

1. Introduction

- 1.1. The Governors of Great Western Academy are committed to ensuring that the highest standards are maintained at the school both in the provision of education to pupils and in every other aspect of the running the school. A complaints procedure is an important part of the management of a well-run school allowing parents and others the opportunity to voice any concerns they may have through appropriate channels. This policy explains the procedure which has been adopted by the Governing Body to ensure a timely, systematic and fair approach to the resolution of such concerns.
- 1.2. We recognise the need to be clear about the difference between a concern and a complaint. A concern might be defined as a cause of worry which can be routinely dealt with through contact with a form tutor or class teacher and could be about issues such as a query about the amount of homework set or about lost property. A complaint might be defined as an expression of dissatisfaction. This dissatisfaction might be about educational matters e.g. a lack of a pupil's progress, the quality of teaching, disciplinary matters or sanctions imposed by the school.
- 1.3. Taking informal concerns seriously at the earliest stage reduces the numbers that develop into formal complaints. We aim to ensure that concerns are handled, if at all possible, without the need for formal procedures. Our formal complaints procedure is only necessary if efforts to resolve the concern or complaint informally are unsuccessful. In most cases, a class teacher or an individual delivering the service will receive the first approach. Our staff development process includes training to help staff resolve issues on the spot, including apologising where necessary.
- 1.4. Our formal procedures are invoked when initial attempts to resolve an issue are unsuccessful and the person raising the concern or complaint remains dissatisfied and wishes to take the matter further.

2. Scope

- 2.1. This policy covers all complaints against the school by external persons/parties which do not have an alternative statutory avenue of complaint or formalised process. All complaints will be kept confidential unless it is necessary to involve other parties and will be dealt with as quickly as possible. Anonymous complaints will not normally be investigated. However, the Principal or Chair of the Governing Body, if appropriate, will determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation.
- 2.2. Complaints must be raised within three months of the incident or, where a series of clearly associated incidents have occurred, within three months of the last of these incidents. If the events are not directly associated only those raised within three months will be considered. Complaints made outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.
- 2.3. Specific policies and procedures exist for dealing with complaints about:
 - 2.3.1. The National Curriculum;
 - 2.3.2. Child Protection Issues;
 - 2.3.3. Admissions / Exclusions;
 - 2.3.4. Financial Regulations;
 - 2.3.5. SEN;
 - 2.3.6. Complaints from staff through grievance or other personnel policies;
 - 2.3.7. Whistle-blowing.
- 2.4. Where complaints make alleged allegations of misconduct against members of staff, this Complaints Procedure may be superseded by use of the Staff Disciplinary Procedure or other appropriate process or policy. In this instance any disciplinary action by the school against a member of staff would be confidential

Policy Owner	Principal
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Date of Governor's Meeting	March 2025
Date of Next Review	February 2027

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between that member of staff and the school, but otherwise complainants will be kept fully informed of the handling of any complaint.

- 2.5. If a complaint is investigated according to the school's policy but not to the satisfaction of the complainant, who then tries to reopen the same issue, the Chair of the Governing Body will inform them in writing that the procedure has been exhausted and that the matter is now closed. However, if the complainant raises an entirely new, separate complaint, it will be dealt with in accordance with this procedure.
- 2.6. Governors also recognise that complainants may sometimes act out of character in times of stress, anxiety or distress and will make reasonable allowances for this. However, all instances of unacceptable behaviour from a complainant such as harassment, aggressive verbal or physical abuse at any time will be documented and this may result in the complaint being dealt with only through written communication thereafter.

3. Objective and Targets

To be effective our complaints procedure will:

- 3.1. Encourage resolution of problems by informal means wherever possible;
- 3.2. Be easily accessible and publicised, including to third parties who hire school premises;
- 3.3. Be simple to understand and use;
- 3.4. Be impartial;
- 3.5. Be non-adversarial;
- 3.6. Allow swift handling with established time-limits for action and keeping people informed of the progress;
- 3.7. Ensure a full and fair investigation by an independent person where necessary;
- 3.8. Respect people's desire for confidentiality;
- 3.9. Address all the points at issue and provide an effective response and appropriate redress, where necessary and
- 3.10. Provide information to the school's senior management team so that services can be reviewed and, where necessary, improved.

4. Monitoring and review

- 4.1. This policy will next be reviewed in February 2027 and agreed with Governors
- 4.2. The policy is published on the school's website.

5. Procedure

- 5.1. Within Great Western Academy, the Principal has overall responsibility for the operation and management of the school's complaints procedure. In practical terms, the Principal will nominate a member of the Academy's Senior Leadership Team (SLT) as complaints co-ordinator to deal with matters on a day-by-day basis and hold records relating to any complaints received. In the event that the complaint is about the a member of SLT this will be dealt with by the Principal or Chair of the Governing Body. In the event that the complaint is about the Principal this will be dealt with by the Chair of the Governing Body. The Chair of the Governing Body may choose to delegate the handling of the complaint to another member of the Governing Body.
- 5.2. It is expected that attempts will be made to resolve difficulties informally with the form teacher/head of year/tutor before being referred to the member of SLT. The informal stage of the procedure should be exhausted before the matter is referred to the formal stage. If any substantial complaint is made to a member of staff by a parent it should be referred to their line manager or a member of SLT, as appropriate, if it cannot be resolved immediately by the member of staff to the satisfaction of the parent. Complaints from anyone who is not a parent of a pupil currently attending the school should be addressed to the Principal in the first instance.
- 5.3. Whenever a formal complaint is received it will be investigated. At each stage, the person investigating the complaint, usually the member of SLT, makes sure that they:
 - 5.3.1. Establish what has happened so far and who has been involved;

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- 5.3.2. Clarify the nature of the complaint and what remains unresolved;
- 5.3.3. Meet with the complainant or contact them (if unsure or further information is necessary);
- 5.3.4. Clarify what the complainant feels would put things right;
- 5.3.5. Interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish;
- 5.3.6. Conduct the interview with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning
- 5.3.7. Keep notes of the interview.

6. Stages in the procedure

- 6.1. There are three stages in the school's complaints procedure. At each stage in the procedure, we will remain mindful of ways in which a complaint can be resolved. It might be sufficient to acknowledge that the complaint is valid in whole or in part. In addition, it may be appropriate to offer one or more of the following:
 - 6.1.1. An apology
 - 6.1.2. An explanation
 - 6.1.3. An admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better.
 - 6.1.4. An assurance that the event complained of will not recur.
 - 6.1.5. An explanation of the steps that have been taken to ensure that it will not happen again.
 - 6.1.6. An undertaking to review school policies in light of the complaint.
- 6.2. We encourage complainants to state what actions they feel might resolve the problem at any stage. An admission that the school could have handled the situation better is not the same as an admission of negligence.
- 6.3. At all times we will seek to identify areas of agreement between the parties and clarify any misunderstandings that might have occurred because this can create a positive atmosphere in which to discuss any outstanding issues.

7. Stage 1 – Informal – complaint heard by staff member

In this stage, the form tutor/head of year/tutor (but not the subject of the complaint or a governor) will deal with the complaint. Most parents' concerns can be adequately resolved by discussion with the form tutor/head of year/tutor or with another member of staff e.g. an administrator. There may be no need for the complaint to be put in writing, which would formalise matters and may lead parents to feel less prepared to articulate concerns, perhaps because of a fear that such action may prejudice the interests of their child. The complaint should be resolved within five school days. However, if the complainant wishes to take the matter further, they are requested to inform the school in writing either by post or e-mail within five school days. The Principal will be informed and stage 2 will be implemented.

8. Stage 2 – Formal – complaint heard by Member of SLT

- 8.1. If the concern is not met to the complainant's satisfaction at Stage 1, then:
 - 8.1.1. The complainant puts the complaint in writing by letter or e-mail.
 - 8.1.2. The initial recipient of the complaint should refer the matter to the Principal or to a designated member of the school management.
 - 8.1.3. The Principal will assign the handling of the complaint to a member of SLT. They will investigate the circumstances of the complaint and may find it appropriate to ask for written statements from staff or pupils and to call for any relevant documentation. If the complaint is against a member of staff, that member of staff has a right to be given details of the complaint and the opportunity to make representation about it. The person investigating the incident will take these details into account.

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- 8.1.4. The Member of SLT will decide what action is required and respond to the complainant with the outcome of the investigation, normally within ten school working days of receipt of the substance of the complaint. If the Member of SLT is unable to meet this timescale, they will provide the complainant with an update and revised response date. The response may be in writing or by e-mail or at a meeting with the complainant followed by written confirmation of the outcome.
- 8.2. Note: If a complaint concerns the conduct of a member of SLT, stage 2 of the complaints procedure will be led by the Principal or Chair of the Governing Body. If the complaint concerns the Principal, then the matter will be referred to the Chair of Governors. In some circumstances, the school reserves the right to refer the matter to an external body.
- 8.3. The complainant will be informed of his or her right to have the matter referred to the Governors' Complaints Appeal Panel if the outcome of stage 2 is not considered satisfactory or if the complainant considers that the school's procedure has not been followed correctly. The time frame in which any appeal must be lodged in writing is five school days. Any such request by a complainant should be addressed to the Clerk to the Governing Body for the attention of the Chair of Governors and the Governors' Complaints Appeal Panel will be convened.

9. Stage 3: Formal – Governors' Complaint Appeal Panel Meeting

- 9.1. When the Clerk to the Governing Body receives the request for the Governors' Complaints Appeal Panel to meet:
 - 9.1.1. The complainant/parent will be informed by the clerk of the new timescale for the investigation and a written report to be provided – within fourteen working days. (Note: the length of the investigation will depend on the nature of the complaint and other variable factors. If the investigation is likely to exceed fourteen days, the school will set realistic time limits for each action within the stage. Where such further investigations are necessary, new time limits may need to be set and the complainant will be sent details of the new deadline and an explanation for the delay.)
 - 9.1.2. A Governors' Complaints Appeal Panel will be assembled comprising three members, none of whom have any previous connection to the complaint, and one of whom will act as Chair for the meeting. One of the panel members will be independent and will not be involved in the management and running of the Great Western Academy. The meeting will additionally have a Clerk in attendance.
 - 9.1.3. The Clerk will write to the complainant, the Principal, the Chair of the Governing Body and Appeal Panel members giving details of the meeting, requesting copies of any documents to be put before the meeting and the names of any witnesses that either party may wish to attend.
 - 9.1.4. The Clerk will inform the complainant of the right to be accompanied by a friend. The hearing will be on reasonable notice and be held as soon as practicable after receipt of the referral. The procedure at the hearing will be sensitive and appropriate for the circumstances and is at the discretion of the Chair of the Governors' Complaints Appeal Panel.
- 9.2. The Governors' Complaints Appeal Panel needs to take the following points into account:
 - 9.2.1. The hearing is as informal as possible.
 - 9.2.2. Witnesses are only required to attend for the part of the hearing in which they give their evidence.
 - 9.2.3. After introductions, the complainant is invited to explain their complaint, and be followed by their witnesses.
 - 9.2.4. The Member of SLT may question both the complainant and the witnesses after each has spoken.
 - 9.2.5. The Member of SLT is then invited to explain the school's actions and be followed by the school's witnesses.
 - 9.2.6. The complainant may question both the Member of SLT and the witnesses after each has spoken.
 - 9.2.7. The panel may ask questions at any point.
 - 9.2.8. The complainant is then invited to sum up their complaint.
 - 9.2.9. The Member of SLT is then invited to sum up the school's actions and response to the complaint.
 - 9.2.10. Both parties leave together while the panel decides on the issues.

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- 9.2.11. The Chair explains that both parties will hear from the panel within a set time scale.
- 9.3. After the hearing the Clerk will offer copies of the minutes of the meeting to all parties involved in the panel hearing and provide an opportunity for the minutes to be agreed and, if necessary, challenged within five school days so that no additional complaints will arise because of the record of the meeting. The panel can:
- 9.3.1. Dismiss the complaint in whole or in part.
 - 9.3.2. Uphold the complaint in whole or in part.
 - 9.3.3. Decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint.
 - 9.3.4. Recommend changes to the school's procedures to ensure that similar problems do not recur.
- 9.4. The Governors' Appeal Panel's decision is final.
- 9.5. A copy of the findings and recommendations of the panel will be sent by letter or electronic mail to the complainant and, where relevant, to the person complained about, and will be available for inspection on the school premises via the Principal.
- 9.6. If, despite following appropriate procedures, the complainant remains dissatisfied, or tries to reopen the same issue, the Chair of Governors will inform them in writing that the procedure has been exhausted and that the matter is now closed.
- 9.7. If the complainant believes the school did not handle their complaint in accordance with the published complaints procedure or they acted unlawfully or unreasonably in the exercise of their duties under education law, they can contact the Department for Education after they have completed Stage 3. The Department for Education will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by Great Western Academy. They will consider whether Great Western Academy has adhered to education legislation and any statutory policies connected with the complaint. The complainant can refer their complaint to the Department for Education online at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus, by telephone on: 0370 000 2288 or by writing to:
- Department for Education
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD.