



Wessex
Learning Trust

We Learn Together

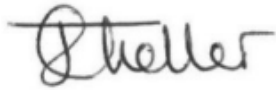
Complaints Policy



Wessex Learning Trust

Complaints Policy

This policy will be reviewed by the Board of Trustees every three years.

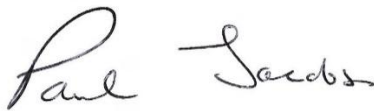


Signature:

Name: Mrs Jayne Keller

Position: Chief Executive

Date: 24/09/2026



Signature:

Name: Mr Paul Jacobs

Position: Chair of the Board

Date: 24/09/2026

Date approved by Trust Board: September 2026

Review Date: September 2029

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1.Introduction

Wessex Learning Trust aims to resolve concerns and complaints fairly, promptly, and constructively. This policy applies to concerns or complaints about any school within the Trust and sets out a clear procedure to resolve issues.

The Trust's aim is to resolve complaints at school level wherever possible. Complaints about day-to-day school matters, teaching, pastoral care, or whole-school processes should always start with the Headteacher or appropriate senior leader.

Central Trust involvement is reserved for complaints about central functions, governance issues, procedural errors, or complaints about central staff. The Trust will not normally investigate complaints that lack material impact, are clearly frivolous, or are primarily intended to harass or disrupt staff, unless there is a safeguarding or statutory concern. This ensures concerns are dealt with promptly and at the level best placed to resolve them.

2. Principles

This policy aims to:

- Encourage early resolution of concerns through informal means
- Provide a clear, accessible, and fair process for complaints
- Respect confidentiality and ensure impartial investigation
- Learn from complaints to improve Trust practice

All parties involved in the complaints process are expected to act reasonably, respect confidentiality, and engage constructively in resolving concerns.

3. Definitions

- **Concern:** Expression of worry or doubt for which reassurance is sought
- **Complaint:** Expression of dissatisfaction about an action, decision, or lack of action

4. Scope

This policy covers complaints about any provision or services by Wessex Learning Trust and its schools, except for matters handled under other statutory procedures (see section 5).

4.1 Complaints handled at school level

All complaints about day-to-day school operations, teaching, pastoral care, provision for pupils with SEND, or whole-school processes should start with the Headteacher or relevant senior school leader. The Trust central team will not normally investigate complaints about matters that fall within the school's day-to-day responsibility. Examples include, but are not limited to:

- Decisions about student behaviour or pastoral support (excluding procedural errors in governance or central oversight)
- Timetabling, teaching methods, or classroom management
- Trust-wide or school-wide policies or routines implemented by the Headteacher or senior staff

4.2 SEND complaints

Complaints relating to SEND provision, including SEN Support, reasonable adjustments, or the implementation of an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), must be raised and considered at school level in the first instance, normally through the school SENDCo and Headteacher, in accordance with Stages 1 and 2 of this policy.

The Trust central team will not normally consider complaints about SEND provision unless the school-level complaints process has been completed and the complaint raises a Trust-wide, systemic, or procedural issue.

The Trust does not intervene in individual SEND case management where the school is meeting its statutory duties and following this Complaints Policy.

Disagreement with the content of an EHCP, placement decisions, or matters for the Local Authority fall outside this Complaints Policy and are subject to separate statutory processes.

5. Exceptions to the Complaints Policy

Exception	Who to contact
Admissions to schools	Through the appeals process or local authority
Child protection concerns	Managed under the school's safeguarding policy and relevant statutory guidance (e.g., LADO involvement)
EHCP content or specified provision	Relevant Local Authority
Exclusion of children from school	Handled under the Exclusion Policy and statutory guidance; Note: complaints about the application of the Behaviour Policy may follow the normal complaints procedure
Staff grievances	Managed under the Trust's internal grievance procedures
Staff conduct	Managed under the Trust's internal disciplinary procedures
Whistleblowing	Through the internal whistleblowing procedure; external referrals to the Department for Education may apply

6. Raising a Concern or Complaint

- Concerns should be addressed first to the relevant staff member (e.g. class teacher, tutor, or pastoral leader).
- Complaints about day-to-day school matters, including teaching, pastoral care, SEND provision or whole-school processes, should first be raised with the **Headteacher**.
- Where a complaint is submitted directly to the Trust without following this stage, it will normally be referred back to the school in line with this policy.

- Complaints can be made in writing, in person, or by phone, and can involve a third party with consent.
- Complaints about the Headteacher, central Trust staff, or Trustees should be raised with the Chief Executive (for Headteacher/central staff) or Chair of Trustees (for Trustees).

7. Timeframes

- Complaints must be raised within three months of the incident or last related incident.
- Exceptions may be considered where it is reasonable to do so, taking into account the circumstances of the complaint.
- Complaints received outside term time are considered received on the first school day after holidays.

8. Stages of complaint

The Trust aims to resolve complaints in a clear, fair and supportive way. The following stages explain clearly what will happen when a complaint is made and how it will be considered.

Stage 1: Informal Resolution

- The purpose of this stage is to resolve concerns quickly and informally wherever possible. Most concerns can be resolved through discussion without the need for a formal complaint.
- At this stage, the member of staff will seek to understand the concern and may speak with other relevant individuals.
- A response will normally be provided within **15 school days** (this may be verbal or written depending on the nature of the concern).

Stage 2: Formal Complaint to Headteacher or Designate

- If a concern is not resolved informally, it may be progressed to a formal complaint in writing to the Headteacher. Where appropriate, the investigation may be delegated to a senior leader acting on their behalf.
- Complaints should be submitted in writing and, where possible, the Trust encourages the use of the complaint form at Appendix 1 to ensure all relevant information is provided. However, complaints will be accepted in other written formats, including email or letter.
- The Headteacher will acknowledge receipt within **5 school days** and will ensure that the complaint is investigated.
- The investigation may be carried out by the Headteacher or by a designated senior leader acting on their behalf. The investigation may include:
 - Reviewing relevant documentation
 - Meeting with the complainant to clarify concerns
 - Interviewing staff or other individuals involved
 - Establishing the facts and determining whether the complaint is upheld in whole or in part
- A written response will normally be issued within **20 school days**, setting out:
 - The findings
 - The decision

- The reasons for that decision
 - Any actions to be taken
- The response will also explain how the complainant may escalate the complaint if they remain dissatisfied.

Stage 3: Formal Complaint to the Local Partnership Board (LPB)

- If Stage 2 does not resolve the complaint, it may be submitted to the Local Partnership Board within **5 school days** of the Stage 2 response. Late submissions will only be considered in exceptional circumstances.
- The complainant should clearly set out the reasons for escalation and why they remain dissatisfied with the Stage 2 outcome.

Stage 3A: Initial Review

- On receipt of the Stage 3 request, the Chair of the Local Partnership Board (or a nominated Local Partnership Board member acting on their behalf), with support from the Clerk will undertake an initial review of the complaint.
- This review will determine whether:
 - the complaint falls within the scope of this policy,
 - earlier stages of the process have been completed appropriately,
 - any further clarification or information is required before the complaint proceeds,
 - a panel hearing is required to consider the complaint further.
- This is a **procedural review** and does not determine the outcome of the complaint.
- Following this review, the Chair of the Local Partnership Board (or a nominated Local Partnership Board member acting on their behalf), may determine that:
 - the complaint will proceed to a panel hearing; or
 - the complaint will not proceed to a panel hearing because:
 - the complaint falls outside the scope of this policy;
 - the earlier stages of the complaints procedure have not been completed;
 - the matters raised have already been considered and addressed through this complaints procedure;
 - the complaint does not raise any new information, evidence, or material procedural concerns that would warrant further consideration by a panel; or
 - the complaint has been determined to be serial, persistent, or unreasonable in accordance with this policy.
- The complainant will be informed in writing of the outcome of this review and the next steps.
- Any individuals involved in the Stage 3A review will not take part in the Stage 3B panel hearing.

Stage 3B: Panel Hearing

- Where a panel hearing is required, a panel of at least three individuals with no prior involvement in the complaint will be convened. At least one panel member will be independent of the management and running of the school concerned and will have had no previous involvement in the matter.
- The panel will normally consist of members of the Local Partnership Board. Where this is not possible due to availability, capacity, or conflicts of interest, the Trust may appoint alternative

suitably qualified individuals. This may include Local Partners from other schools, Trustees, or governors from another academy trust.

- A Clerk will support the panel to ensure the process is fair, consistent, and in line with this policy.
- A hearing will be held to allow both the complainant and the school to present their case.
- At the hearing:
 - The complainant may attend and may be accompanied
 - The school will be represented by the Headteacher or a designated member of staff
 - Panel members may ask questions to clarify the issues
- The hearing is private, not a legal proceeding, and will be conducted in a fair and impartial manner.
- Following consideration of all evidence, the panel will reach a decision. The outcome may be:
 - The complaint is upheld in whole or in part
 - The complaint is not upheld
- Where appropriate, the panel may recommend actions, improvements, or changes to systems and procedures.
- The complainant will receive a written outcome within **5 school days** of the hearing, explaining the panel's decision and the reasons for it.

9. Exceptional review by Trust Central Team

In rare cases, the Trust Board or Executive Team may review whether the complaints procedure has been followed correctly. This review is limited to **procedural compliance only** and is not an appeal against the outcome of the complaint.

The Chief Executive will not personally handle all complaints; where appropriate, investigations may be delegated to other Executive leaders.

10. Complaints About Senior Roles (Headteacher, Trustees, Chief Executive)

- A complaint is not “about the Headteacher” simply because the Headteacher is responsible for the school, or the complainant is dissatisfied with a decision made under the Headteacher's authority.
- A complaint will be treated as being “about the Headteacher” only where the substance of the complaint relates to the Headteacher's **personal conduct, actions, or decisions**, rather than the actions of other staff or the general operation of the school.
- Complaints that relate to teaching, pastoral care, behaviour management, timetabling, communication, SEND provision, or the implementation of school policies must be raised and considered at school level, even if the Headteacher has overall responsibility.
- The Trust reserves the right to redirect complaints to the appropriate school where this policy has not been followed.
- Legitimate complaints about the personal conduct, actions, or decisions of the Headteacher or central Trust staff should be raised with the Chief Executive, via the office of the Chief Executive at office@wessexlearningtrust.co.uk. The Chief Executive may investigate personally or, where

appropriate, delegate the investigation to another senior Executive leader to ensure impartiality and timely resolution.

Complaints about senior roles follow the same three-stage process as outlined in Section 8 with appropriate adjustments to ensure independence:

- Stage 1: Informal discussion
- Stage 2: Formal investigation, led by the Chief Executive or their designate (for complaints about Headteachers or central staff) or by an appropriate panel of Trustees (for complaints about the Chief Executive)
- Stage 3A: Initial review by the Chair of the Trust Board (or nominated Trustee acting on their behalf), with support from the Governance Professional), to determine whether a panel hearing is required
- Stage 3B: Panel hearing, where required, conducted by a panel of Trustees with no prior involvement in the complaint

11. Anonymous, Late, Vexatious or Trivial Complaints

- Anonymous complaints will usually not be investigated unless safeguarding or criminal concerns exist.
- Late complaints may be declined if more than three months have passed unless exceptional circumstances exist.

11.1 Vexatious Complaints

The Trust aims to deal with all complaints fairly and impartially. However, on rare occasions, a complainant may act in a way that is abusive, unreasonable, or persistent, which places a disproportionate burden on staff or disrupts the complaints process.

A complaint may be considered vexatious or unreasonable if, for example:

- It is repeated and has already been investigated and concluded.
- It is malicious or intended to harass staff or the school.
- It demands unrealistic outcomes or escalates unnecessarily.
- It refuses to accept that certain issues are outside the Trust's remit or statutory responsibility.

Handling Vexatious Complaints

The Headteacher or Chief Executive (depending on level) may determine that a complaint is vexatious. The complainant will be informed in writing of the decision and the reasons.

The Trust may:

- Refuse to respond to repeated correspondence on the same matter.
- Limit communication channels (e.g., requiring contact via one designated point).
- Close the complaint where further action is not proportionate.

This is done to protect staff time and maintain a fair complaints process for all stakeholders. Vexatious complaints will still be logged and retained for records.

11.2 Trivial Complaints

The Trust will not normally investigate complaints that are considered trivial or lacking substance, meaning they:

- Relate to minor matters that do not affect the wellbeing or education of pupils.
- Have no significant impact on school operations.
- Are primarily about personal disagreements rather than actionable concerns.

Such complaints may be acknowledged in writing but will not proceed through the formal complaints process. This approach ensures the Trust and schools can focus resources on genuine and substantive concerns that impact pupils, staff, or the operation of the school.

12. Complaints campaigns (multiple complaints about the same issue)

On rare occasions, the Trust may receive concerns or complaints from three or more individuals regarding the same issue. Where this occurs, the Trust may treat the matter as a *complaints campaign*.

In these circumstances, the Trust may depart from the usual complaints procedure and instead:

- Issue a single written response to all complainants; and/or
- Publish a single response on the Trust's website.

Where a complaints campaign involves parents or carers of pupils currently attending a Trust academy, complainants will retain the right to request escalation to a Stage 3 complaint panel hearing if they remain dissatisfied with the Trust's response. The Trust will determine the most appropriate arrangements for managing any such hearing.

If complainants remain dissatisfied, they may refer the matter to the Department for Education (DfE). The DfE cannot overturn the Trust's response to a complaints campaign but may consider whether the Trust has followed its published complaints procedures correctly.

13. Referral after exhausting Trust procedures

Once all internal stages are complete, if a complainant believes the Trust has not followed its published complaints process, they may refer the matter to the Department for Education (DfE).

The DfE will consider whether the Trust has followed its procedures but will not normally reconsider the merits of the complaint or overturn the decision reached.

14. Records

The Trust will maintain a written record of each complaint, including:

- The **name of the complainant** (or an indication if anonymous).
- The **date the complaint was received**.
- A **summary of the complaint**, including the nature and subject.
- **Actions taken** to investigate the complaint, including interviews, meetings, and correspondence.
- The **outcome or resolution**, including any remedial actions.
- Details of **any escalation**, including review by the Local Partnership Board, the Trust Board, or referral to the DfE.

15. Confidentiality and Data Protection

- Complaint records are considered **personal data** under the UK Data Protection Act 2018 and GDPR.
- Records will be stored securely in password-protected electronic systems.
- Access to records is **restricted** to staff who are directly involved in handling the complaint.
- Complaint records will **not be disclosed to third parties** except where required by law or statutory inspection

Appendix 1 – Complaint form

Wessex Learning Trust Complaint Form If you are not satisfied or feel unfairly treated, we would like you to indicate the problem. It is however, very important that you seek to resolve any difficulties in the first instance by discussing your concerns/complaint with a member of staff at the school. If you are still not satisfied with the response then please fill in all sections of the form and return it to the main office at the at the school, following the guidelines in the Complaints Policy.
Your name:
Your child's name:
Your child's school:
Your address:
Contact telephone number:
Email address:
Please provide details of your complaint (please be as specific as possible giving dates, describing what happened and who was involved).
<i>You may continue on an additional sheet and attach any additional information that you wish to be considered.</i>

When did you report the problem to the school?
To whom did you report the problem to at the school?
What was the response?
Have you complained to the Academy before about this issue? Yes/No (please delete as appropriate)
If so to whom and when?
Please state what would you like to see done to resolve your complaint and bring the matter to an acceptable conclusion for yourself and the school?
Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details.
Signed:
Date:
Official use
Date received:
Date confirmation sent: