Wolsey House Primary School

Managing Serial and Unreasonable Complaints and Unacceptable Behaviour Policy

Policy date: October 2026

Policy review date: October 2027

Together we grow, achieve and thrive.

1. Policy Principles

Wolsey House Primary School is committed to dealing with concerns and complaints fairly, impartially and in accordance with its published Complaints Policy. Most concerns can be resolved through open, respectful communication. Very occasionally, the frequency, nature or manner of contact may become unreasonable, abusive, threatening or so disruptive that it affects the school's ability to investigate the complaint, educate pupils, safeguard the school community or carry out its normal work.

This policy explains how the school may manage those circumstances. It applies to anyone communicating with the school, including parents, carers, former pupils, members of the public and representatives acting on their behalf.

In applying this policy, the school will:

- separate the substance of a complaint from the behaviour or method of communication used;
- remain fair, objective and focused on evidence;
- not regard a person as unreasonable simply because they are persistent, disagree with the school or use the stages of the Complaints Policy;
- take account of the context, frequency, impact and seriousness of the behaviour;
- make reasonable adjustments for disability and consider communication, language and accessibility needs;
- use restrictions only where they are necessary, proportionate, clearly explained and time limited;
- retain a suitable route for essential communication; and
- continue to consider safeguarding concerns, new complaints and materially new information on their merits.

2. What complainants can expect from the school

The school will:

- publish a clear complaints procedure and explain how a concern may be raised;
- listen to the concern, establish the outcome sought and respond within the published timescales, or explain any delay;
- treat complainants with courtesy and respect, maintain appropriate confidentiality and avoid discrimination;
- provide reasons for decisions and identify any remaining route of escalation;
- make reasonable adjustments where required; and
- identify a clear point of contact where this will help communication.

3. The school's expectations of complainants

The school expects anyone raising or pursuing a concern to:

- treat pupils, staff, governors and others with courtesy and respect;
- use the school's published procedures and appropriate channels of communication;
- explain the concern and the outcome sought as clearly as possible;
- provide relevant information honestly and allow the school a reasonable opportunity to respond;
- avoid abusive, threatening, discriminatory, defamatory or intimidating language or behaviour;

- avoid repeatedly contacting several members of staff about the same matter or demanding immediate responses outside reasonable working arrangements;
- respect privacy and not publish confidential or identifying information about pupils, staff or other families; and
- comply with reasonable arrangements for meetings and access to the school site.

Reasonable criticism, robust questioning, disagreement with a decision or a request for escalation under the Complaints Policy will not, by itself, be treated as unacceptable behaviour.

4. What is unreasonable behaviour or a serial complaint?

Behaviour may be considered unreasonable where, because of its nature, frequency, persistence or impact, it obstructs the fair resolution of a complaint, places disproportionate demands on school resources, or causes an unacceptable risk or impact to pupils, staff or the school community.

4.1 Examples of unreasonable behaviour

Examples may include, but are not limited to:

- refusing to identify the substance of a complaint or the outcome sought, despite reasonable help;
- refusing to cooperate with the published procedure while expecting the complaint to be resolved;
- insisting on dealing only with a particular person where this is not appropriate;
- changing the basis of the complaint or introducing unrelated matters as the process proceeds;
- making excessive demands on staff time through frequent, lengthy, repetitive or multi-channel contact;
- repeatedly raising substantially the same issues after they have been considered and a final response has been provided;
- making unjustified complaints about staff involved in handling the matter or attempting to have them replaced without proper reason;
- providing information known to be false, or refusing to accept reliable documentary evidence;
- using abusive, offensive, discriminatory, intimidating or threatening language or behaviour;
- recording or publishing meetings or communications in a way that breaches privacy, data protection or safeguarding expectations;
- publishing identifying or confidential information about pupils, families or staff; or
- pursuing a complaint in a way that causes significant and unjustified disruption, even where the original concern may be legitimate.

4.2 Serial or persistent complaints

A complaint may be described as serial or persistent when substantially the same issue continues to be raised after it has been considered through the appropriate stages, a clear final response has been given and any available escalation route has been explained. The description applies to the pattern of contact or complaint, not to the person.

A complaint will not be treated as serial merely because it is strongly expressed, remains unresolved in the complainant's view, or is escalated in accordance with the Complaints Policy.

4.3 Duplicate complaints and complaint campaigns

Where the school receives a duplicate complaint from a spouse, partner, relative or other person about the same subject, it may explain that the matter is already being considered and, where appropriate and lawful, provide the published outcome. Each person's right to raise a genuinely separate concern will be respected.

Where many people submit complaints about the same subject, the school may use a proportionate coordinated response, such as a standard reply or publication on its website, while protecting confidential and personal information. This will be managed in accordance with the Complaints Policy.

5. Managing serial and unreasonable complaints and unacceptable behaviour

5.1 Initial assessment and informal resolution

The school will first consider the circumstances, the impact of the behaviour, any disability or communication need, and whether additional explanation, a named contact, mediation or another reasonable adjustment could resolve the difficulty. The complaint itself should continue to be addressed through the Complaints Policy wherever this can be done safely and fairly.

Unless the behaviour presents an immediate or serious risk, the school will normally discuss the concern with the complainant and explain what needs to change before imposing a restriction.

