied with the outcome to previous stages, the complainant should use Appendix A to escalate their complaint to Stage 4 of the Complaints Procedure in writing to the Chair of Trustees via the Head of Governance (governance@wandlelearningtrust.org.uk).

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

The Head of Governance will convene a Complaints Committee of three individuals who have no prior knowledge of the matter under consideration. The Complaints Committee will include at least one member who is independent of the management and leadership of the Trust and those schools within it.

The Head of Governance will discuss the membership of the Complaints Committee with the Chair of the Trust Board if appropriate. The Chair of the Trust Board should only proceed with Stage 4 of the procedure if they believe all previous stages have been exhausted. The Head of Governance shall verify that Stages 1 to 3 have been completed before the Complaints Committee is convened to hear the complaint under Stage 4.

The Head of Governance will notify the complainant of their right to attend the Complaints Committee hearing and be accompanied if they wish. This notification will be no less than seven working days prior to the date of the hearing. Following consultation, the Head of Governance shall notify all other parties of the requirement for them to attend the hearing. In the event that the complainant or those complained against are unable to attend the hearing at the proposed date, an attempt will be made to find a mutually convenient date. If the complainant or those complained against are unable to attend the alternative date, the hearing will go ahead in their absence.

The timescale for resolution of a 'formal complaint' at Stage 4 will be no more than 20 school days from the point of it being raised at this stage via the Head of Governance. This means that the Complaints Committee must meet within that time frame. In exceptional circumstances, complaints at Stage 4 may not be dealt with in the 20 school days timeframe referred to above, but every effort should be made to ensure the complaint is resolved within a reasonable timeframe.

The hearing will be minuted by the clerk to the Complaints Committee. The Head of Governance may act as the clerk to the Complaints Committee, but it may be necessary to appoint a clerk who has no prior knowledge of the complaint to date. The minutes will be kept on file and shared with all relevant parties on request.

On behalf of the Complaints Committee, the clerk will inform the complainant and other relevant parties of the Committee's decision, including its findings and recommendations and the reasons for them, in writing within 10 school days of the hearing taking place.

The decision of the Complaints Committee, including its findings and recommendations, will be available for inspection by the Trust or, where relevant, the head teacher.

A written record will be kept of all complaints made in accordance with sub-paragraph (e) of Part 7 of the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, along with details of whether they were resolved following a formal procedure, or progression to a formal hearing. The Trust will record the action it takes as a result of complaints (regardless of whether they are upheld).

All correspondence statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential, except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the 2008 Act requests access to them.

Next Steps

Contacting the Department for Education

If the complainant believes the Trust 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 (DfE) ([Complain about a school](#)) after all stages have been completed.

The DfE will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by the Trust. They will consider whether the Trust has adhered to education legislation and any statutory policies connected with the complaint and whether they have followed [Part 7 of the Education \(Independent Academy Standards\) Regulations 2014](#).

Complaints to Ofsted

By law, and in certain circumstances, Ofsted may investigate complaints from parents about their child's academy to decide whether to use its inspection powers.

Ofsted's only power regarding a qualifying complaint is to determine if a school inspection is needed. It cannot investigate individual issues. Qualifying complaints are shared with the lead inspector as part of the evidence base for inspections.

Managing serial and unreasonable complaints

Wandle Learning Trust is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, and to providing a high-quality service to those who complain. The Trust will not normally limit the contact complainants have with it and its schools. However, the Trust does 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.

Wandle Learning Trust defines unreasonable behaviour as that which hinders our consideration of complaints because of the frequency or nature of the complainant's contact with the Trust and/or its schools, 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 Trust'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 the Trust's and/or school's 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 Trust and/or 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 and as appropriate, the co-CEOs, headteacher or chair of the Trust or Academy Committee will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying an 'unreasonable' marking.

If the behaviour continues, co-CEO or headteacher will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and ask them to change it. For complainants who excessively contact the Trust and/or school causing a significant level of disruption, the Trust 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, the Trust and/or school will immediately inform the police and communicate the actions taken in writing. This may include barring an individual from the Trust and its schools.

Review schedule

This policy was approved	By the Trust Board
Date	14 July 2025
Policy version	Version 1.4
This policy will be reviewed	July 2026
Member of staff with responsibility for review	Head of Governance
Latest edits	July 2025: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• updated next steps in accordance with Academy Trust Governance Guide

Complaint Form (Appendix A)

Please complete and return to the school's office (Stage 2) or the Head of Governance (Stage 3-5) who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

Your name:
Pupil's name (if relevant):
Your relationship to the pupil (if relevant):
Pupil's school (if relevant):
Address:
Postcode:
Day time telephone number:
Evening telephone number:
Email address:

Please give details of your complaint, including whether you have spoken to anybody at the Trust or school about it.

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

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

Signature:

Date:

Investigation report (Appendix B)

This template should be used by investigators at each stage of the process.

STAGE of complaints procedure:
Trust / School:
Investigation authorised by:
Investigator:
Date investigation began:
Background to the investigation:
Process of Investigation
Approach taken:
Evidence collected:
Persons interviewed:

Investigation Findings

Facts established:

Facts that could not be established:

Conclusion

Further details on recommendation: [such as recommended action or improvements to be made suggested].

Investigator's signature:

Date: