WANDLE LEARNING TRUST

Complaints Procedure



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1. Introduction

At Wandle Learning Trust, we are guided by our Wandle 2030 strategy, which places inclusion, belonging, and high-quality provision at the heart of our work. We recognise that concerns and complaints are an important form of feedback and an opportunity to improve.

This procedure reflects our commitment to the *Wandle 2030* inclusion principle, ensuring that all stakeholders can raise concerns in a way that is accessible, respectful and fair, and that promotes a strong sense of belonging across our community. It also establishes a clear and proportionate process for resolving issues effectively, supporting staff, and maintaining high standards for all pupils.

2. Aims

This procedure aims to:

- resolve concerns at the earliest possible stage
- ensure complaints are handled fairly, proportionately, and consistently
- encourage resolution at the earliest appropriate stage and ensure proportionate use of Trust resources
- ensure expert input for complex and high-risk matters
- enable all stakeholders, particularly those facing barriers, to engage confidently in the process
- identify and address any inequities in how complaints are raised, handled or resolved

We are committed to:

- respectful, constructive engagement
- clear communication and timelines
- learning from complaints to improve practice

3. Scope

This procedure applies to complaints about the Trust, its schools and any other entities within the Trust.

4. Statutory framework

This Complaints Procedure has been developed in accordance with relevant legislation and statutory guidance, including:

- Education Act 2002 (Section 29)
- Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, Part 7 (for academies)
- DfE Best Practice Guidance for School Complaints Procedures (2021)
- Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) 2026
- UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) and Data Protection Act 2018
- Equality Act 2010

The Trust will ensure that all complaints are handled in line with these frameworks, particularly where complaints relate to safeguarding, data protection, equality, or other areas governed by statutory requirements.

5. Matters not covered by this procedure

Where a complaint falls within a statutory process (for example, exclusions, admissions, safeguarding, or data protection), it will be managed in accordance with the relevant legal framework rather than this procedure.

Issue	Policy / Route
Safeguarding concerns	Child Protection / Safeguarding Policy / Designated Safeguarding Lead / KCSIE
Allegations against staff	Allegations against staff / LADO (Local Authority Designated Officer) procedure.
Concerns against staff	HR procedures. Complaints solely relating to the professional competence, performance management, disciplinary matters or employment of individual staff members will not normally be investigated under this procedure as these are confidential employment matters.
Admissions	Admissions Policy / Statutory Appeals process
Suspensions and exclusions	DfE statutory process
SEND	SEND Policy / EHCP / Local Authority / Tribunal
Staff grievance	HR procedures
Whistleblowing	Whistleblowing Policy
Attendance (including fines / penalty notices / enforcement action)	Attendance Policy / Local Authority processes
Data protection issues (including access to records)	Data Protection Policy / (ICO) Information Commissioner's Office

Where a complaint includes mixed issues, the Trust may separate elements and handle each under the appropriate process.

6. Stage 0: Triage (initial consideration)

On receipt of a concern or complaint, the Trust will carry out an initial triage to determine how the matter should be handled. This ensures that issues are directed to the appropriate process at the earliest stage, avoiding delay and unnecessary escalation.

Triage involves identifying whether the matter:

- is a concern suitable for informal resolution
- is a formal complaint
- is a safeguarding issue or allegation against staff
- is a matter that should be managed under a different statutory or Trust procedure
- needs consideration of vulnerability or disadvantage, and whether the complainant may need additional support or reasonable adjustments

This stage helps ensure that concerns are addressed quickly, fairly and proportionately, and that the correct expertise and process are applied from the outset.

Triage will also consider whether the complainant may face barriers to engagement (including SEND, language, literacy, confidence, or access), and ensure appropriate support is put in place from the outset.

On completion of triage, the Trust reserves the right to:

- redirect issues to the appropriate procedure, policy, or authority
- review and change how a concern or complaint is categorised to ensure it is handled under the correct process.
- limit scope of the investigation to admissible elements that meet the criteria set out in this procedure

7. Timescales

7.i Submission and response times

Complaints must normally be made within three months of the incident or from when the issue became known. In the event that there is a series of associated incidents, we will consider this to be within three months of the last of these incidents occurring.

Older complaints will not normally be investigated unless they raise:

- safeguarding risks or serious allegations against staff
- serious or systematic issues
- exceptional circumstances

The Trust will aim to respond to complaints within reasonable and proportionate timescales, taking into account the nature and complexity of the issues raised.

- **Acknowledgement:** within five school days.
- **Investigation and written outcome:** within 20 school days of the complaint being received.
- **Complaints Committee:** within 20 school days of the request being received.

Where it is not possible to meet this timeframe, the Trust will inform the complainant, provide an explanation for the delay, and confirm a revised timescale.

Timescales may vary where:

- the complaint is complex or involves multiple elements
- further information or external input is required
- key individuals are unavailable (e.g. during school holidays)

The Trust will keep the complainant informed of progress throughout and will ensure that any revised timescales are communicated clearly

7.ii Escalation between stages

Complaints must be escalated within ten school days of receiving the outcome from the previous stage. We will consider complaints made outside of term time to have been received on the first school day after the holiday period.

Requests to escalate must be made via governance@wandlelearningtrust.org.uk using Appendix A and must include:

- reasons for dissatisfaction
- desired outcome(s)

If a request to escalate has not been received within ten school days, then the Trust will close the complaint. Escalation outside of this timeframe will only be accepted in exceptional circumstances.

7.iii Variations to timescales

Where external bodies (such as the police, local authority safeguarding teams, or tribunals) are investigating aspects of a complaint, this may affect our ability to meet the timescales set out in this procedure or require the process to be paused. If this occurs, we will inform you of any revised timescales.

If legal proceedings are initiated in relation to a complaint, the Trust may suspend the complaints process pending the outcome of those proceedings.

8. Stage 1: Informal resolution (concerns)

Concerns should be raised in the first instance with the relevant staff member (e.g. the class teacher) and escalated to a senior leader if required.

Outcomes of concerns raised at Stage 1 will be recorded on the school's internal system to ensure appropriate oversight and to support continuous improvement.

Formal complaints will not normally be accepted unless:

- informal resolution has been attempted, or
- the complaint is serious or involves risk.

9. Mediation

At any stage of the process, the Trust may offer the option of mediation where it is appropriate and both parties agree.

Mediation is a voluntary, informal process that aims to support a constructive conversation, helping those involved to better understand the issues and work towards a mutually acceptable resolution. It does not replace the formal Complaints Procedure but may provide an opportunity to resolve matters more quickly and collaboratively.

Mediation may be particularly beneficial where misunderstandings arise from differences in communication, culture, or expectations.

Where mediation is offered:

- it will be facilitated by a suitably trained and impartial individual
- participation is voluntary for all parties
- either party may choose to end mediation at any time

If mediation is unsuccessful, the complaint will continue through the formal procedure from the point at which it was paused.

10. Stage 2: Formal complaints

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction about actions taken or a lack of action that requires a formal response under this procedure.

10.i Submission of a formal complaint

Formal complaints must be submitted to governance@wandlelearningtrust.org.uk using the standard complaint form (Appendix A) and include:

- a clear statement of the issue
- dates, facts, and the individuals involved
- impact on the child
- actions already taken to resolve the complaint
- desired outcomes

The Trust may pause or decline complaints that:

- are unclear or lack sufficient detail
- rely on generic wording without specific context
- include excessive, repetitive, or irrelevant material

10.ii Acceptance of complaints

Complaints will not normally be investigated if they are:

- anonymous (unless there is a safeguarding risk)
- historic
- already investigated with no new material evidence introduced
- repetitive or minor variations of previous complaints
- coordinated complaints raising substantially identical issues may be considered collectively and responded to through a single coordinated response.
- raised exclusively through social media platforms

The Trust may:

- combine multiple concerns into one complaint
- appoint a single point of contact to manage complaints
- define the scope of the investigation

The complainant is responsible for providing sufficient information and evidence to enable the Trust to understand and investigate the issues raised, however, where a complaint lacks clarity or detail, the Trust will make reasonable efforts to support the complainant to clarify their concerns before deciding whether to accept or decline the complaint.

