Complaints Policy

Phase of school this policy relates to

Early Years	**Primary**	**Secondary**	**Whole School**

Date created:	**June 2019**
Date reviewed:	**May 2025**
Next review date:	**Summer 1 2026/27**
Policy lead staff member:	**Leanna Barrett**
Policy link governor:	**Ashely Bergen**
Date Ratified:	**16th November by Julie Fisher**

Liberty Woodland School's Complaints Policy follows guidelines from The Independent school standards, March 2018, Part 7, Manner in which complaints are handled.

This policy applies to pupils enrolled at Liberty Woodland School.

Introduction

Liberty Woodland School prides itself on the quality of the teaching and care provided to its pupils. However, if parents do have a complaint, they can expect it to be treated by the School in accordance with this policy.

Liberty Woodland School will make the Complaints Procedure available to all parents of enrolled pupils via the Liberty Woodland School website. It is also available to prospective parents where the complaint concerns the School's admission process.

The policy does also apply to past pupils but only if the complaint was initially raised whilst the pupil was still enrolled.

The School will ensure that parents of pupils who request it are made aware that this document is available and have access to it.

What constitutes a Complaint?

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction with a real or perceived problem. It can be about the school as a whole, a specific department or individual staff member. A complaint is likely to arise if a parent believes that the school has done something wrong, failed to do something it should have done or has acted unfairly.

Timeframe for Dealing with Complaints

All complaints will be handled seriously and sensitively. They will be acknowledged within five working days if received during term time and as soon as possible during holiday periods. It is in everyone's interest to resolve a complaint as speedily as possible: the school's target is to complete the first two stages of the procedure within 28 working days.

The timescale is measured in normal school working days whether the complaint is lodged during term time or school holidays. Stage 3, the Panel Hearing, will be completed within a further 28 working days. Again, the timescale is measured in normal school working days whether the complaint is lodged during term time or school holidays.

Stage 1 – Informal Resolution

It is hoped that most complaints and concerns will be resolved quickly and informally. If parents have a complaint they should normally contact the Deputy Head. In many cases, the matter will be resolved straightaway by this means to the parents' satisfaction. If the Educator cannot resolve the matter alone, it may be necessary for the Deputy Head to consult the Head.

Complaints made directly to the Deputy or Head will usually be referred to the relevant Educator unless the Head deems it appropriate for her to deal with the matter personally.

The Educator will make a written record of all concerns and complaints and the date on which they were received. Should the matter not be resolved within fourteen working days or in the event that the Educator and the parent fail to reach a satisfactory resolution then parents will be advised to proceed with their complaint in accordance with Stage 2 of this Procedure.

If the complaint is against the Head, parents should make the complaint directly to the Chair of the Governors.

Stage 2 – Formal Resolution

If the complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis, then the parents should put their complaint in writing to the Head. The Head will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action to take.

In most cases, the Head will meet the parents concerned, normally within 7 working days of receiving the complaint, to discuss the matter. If this is not possible, a phone call or Zoom meeting is available. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage.

It may be necessary for the Head to carry out further investigations.

The Head will keep written records of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint.

Once the Head is satisfied that, so far as is practicable, all of the relevant facts have been established, a decision will be made and parents will be informed of this decision in writing. The Head will also give reasons for the decision.

If the complaint is against the Head, the Chair of Governors will call for a full report from the Head and for all relevant documents. The Chair may also call for a briefing from members of staff, and will in most cases, speak to or meet with the parents to discuss the matter further. Once the Chair is satisfied that all relevant facts have been established, the parents will be informed of the decision in writing, together with reasons for the decision.

If parents are still not satisfied with the decision, they should proceed to Stage 3 of this Procedure.

Stage 3 – Panel Hearing

If parents seek to invoke Stage 3 (following a failure to reach an earlier resolution), they will be referred to the Chair of Governors, who has been appointed by the Governors to call hearings of the Complaints Panel.

The matter will then be referred to the Complaints Panel for consideration. The Panel will consist of at least three persons, two of whom will not be directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint. One of the panel members will be independent of the management and running of the school (meaning not only outside the school's workforce, and not a member of governing body/proprietorial body, but also not otherwise involved with the management of the school). Panel members shall be confirmed by the Board of Governors. The Chair, on behalf of the Panel, will then acknowledge the complaint and schedule a hearing to take place as soon as practicable and normally within 14 working days. This hearing may take place in person or over Zoom.

The Panel hearing should proceed not withstanding that the parent may subsequently decide not to attend. If necessary, the Panel should consider the parent's complaint in his/her absence and issue findings on the substance of the complaint thereby bringing the matter to a conclusion.

If the Panel deems it necessary, it may require that further particulars of the complaint or any related matter be supplied in advance of the hearing. Copies of such particulars shall be supplied to all parties not later than five working days prior to the hearing.

The parents may be accompanied to the hearing by one other person. This may be a relative, teacher or friend. Legal representation will not normally be appropriate. The Panel should be informed in advance of this person's name and their relationship with the complainant.

If possible, the Panel will resolve the parents' complaint without the need for further investigation.

Where further investigation is required, the Panel will decide how it should be carried out. After due consideration of all facts they consider relevant, the Panel will reach a decision and may make recommendations.

The Panel will write to the parents informing them of its decision and the reasons for it, normally within seven days of the hearing. The decision of the Panel will be final. The Panel's findings and its recommendations (if any) will be sent by email or otherwise given to the parents and, where relevant, the person complained of, as well as the Governors and the Head.

A copy of the Panel's findings and recommendations (if any) will also be available for inspection on the School premises by the Chair of Governors and the Head.

Post complaint

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 MHR. They will consider whether MHR 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

Persistent and Vexatious Complaints

The school will take all reasonable steps to investigate a complainant's concerns.

A copy of the outcome of the investigation and any recommendations made will be given to the complainant following any formal investigations.

There may be occasions however when the complainant remains dissatisfied. If a complainant contacts the school repeatedly, making substantially a similar complaint each time, this will be viewed as a 'persistent' or 'vexatious' complaint. If this is the case the complainant will be informed that the matter has been closed and the school will not respond further.

Where complaints are deemed after investigation to be either malicious or unnecessarily time wasting, or vexatious complaints continue, the Proprietor will consider what further action may be necessary.

Ultimately where the situation cannot be resolved or has resulted in an irretrievable breakdown in the school parent relationship, in line with the school's terms and conditions, this may lead to a family being asked to remove their child from the school.

If an individual persists to the point that may constitute harassment, the school will seek legal advice.

Recording Complaints

A written record will be kept of complaints made in writing under the formal part of the procedure and whether they are resolved at the Formal Resolution stage or proceed to a Panel hearing. A written record will also be made of action taken by the School as a result of these complaints (regardless of whether they are upheld). At the School's discretion, additional records may be kept which may contain the following information:

- Date when the issue was raised
- Parent and pupil names
- Details of the issue

- Records of any investigations and witness statements (where appropriate)
- Details of staff members handling the issues at each stage
- Copies of all relevant correspondence relating to the issue

The school processes data in accordance with its Privacy Policy. Records kept may include 'special category personal data' (as further detailed in the School's Privacy Policy, but potentially including sensitive data such as information relating to physical or mental health) where this is necessary owing to the nature of the complaint.

Parents can be assured that all concerns and complaints will be treated seriously and confidentially. Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the Education and Skills Act 2008 requests access to them.

The School will keep records of formal complaints and Complaints Panel hearings, as required by regulation. It will do so in accordance with its Privacy Policy but in most cases for a period of at least seven years after the pupil leaves the School.

Guidance for independent school complaints

Guidance on complaints about independent schools can be found here: https://www.gov.uk/complain-about-school/private-schools

"The Department for Education (DfE) cannot investigate individual complaints about private schools. But it has certain powers as a regulator if the school is not meeting standards set by DfE for:

- education
- pupil welfare and health and safety
- school premises
- staff suitability
- making information available to parents
- spiritual, moral, social or cultural development of students

DfE will consider any reports of a major failure to meet the standards. It can arrange an emergency inspection to look at pupil welfare and health and safety, and make sure serious failings are dealt with.

DfE can ask the school inspectorates to take minor complaints into account when the school is next inspected."

Parents can contact the Department for Education here: https://form.education.gov.uk/en/AchieveForms/?form_uri=sandbox-publish://AF-Process-f1453496-7d8a-463f-9f33-1da2ac47ed76/AF-Stage-1e64d4cc-25fb-499a-a8d7-74e98203ac00/definition.json&redirectlink=%2Fen&cancelRedirectLink=%2Fen

Additional information

Taken from The Independent school standards, March 2018, Part 7, Manner in which complaints are handled;

"a. the complaints procedure need not apply to prospective pupils, and therefore, it does not have to cover failure to admit such pupils;
b. the procedure only needs to apply to relation to complaints from parents of pupils, i.e. persons for whom education is being provided at the school. Therefore, the process does not need to cover complaints from parents of pupils who have left (except in cases where the complaints process was started when the pupil was still being educated at the school);
c. there is no provision in the standard for complaints by pupils, although a school may choose to have such a process;
d. the requirement for a panel member who is independent of the management and running of the school means that the independent member should not only be outside the school's workforce, and not a member of governing body/proprietorial body, but also should not be otherwise involved with the management of the school - for example, this might well be the case with a solicitor who regularly acts for a school;
e. the provision requiring a complaints procedure to allow a parent to be accompanied at a panel hearing does not confer a right on a parent to have a legal representative to make representations on their behalf at the hearing, although the school can allow this if it wishes;
f. if a parent does not exercise the right to attend a panel hearing, this does not remove the school's obligation to hold the hearing in conformity with its complaints policy. The school's arrangements for the panel hearing should be reasonable in order to facilitate the parent(s) exercising the right of attendance
126. It should also be noted that if it is found that this standard has not been met because of the way a particular complaint has been handled, the Secretary of State has
no power to compel the school to alter its decision on that complaint, only to take regulatory action designed to address the failure to meet the complaints standard so that
future complaints are dealt with properly."

Number of complaints reaching stage 2 or above of the complaints process in the last academic year 2024/2025 is 0.