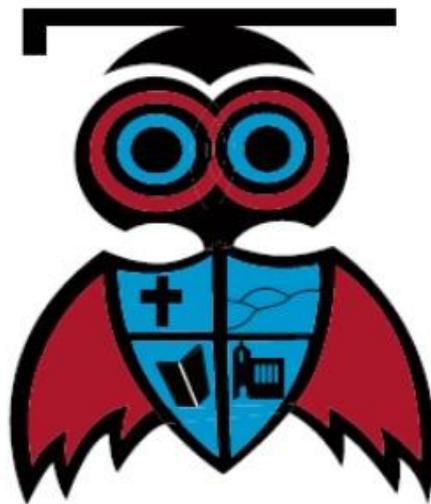


William Alvey Primary School



Complaints Policy and Procedure

This policy is reviewed annually. It is reviewed by our Headteacher at the beginning of each autumn term. It is then ratified by our governing body at their first meeting in the autumn term.

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Statement of intent

The William Alvey CofE School aims to resolve complaints at the earliest possible stage and, where possible, informally. This is crucial if we are to meet our vision aim of ensuring all members of our school community 'live life in all its fullness.'

This policy has been created to handle complaints and concerns about the academy, its provision of facilities or services, any member of staff, individual governors or members of the board of trustees.

The policy is designed to ensure that the academy's complaints procedure is straightforward, impartial, allows a full and fair investigation, respects confidentiality, and delivers an effective response.

This policy outlines the procedure that the complainant and the academy will follow. Once a complaint has been made, it can be resolved or withdrawn at any stage.

1. Legal framework

This policy has due regard to all relevant legislation and guidance including, but not limited to, the following:

- Freedom of Information Act 2000
- Education Act 2002
- Equality Act 2010
- The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014
- Immigration Act 2016
- UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR)
- Data Protection Act 2018
- HM Government (2016) 'Code of Practice on the English language requirement for public sector workers'
- ESFA (2021) 'Best practice guidance for academies complaints procedures'
- ESFA (2025) 'Academy trust handbook 2025'

This policy operates in conjunction with the following school policies:

- Admissions Policy
- Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy
- Behaviour Policy
- Whistleblowing Policy
- Data Protection Policy

2. Definitions

For the purpose of this policy, a “**complaint**” is defined as ‘an expression of dissatisfaction’ towards the actions taken or a perceived lack of action. Complaints can be resolved formally or informally.

A “**concern**” is defined as ‘an expression of worry or doubt’ where reassurance is required.

Any complaint or concern will be taken seriously, whether raised formally or informally, and the appropriate procedures will be implemented.

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 complaints procedure. Concerns will be treated extremely seriously and every effort will be made to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.

If an individual has difficulty discussing a concern with a particular member of staff, a different member of staff will be nominated. Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels unable to deal with a concern, the concern will be referred to another member of staff. The member of staff may be more senior but does not have to be. The concern will be treated objectively and impartially.

The school will recognise that there are occasions when people would prefer to raise their concerns formally. In this case, there will be attempts to resolve the issue internally, through the stages outlined within this complaints procedure.

The definition of “**unreasonable complaints**” is outlined in the ‘Managing unreasonable complaints’ section of this policy.

For the purpose of this policy, “**duplicate complaints**” are identical complaints received from a complainant’s spouse, partner or family member. These complaints will not be addressed again

and the individual making the second complaint will be informed that the complaint has been dealt with. If the individual is dissatisfied with the result, they can appeal to the ESFA, as outlined in 'The role of the ESFA' subsection of this policy. Any new details provided by a complainant's spouse, partner or child, however, will be investigated and managed in line with the complaints procedure.

For the purpose of this policy, "**complaints campaigns**" are where the academy receives large volumes of complaints that are all based on the same subject.

For the purposes of this policy, having "independence" from the academy is defined as having no association with the academy, including through being a member, trustee or employee, and having no clear connection with any part of the academy. Independent panel members will meet the academy's and ESFA's definition of independence.

3. Making a complaint

Complaints are expected to be made as soon as possible after an incident arises and within three months of the incident or, where there a series of associated incidents have occurred, within three months of the last of these incidents. Complaints made outside this time limit will be considered in exceptional circumstances. In the case of any timescales changing, all parties involved will be informed of the changes in a timely manner. Complaints received outside of term time will be treated as being received on the first school day after the holiday period.

All complainants will be given the opportunity to fully complete the complaints procedure.

Complaints about academy staff or governors

Complaints against staff, excluding the headteacher, will:

- Be dealt with by the headteacher via the school office or direct to the headteacher via email (head.teacher@william-alvey.lincs/sch.uk). All correspondence should be marked as Private and Confidential.
- Follow the complaints procedure.

Complaints that involve or are about the headteacher will:

- Be dealt with by the chair of governors via their email - chair@william-alvey.lincs.sch.uk
- Follow the complaints procedure.

Complaints against governors or members of the board of trustees will:

- Be made in writing to the clerk (clerk@william-alvey.lincs.sch.uk), marked as private and confidential, who will arrange for them to be heard.
- Be dealt with by the chair of trustees.
- Potentially involve escalation to conduct an investigation – this will be handled by the Chair of governors.

Complaints against the Chair of Governors will:

- Be made in writing to the clerk marked as private and confidential, who will determine the most appropriate course of action dependent on the nature of the complaint.

4. Roles and responsibilities

The complainant will be responsible for:

- Cooperating with the academy in seeking a solution to the complaint.
- Expressing the complaint and their concerns in full at the earliest opportunity.
- Promptly responding to any requests for information and meetings.
- Asking for assistance as needed.
- Treating anyone involved in the complaint with respect.
- Respecting confidentiality.

The role of the investigator will differ depending on the nature of the complaint and who it is directed at. This means that:

- For complaints against staff, the investigator will be the headteacher.
- For complaints against the headteacher, the investigator will be the chair of governors.
- For complaints against governors or members of the board of trustees, the investigator will be the chair of governors.
- For complaints against the chair of governors, the clerk will appoint an appropriate person to be the investigator.

The investigator of the complaint will be responsible for:

- Considering all records, evidence and relevant information provided.
- Interviewing all parties that are involved in the complaint, including staff and pupils, where appropriate.
- Conducting interviews with an open mind and being prepared to persist in the questioning of those involved.
- Analysing all information in a comprehensive and fair manner.
- Liaising with the complainant and clarifying an appropriate resolution to the problem.
- Identifying and recommending solutions and courses of actions to take.
- Being mindful of timescales and ensuring all parties involved are aware of these timescales.
- Responding to the complainant in a clear and understandable manner.

Where complaints are escalated to an independent and impartial panel hearing, the complete, legally compliant, procedure will be provided to panel members and the complainant.

The role of the ESFA

If a complainant remains dissatisfied once the complaint procedure has been completed, they have the right to refer their complaint to the Secretary of State. If a complainant wishes to escalate a complaint, the academy will refer them to the relevant [contact form](#), and prompt them to follow the instructions on this form to submit a complaint to the Secretary of State.

The ESFA will not overturn the academy or panel's decision about a complaint or re-investigate the original complaint. The ESFA will only intervene following a complaint if it believes the academy has:

- Breached a clause in its funding agreement.
- Failed to comply with education law or acted unreasonably when exercising related education functions.

When making a final decision about a complaint, the academy reserves the right to seek advice from the ESFA on whether they are acting reasonably and lawfully; however, they will not be able to advise on how to resolve the complaint.

5. Complaints procedure

The academy will ensure that the complaints procedure is:

- Easily accessible and publicised on its website.
- Simple to understand and put into practice.
- Impartial and fair to all parties involved.
- Respectful of confidentiality duties.
- Continuously under improvement.
- Fairly investigated, by an independent person where necessary.
- Used to address all issues to provide appropriate and effective responses where necessary.

The stages of a complaint

- **Informal** – which will usually come in the form of a meeting between a representative of the academy and the complainant.
- **Formal** – where the complaint is put in writing to the academy.
- **Panel hearing** – where the panel includes at least three people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint and one person who is independent of the management and running of the academy.

At each stage, complainants will be informed of their options for escalation if they are unsatisfied with the outcome of their complaint. .

To prevent later challenge or disagreement over what was said in any in-person meetings or telephone conversations at any stage of the procedure, brief notes will be kept, and a copy of any written response will be added to the record of the complaint. Notes and paper copies of any complaints and/or responses are kept securely on our ICT system.

Stage one – informal complaint

An informal complaint may be made in person, by telephone or in writing.

Where a complaint has been made about a member of staff, the complainant can discuss the concern with the headteacher, or a person delegated to hear the complaint on their behalf, to

seek support. If the concern is about the headteacher, the chair of governors should be informed and will need to handle the complaint.

Where a complaint is made initially to a governor, the complainant will be referred to the appropriate person. No member of staff or governor will act alone on a complaint outside of the procedure; if they do, they cannot be involved if the complaint is subject to a hearing at a later stage of the procedure.

Within 10 school days of notification of the complaint, the complainant and the relevant member of staff should discuss the issue in a respectful and informal manner to seek a mutual resolution.

At this initial communication stage of the complaint, the complainant will be asked for their input as to what they believe may resolve the issue about which the complaint has been made to avoid further escalation where possible.

In line with ESFA guidance, complainants should note that any acknowledgement by the school that it could have handled the situation better is not an admission of unlawful or negligent action.

If an appropriate resolution cannot be sought at this informal level, or if the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome following the initial discussions, the person managing the response to the complaint will inform the complainant about the next level of the procedure.

Stage two – formal complaint

Formal complaints must be made in writing.

Stage two of the process will be completed within 15 school days. Where the situation is recognised as complex, and it is deemed to be unable to be resolved within this timescale, the person managing the complaint will contact the complainant to inform them of the revised target date via a written notification.

If the complaint is against the headteacher, the complainant will initially need to write, in confidence, to the chair of governors.

In terms of a complaint being made against a member of staff, the headteacher will discuss the issue with the staff member in question. Where necessary, the headteacher will conduct interviews with any relevant parties, including witnesses and pupils, and take statements from those involved. All discussions shall be recorded by the headteacher.

Once all facts are established, the person handling the complaint shall contact the complainant in writing with an explanation of the decision.

The complainant may request copies of minutes, subject to any necessary redactions under the Data Protection Act 2018 and the UK GDPR. Any further action the trust plans to take to resolve the issue will be explained to the complainant in writing.

If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome suggested, the procedure will progress to stage three. A request to escalate to stage three will be made to the clerk to the chair of governors within 10 school days of the end of stage two, i.e. communication of an outcome.

Stage three – panel hearing

Where the complaint progresses to stage three, a panel will be constituted to hear the complaint, consisting of at least three individuals who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint, and at least one independent panel member. The independent panel member will not be a member, trustee or employee of the academy. The academy will also ensure the independent panel member does not have any clear connection with the school.

The clerk will record the date the escalation request was received, acknowledge receipt of the complaint, and inform the complainant of the scheduled time and date of the panel hearing in writing. The meeting will be convened within 15 school days of the receipt of the escalation request where possible. Where this is not possible, the clerk will provide an anticipated date and ensure the complainant is kept up-to-date.

5 school days' notice will be given to all parties attending the panel hearing, including the complainant.

Prior to the hearing, the clerk will have written to the complainant informing them of how the review will be conducted. The headteacher and the chair of governors will also have a copy of this letter.

At the hearing, all participants will be given the opportunity to put their case across and discuss any issues. The meeting will allow for:

- The complainant to be present and accompanied at the hearing if they wish.
- The complainant to explain their complaint and the individual handling the complaint to explain the reasons for their decision.
- The complainant to question the individual handling the complaint, and vice versa, about the complaint.
- Any evidence, including witnesses who have been prior approved by the chair of the panel, to be questioned.

- Members of the panel to question both the complainant and the individual about whom the complaint was made.
- Final statements to be made by both parties involved.

Neither the complainant nor the academy will bring legal representation to this hearing, unless in exceptional circumstances, where this will be agreed beforehand. A member of staff who may be a witness to the complaint can bring a union representative or legal representative if desired; this will be agreed before the hearing.

The purpose of the hearing will be reconciliation and ensuring that things that may have gone wrong are corrected.

The complainant will receive a written response explaining the panel's findings and recommendations within 15 school days. This letter will also explain whether there are any further rights of appeal and to whom they need to be addressed.

The panel will make findings and recommendations, and a copy of those findings and recommendations will be made available for inspection on the academy premises by governors, board members and the headteacher.

Where relevant, the person complained about will receive a summary of the panel's findings and recommendations. They will also receive a copy of the minutes, subject to any necessary redactions under the Data Protection Act 2018 and the UK GDPR.

Complaints to the ESFA

If a complainant has exhausted the trust's complaints procedure, they will be advised that they can submit a complaint to the ESFA via its [webpage](#) or by writing to:

Complaints Team

Education and Skills Funding Agency

Cheylesmore House

Coventry

Quinton Road

Coventry

CV1 2WT

Resolving complaints

At each stage of the complaints procedure, the academy is committed to resolving the complaint. Where appropriate, the academy will acknowledge that the complaint is upheld in whole or in part.

Withdrawal of a complaint

Where a complainant wishes to withdraw their complaint, the academy will ask them to confirm this in writing. The academy will not under any circumstances ask, or pressure an individual, to withdraw a complaint.

Record keeping

A written record will be kept of all complaints that are made, regardless of the stage at which they are resolved, including any action taken by the trust as a result of those complaints whether they are upheld or not.

All correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or an inspectorate requests access to them.

Academies are data controllers in their own right and must decide for themselves how long to keep records, unless statutory regulations apply, e.g. attendance records must be kept for 3 years. The trust will retain records of complaints and related documents in line with the Data Protection Policy and Records Management Policy. Personal data will only be kept for as long as necessary.

6. Interviewing witnesses

When interviewing pupils to gather information regarding a complaint, the interview should be conducted in the presence of another member of staff or, in the case of serious complaints, e.g. where the possibility of criminal investigation exists, in the presence of their parents. All pupils interviewed will be made fully aware of what the interview concerns and their right to have someone with them.

The academy will ensure that the conduction of interviews does not prejudice an investigation by the LA designated officer (LADO) or police.

The academy understands the importance of ensuring a friendly and relaxed area which is free from intimidation. Staff are allowed a colleague to support them at their interview. The colleague must not be anyone likely to be interviewed themselves, including their line manager. The

interviewer will not express opinions in words or attitude, so as to not influence the interviewee. The interviewee will sign a copy of the transcription of the interview.

7. Recording a complaint

A written record shall be kept of any complaint made, whether made via phone, in person or in writing, detailing:

- The main issues raised, the findings and any recommendations.
- Whether the complaint was resolved following an informal route, formal route or panel hearing.
- Actions taken by the academy as a result of the complaint (regardless of whether the complaint was upheld).
- All records are made available for inspection on the academy premises by the academy.

The academy holds the right to use recording devices, where appropriate, to ensure all parties involved are able to review the discussions at a later date. Where there are communication difficulties or disabilities, the trust may provide recording devices to ensure the complainant is able to access and review the discussions at a later point. Recording devices will not be used without the prior consent of all parties.

The academy will not accept as evidence any recordings that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.

Details of any complaint made shall not be shared with the entire board of governors. The exception to this is when a complaint is made against the whole board and they need to be aware of the allegations made against them to respond to any independent investigation.

Complainants have a right to access copies of these records under the UK GDPR and the Freedom of Information Act 2000. The academy will hold all records of complaints on its 'complaints log'. The complaints log will record complaints that move to either stage 2 or 3. Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints are kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection requests to access them.

8. Exceptional circumstances

The ESFA expects complainants to have completed the trust's complaints procedure before directing a complaint to them. The exceptions to this include when:

- Pupils are at risk of harm.
- Pupils are missing education.
- A complainant can prove that the academy:
 - Does not have a complaints procedure.
 - Did not provide a copy of the complaints procedure when requested.
 - Does not have a procedure that complies with the statutory regulations.
 - Has not followed its published complaints procedure.
 - Has not allowed its complaints procedure to be completed.
- A complainant is being prevented from having their complaint progressed through the trust's complaints procedure.
- The ESFA has evidence that the trust is proposing to act or is acting unlawfully or unreasonably.

If a social services authority decides to investigate a situation, the board of trustees may postpone the complaints procedure.

9. Managing unreasonable complaints

The academy is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, and to providing a high-quality service to those who complain. The academy will not normally limit the contact complainants have with the academy itself; however, the academy does not expect staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour and will take action to protect staff from such behaviour, including that which is abusive, offensive or threatening.

For the purposes of this policy, "unreasonable complaints" include:

- Vexatious complaints, which:
 - Are obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific, or repetitious.

- Insist upon pursuing unmeritorious complaints and/or unrealistic outcomes beyond all reason.
- Insist upon pursuing meritorious complaints in an unreasonable manner.
- Are designed to cause disruption or annoyance.
- Demand for redress which lacks any serious purpose or value.
- Serial or persistent complaints, which:
 - Are duplicated, sent by the same complainant once the initial complaint has been closed.
 - Are new complaints that are submitted additionally, as part of an existing open complaint, by the same complainant.

A complaint may also be regarded as unreasonable when 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 cooperate with the complaints investigation process while still wishing their complaint to be resolved.
- Refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of a complaints procedure.
- Insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the adopted complaints procedure or with good practice.
- Introduces trivial or irrelevant information which they expect to be taken into account and commented on, or 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 complaints procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed, including referral to the ESFA.
- Seeks an unrealistic outcome.
- Makes excessive demands on school time by frequent, lengthy, complicated and stressful contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with.

A complaint may also be considered unreasonable if the complainant:

- Acts maliciously or aggressively.
- Uses threats, intimidation or violence.
- Uses abusive, offensive or discriminatory language.
- Knows the complaint to be false.
- Uses falsified information.
- Publishes unacceptable information in media such as social media websites and newspapers.

The above applies regardless of the method the complaint is made, e.g. face-to-face, by telephone, in writing or electronically. Whenever possible, the member of staff or governor leading the response to a complaint will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying an 'unreasonable' marking.

Complainants should limit the number of communications while a complaint is being progressed. It is not helpful if repeated correspondence is sent, either by letter, phone or email, as it could delay the outcome being reached.

For complainants who excessively contact the academy causing a significant level of disruption, the academy may specify methods of communication. .

A decision to stop responding will only be considered in circumstances where the following statements are true:

- Every reasonable step has been taken to address the complainant's concerns
- The complainant has been given a clear statement of the trust's position and their options

- The complainant contacts the academy repeatedly, making substantially the same points each time

10. Complaints campaigns

Where the trust becomes the subject of a complaints campaign from complainants who are not connected with the academy, a standard, single response will be published on the academy's website.

If the academy receives a large number of complaints about the same subject from complainants who are connected to the academy, e.g. parents, each complainant will receive an individual response. If complainants remain dissatisfied with the academy's response, they will be directed to the ESFA.

11. Barring from the premises

School premises are private property and, therefore, any individual may be barred from entering the premises. If an individual's behaviour is cause for concern, the headteacher will ask the individual to leave the premises.

The headteacher will notify the parties involved in writing, explaining that their implied licence for access to the premises has been temporarily revoked and why, subject to any representations that the individual may wish to make. The individual involved will be given the opportunity to formally express their views regarding the decision to bar them.

This decision to bar will be reviewed by the chair of governors where escalated, taking into account any discussions following the incident. If the decision is made to continue the bar, the individual will be contacted in writing, informing them of how long the bar will be in place, and when the decision will be reviewed.

Anyone wishing to make a complaint regarding a barring order can do so in writing, including via email, to the headteacher or chair of governors.

12. Standard of fluency complaints

As members of a public authority, all staff are subject to the fluency duty imposed by the Immigration Act 2016, which requires staff members to have an appropriate level of fluency in English in order to teach pupils.

The academy is free to determine the level of spoken communication necessary in order for staff members to develop effective performance, but it will be matched to the demands of the role in

question. The academy will be satisfied that an individual has the necessary level of fluency appropriate for the role they will be undertaking, whether this is an existing or potential new member of staff.

If a member of the school community feels that a staff member has insufficient proficiency in spoken English for the performance of their role, they are required to follow the complaints procedure outlined in this policy.

For the purpose of this policy, a **“legitimate complaint”** is one which is about the standard of spoken English of a member of staff; complaints regarding an individual’s accent, dialect, manner or tone of communication are not considered legitimate complaints. All legitimate complaints regarding the fluency duty will be handled in line with the processes detailed in this policy.

13. Transferring data

When a pupil changes school, the pupil’s educational record will be transferred to the new school and no copies will be kept.

The academy will hold records of complaints separate to pupil records while a complaint is ongoing, so that access to these records can be maintained. Information that the academy retains relating to a complaint will be stored securely.

14. Availability

A copy of this policy will be made available on request. It will also be published on the academy’s website, as recommended by the ESFA.

15. Monitoring and review

The complaints procedure will be reviewed annually, taking into account any legislative changes and the latest guidance issued by the DfE or ESFA. This policy is routinely reviewed at each autumn term governors’ meeting.