10.iii Investigations

The Trust applies a complaint pathway and investigation level framework when managing complaints. The pathway determines who is responsible for handling the complaint, based on the role of the individual concerned. The investigation level determines the depth of investigation, level of oversight and any specialist input required, based on the nature, complexity and risk of the complaint.

These frameworks operate together to ensure complaints are handled independently, proportionately and with appropriate expertise.

10.iii.a) Complaint pathway

To ensure complaints are handled independently, fairly and at the appropriate level, the Trust has set out the escalation pathway for complaints depending on who the complaint relates to.

This means that

- no individual is involved in investigating a complaint about themselves, and
- appropriate governance oversight is applied for complaints concerning senior leaders.

The table below summarises how complaints will be directed, investigated and overseen:

Complaint relates to	Who receives the complaint	Investigation led by
Member of school staff	Headteacher via governance@wandlelearningtrust.org.uk	Headteacher or designated senior leader
Headteacher	Chair of the Academy Committee via governance@wandlelearningtrust.org.uk	Senior Trust Leader with no prior involvement
Member of Central Team	Chief Executive Officers via governance@wandlelearningtrust.org.uk	Executive Leader with no prior involvement or trustee
Executive Leader	Chair of Trustees via governance@wandlelearningtrust.org.uk	Trustee or external investigator

10.iii.b) Investigation level

The table below sets out the depth, oversight and expertise required based on the complexity and risk of the complaint.

Level	Type	Investigator
Level 1	Straightforward day-to-day operational issues	Local
Level 2	Complaints about the headteacher and/or complex / multi-elements which involves more than one issue or requires wider oversight.	Trust
Level 3	Complaints about an Executive Leader and/or high risk or sensitive (safeguarding, SEND, legal advice)	Specialist expertise

The Trust may adjust the investigation level at any stage if new information emerges.

10.iii.c) Complaints about the Headteacher or the Chief Executive Officers

Where a complaint relates to the Headteacher, it should be addressed to the Chair of the Local Academy Committee (via governance@wandlelearningtrust.org.uk).

The Head of Governance will oversee the process and will commission an investigation by a suitably senior individual with no prior involvement, typically a member of the Trust's executive or central team.

Where a complaint relates to a Chief Executive Officer (CEO), it should be addressed to the Chair of Trustees (via governance@wandlelearningtrust.org.uk). The Chair of Trustees may appoint an independent and suitably qualified investigator.

Complaints at this level will typically be managed at Level 2 or Level 3.

The individual who is the subject of the complaint will not be involved in the investigation, and those involved in investigating will not serve on any subsequent Complaints Committee.

10.iv Process

At each formal stage of the Complaints Procedure, the Trust will:

- acknowledge and log the complaint within five school days
- define and communicate the scope of the complaint to the complainant
- investigate proportionately
- provide updates where appropriate
- use the Appendix B to record the investigation
- issue a formal written clear outcome with findings, recommendations, and reasons for these

10.v Outcomes

The Trust will consider whether the complaint is upheld, partially upheld or not upheld.

Possible outcomes may include:

- an explanation
- an apology
- clarification of policy
- recommendation for improvement, staff training, or procedural changes
- no further action

Outcomes will not include:

- disciplinary action disclosure
- staff sanctions
- employment outcomes

While the Trust will consider the remedy sought by the complainant, there is no obligation to provide the specific outcome requested.