5.2 Written warning

If unreasonable behaviour continues, the school will normally issue a written warning. This will identify the behaviour of concern, explain its impact, state the standard expected, offer any appropriate support or adjustment, and describe the restrictions that may follow if the behaviour continues.

5.3 Formal decision and possible restrictions

Where a restriction is necessary, the decision will be confirmed in writing. The letter will state:

- the behaviour and evidence considered;
- the reasons for the decision;
- the nature and scope of the restriction;
- how essential and safeguarding communication can continue;
- the start date, duration and review date;
- any reasonable adjustments made; and
- how the person may make written representations about the restriction.

Depending on the circumstances, proportionate arrangements may include:

- a single named point of contact;
- contact through a designated email address or in writing only;
- reasonable limits on the frequency, timing, length or subject of communications;
- a consolidated response rather than separate replies to repeated messages;
- meetings by prior appointment, at an agreed location and with a second member of staff present;
- communication through an agreed representative or advocate;
- ending a telephone call or meeting if abusive, threatening or discriminatory behaviour continues after a clear warning; or

- declining further substantive responses on a complaint that has completed the procedure, subject to section 5.7.

5.4 Who makes the decision

The Headteacher will normally decide whether this policy should be applied. Where the complaint concerns the Headteacher, or the Headteacher has a conflict of interest, the Chair of Governors will decide. Where the Chair is involved or has a conflict of interest, the Vice-Chair or another impartial governor will decide.

Where possible, a person who has made or reviewed a restriction will not sit on a later complaints panel if their prior involvement could reasonably call the panel's impartiality into question.

5.5 Threatening, abusive or violent behaviour

The school has a duty to protect pupils, staff and visitors. A call or meeting may be ended immediately where behaviour creates a safety risk. In an emergency, where there is immediate danger or a crime is in progress, the police will be contacted using 999. For non-emergency concerns, the school may seek advice or report the matter through the appropriate police, local authority or legal route. Affected staff will be offered appropriate support and incidents will be recorded.

5.6 Restricting access to the school site

A parent or carer does not have an automatic right to enter school premises. Where conduct gives the school reasonable grounds to consider restricting access, the school will follow current Department for Education guidance on controlling access to school premises.

Except where an immediate temporary restriction is necessary to protect safety, the person will normally receive written notice of the proposed restriction and a reasonable opportunity to make representations. Any decision will be confirmed in writing, give reasons, state its duration and review date, and explain how representations may be made. A restriction on site access will not prevent the child from attending school or the parent or carer from receiving essential information about the child.

5.7 When the school may stop substantive responses

The school may decide that it will not provide further substantive responses about a particular complaint only where:

- every reasonable step has been taken to address the complaint under the published procedure;
- the school has clearly explained its position and any remaining external options; and
- the complainant continues to raise substantially the same points without significant new information.

The decision and reasons will be provided in writing. Essential operational and safeguarding communication will continue. Any genuinely new complaint, materially different issue or significant new evidence will be considered on its own merits.

5.8 Review and withdrawal of restrictions

Restrictions will be imposed for the shortest reasonable period and reviewed on the date stated in the decision letter, or earlier if circumstances materially change. The review will consider whether

the behaviour and impact have changed, whether the restriction remains necessary and proportionate, and whether it should be lifted, varied or extended. The outcome will be confirmed in writing.

6. Exemptions and communications that will continue

This policy will not be used to prevent or deter:

- a child or adult raising a safeguarding or child protection concern;
- the reporting of an immediate health, safety or welfare risk;
- a new complaint or materially new evidence being considered fairly;
- a person using a remaining stage or external route identified in the Complaints Policy;
- a lawful request under data protection or freedom of information legislation;
- a protected disclosure made under the school's Whistleblowing Policy; or
- necessary communication about attendance, medical needs, SEND, collection arrangements or another essential matter concerning a pupil.

Where contact has been restricted, the school will clearly identify how urgent and essential matters must be communicated.

7. Records, confidentiality and data protection

The school will retain an accurate record of relevant communications, warnings, decisions, reasons, restrictions, representations and reviews. Records will be stored securely, shared only where there is a lawful and legitimate need, and retained in accordance with the school's records-management and data-protection arrangements.

Information about pupils, staff and complainants will be handled confidentially so far as possible. Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed where information must be shared to safeguard a child, investigate alleged wrongdoing, comply with the law or obtain appropriate professional advice.

8. Monitoring and review

The Headteacher will monitor the use of this policy. The Governing Body may receive anonymised information about its use, patterns of behaviour, the effect on staff welfare and school operations, and any learning for policy or practice.

This policy will be reviewed annually, and sooner if legislation, statutory guidance, the school's Complaints Policy or local procedures change.

9. Related policies and guidance

- Complaints Policy, September 2026 (the main procedure);
- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy;
- Staff Code of Conduct and Whistleblowing Policy;
- Equality, Accessibility and Data Protection policies;
- Health and Safety Policy;
- Department for Education, Best practice guidance for school complaints procedures;
- Department for Education, Controlling access to school premises; and
- Department for Education, Preventing and tackling bullying and harassment in schools: guidance for schools and trusts on supporting school staff.