11. Withdrawal of a complaint

If a complainant wishes to withdraw their complaint, they will be asked to confirm this in writing.

12. Stage 3: Complaints Committee

If a complainant remains dissatisfied after Stage 2 is completed, they may request a review by a Complaints Committee.

The purpose of Stage 3 is to provide an independent and impartial review of how the complaint has been handled and the decision reached. The Complaints Committee will not normally re-hear all evidence, re-investigate the complaint from the beginning, or substitute its own judgement where a reasonable investigation has already been undertaken.

The Complaints Committee represents the final stage of the Trust's internal complaints procedure and will be conducted in line with statutory requirements and DfE best practice, ensuring fairness, transparency and independence.

The Trust reserves the right to decline a Stage 3 request where:

- all prior stages of the procedure have not been completed, or
- the complaint does not meet the acceptance criteria set out in this policy.

A request to escalate to Stage 3 must be submitted within ten school days of receiving the outcome from the previous stage. Requests must be made via governance@wandlelearningtrust.org.uk using Appendix A and must include:

- points of disagreement
- outcome sought

The Head of Governance will triage the request to escalate the complaint to Stage 3 and consult with the Chair of Trustees to determine acceptance of escalation.

12.i Committee composition

The Committee will consist of at least three individuals, none of whom have had prior involvement in the complaint, and one of whom must be an independent member, who is not involved in the management or running of the Trust

Committee members may include:

- members of the Trust's governance community
- individuals with relevant governance experience from outside the Trust

12.ii Stage 3 process

The Stage 3 process will be overseen by the Head of Governance who will ensure the process is conducted fairly and in accordance with statutory procedure. Administrative support may be delegated to a Local Governance Professional.

The Trust recognises that some individuals may require support to participate fully and will permit the involvement of a friend, relative, or advocate to ensure the complainant's voice is heard effectively. The Head of Governance will consult with the Chief Executive Officer to determine whether the complainant's chosen advocate presents a conflict of interest.

At least ten school days before the hearing, the Complainant and all relevant parties will be notified of the date of the hearing and of their right to attend and be accompanied by a representative or friend.

Where either the Complainant or any other relevant party is unable to attend on the proposed date, reasonable efforts will be made to arrange an alternative mutually convenient date. If attendance is not possible on the revised date, the hearing may proceed in their absence.

At least five school days before the hearing, a bundle of relevant evidence, including all documentation to be considered by the Committee, will be prepared and shared with all parties. The Complaints Committee will not normally accept new evidence.

12.iii Outcome to Stage 3

Within ten school days from the date of the hearing, a written decision will be provided and will include:

- findings
- conclusions
- recommendations

This will conclude the Trust procedure.

13. Managing behaviour and unreasonable complaints

The Trust is committed to dealing with all complaints in a fair, respectful and proportionate manner. In most cases, concerns are raised constructively and can be resolved through the normal process.

However, there are occasions where the behaviour associated with a complaint, or the way it is pursued, becomes unreasonable, persistent or places a disproportionate demand on staff time and resources. In such cases, the Trust will take appropriate steps to manage the situation effectively while ensuring that all complaints are still handled properly and in line with this procedure.

Where a complainant's conduct is:

- persistent or repetitive
- excessive in volume
- unreasonable or abusive

The Trust may:

- place reasonable limits on the frequency, length or format of communications where necessary to ensure the efficient administration of the complaints process.
- require that a single communication channel is put in place
- determine that no further substantive response will be provided on issues that have already been considered and concluded.

The Trust will take into account whether behaviour may be influenced by vulnerability, communication needs, or personal circumstances, and will consider reasonable adjustments before applying restrictions.

13.i Expected conduct

The Trust expects all parties to engage in the complaints process in a manner that is respectful, constructive and focused on resolving the issues raised. A positive and cooperative approach supports fair and timely outcomes for all involved and contributes to a culture of openness and belonging across the Trust.

While we recognise that concerns can be emotional and important, all interactions should be conducted with courtesy and respect. The Trust is committed to supporting a safe and professional environment for staff and will not tolerate behaviour that is abusive, threatening or places unreasonable demands on the process.

Complainants are expected to:

- communicate respectfully
- provide concise and relevant information
- focus on resolution

The Trust will:

- communicate clearly
- follow agreed timescales
- provide reasoned responses

Those involved in complaints handling will:

- approach all complaints with an open and impartial mindset
- actively listen and seek to understand the complainant's perspective
- be mindful of cultural, social and individual differences in communication

13.ii Inclusion and accessibility

The Trust will

- make reasonable adjustments to support individuals with additional needs
- offer alternative communication methods
- ensure fair access to the process

14. Records, GDPR, and learning from complaints

The Trust is committed to maintaining accurate, confidential records of complaints and ensuring that all information is handled in accordance with data protection legislation, including UK GDPR. Clear record-keeping supports transparency, fairness and effective oversight of the process.

Complaints also provide valuable insight into the experiences of our stakeholders. The Trust will use information from complaints to identify patterns, inform decision-making, and support continuous improvement across our academies, in line with our commitment to high-quality provision and a culture of inclusion and belonging.

The Trust will:

- keep accurate records of the complaint and associated investigations
- comply with data protection legislation
- ensure records are handled in line with GDPR

The Trust will:

- maintain a Complaints Log to analyse trends and patterns
- ensure governance oversight of recommendations
- use findings to improve practice

The Trust will, where appropriate and lawful, analyse complaints data by relevant characteristics (e.g. SEND, ethnicity, socio-economic context) to identify any disproportionality in:

- who raises complaints
- how complaints progress through stages
- outcomes to complaints

This analysis will inform targeted improvements to promote equity and inclusion.

15. Next Steps

15.i 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.

15.ii 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.

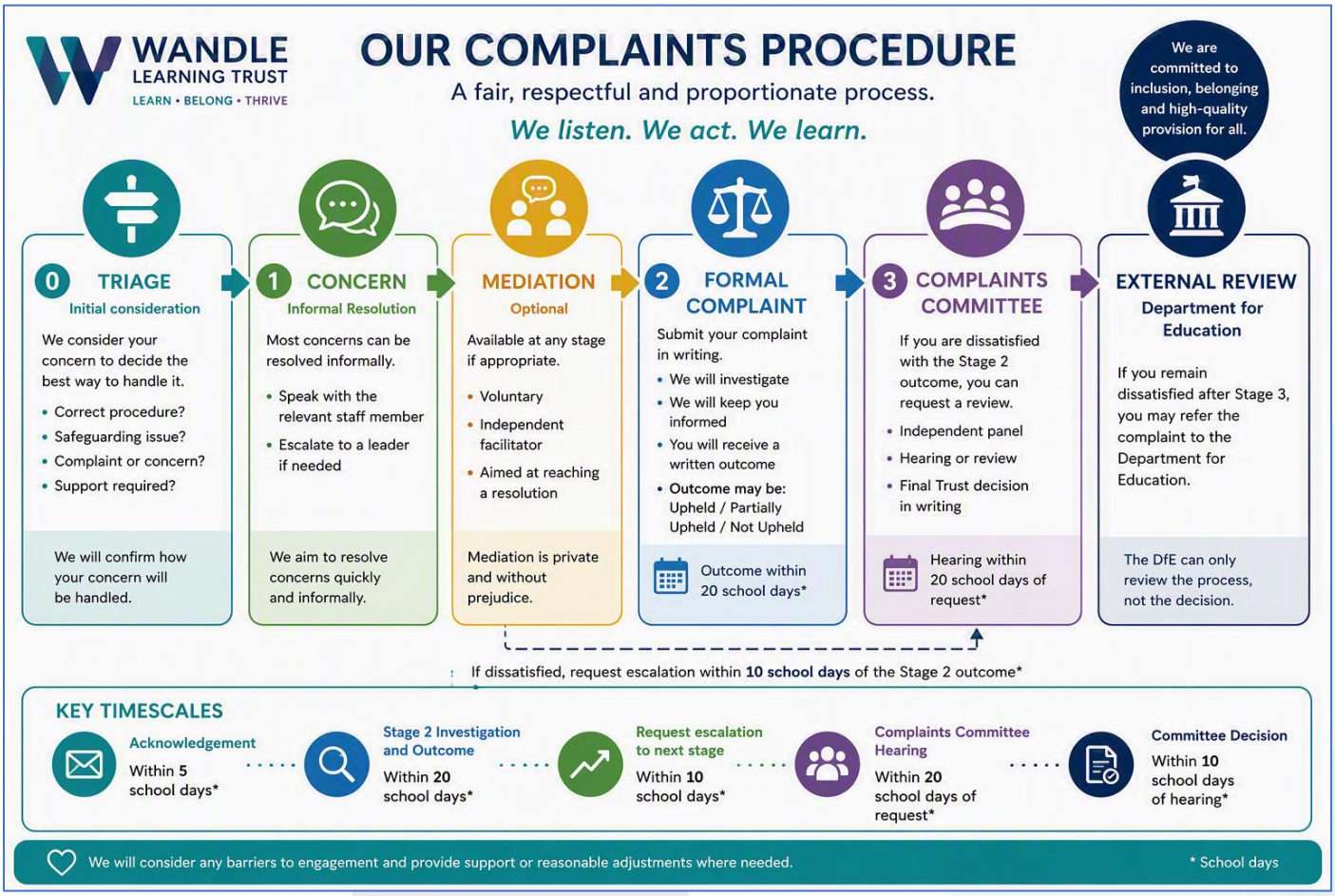
16. Complaint Form (Appendix A)

This form should be downloaded and used by complainants and submitted via governance@wandlelearningtrust.org.uk

17. Investigation record (Appendix B)

This form should be used by investigating officers to record all investigations into formal complaints (Stage 2).

18. Navigating our Complaints Procedure



19. Key definitions in this policy

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

Term	Definition
"Executive Leaders"	means the Chief Executive Officers (co-CEOs) and the Chief Operating Officer (COO) who provide trust-wide strategic and operational leadership, oversee Trust-wide improvement, ensure consistency, and deliver the Trust's mission, values and priorities across all academies and services.
"Senior Trust Leader"	provide leadership for defined areas within the Trust, translating the strategy into effective delivery, and continuous improvement across the academies, and other entities within the Trust.
"Headteacher"	leads the day-to-day operational and educational running of the academy with a focus on teaching quality, behaviour, and pupil outcomes.
"Head of Service" (including the Head of Governance)	lead and develop trust-wide specialist functions, delivering high-quality operational support, consistency and expertise to schools in line with the Trust's strategy and policies
"Trustees or Trust Board"	responsible for the overall strategic leadership, accountability and stewardship of the Trust, ensuring statutory compliance, strong governance, effective use of resources, and sustained improvement in educational outcomes across all academies.
"Chair of the Trust Board"	provides strategic leadership of the board, ensures effective governance and decision-making, holds executive leaders to account, and acts as the Trust's senior ambassador and link with key stakeholders.
"Local Academy Committee"	a committee of the Trust Board with specific responsibilities for strategic oversight of performance in an individual school.
"Chair of Local Academy Committee"	the person appointed to lead the Local Academy Committee and oversee its governance responsibilities on behalf of the Trust Board
"Concern"	is an expression of worry or doubt that can usually be resolved quickly through informal discussion.
"Complaint"	a clear statement of dissatisfaction about actions taken or a lack of action, which requires formal investigation.
"Complainant"	a person or body who makes a concern or complaint about the actions of the Trust, a school, or individuals acting on their behalf.