West Pennard C of E Primary School

Parental Complaints Policy

January 2025

Tony Wheat
Headteacher

Sylvia Smith
Chair of Governors

Review date: January 2027

Our school vision…

'Since God so loved us, so we must love one another'
(1 John 4 v11)

Valuing our Christian foundation, we care for each other and our world.
We develop resilience, confidence, creativity and independence through our innovative and diverse curriculum; inspiring and motivating everyone to thrive.
Our motto, 'To Try is to Triumph' and growing Christian Values, are central to all that we do.

We link this policy with our Christian values of:

- **Truthfulness**
- **Compassion**
- **Friendship**
- **Thankfulness**
- **Respect**
- **Forgiveness**

Introduction

West Pennard is dedicated to providing the best possible education and support for all its pupils. This means having a clear, fair, and efficient procedure for dealing with any complaints from parents of registered pupils to or against the school, so that any issues that arise can be dealt with as swiftly and effectively as possible.

The difference between a concern and a complaint
A concern may be defined as '*an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought*'.

A complaint may be defined as '*an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action*'.

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 complaint's procedure. West Pennard takes concerns seriously and will make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.

This policy only fully applies to parents of registered pupils at the school. If complaints are raised by persons other than parents, they will be dealt with under [Stages 1 and 2] [Stage 2] of the formal policy.

All school staff will be made aware of complaints procedures and expected to review this document regularly in order that they are familiar with our process of dealing with complaints and can be of the most assistance when an issue is brought to their attention.

This document explains that procedure, and the steps that it outlines should be referred to and followed by all pupils and their parents whenever an issue arises that causes them concern. If it becomes necessary to alter the time limits and deadlines set out within this procedure, you will be advised accordingly, given an explanation and provided with revised timescales.

Scope of this Complaints Procedure

This procedure covers all complaints about any provision of community facilities or services by West Pennard, other than complaints that are dealt with under other statutory procedures, including those listed below.

Exceptions	Who to contact
• Admissions to schools • Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs • School re-organisation proposals	Concerns about admissions, statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs, or school re-organisation proposals should be raised with the local authority **0300 123 2224** http://www.somerset.gov.uk/education-learning-and-schools/

• Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation	Complaints about child protection matters are handled under our child protection and safeguarding policy and in accordance with relevant statutory guidance. If you have serious concerns, you may wish to contact the local authority designated officer (LADO) who has local responsibility for safeguarding or the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH). Antony Goble **Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO)** PP B3W2, County Hall, Taunton. TA1 4DY
• Exclusion of children from school*	Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at: www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions. **complaints about the application of the behaviour policy can be made through the school's complaints procedure.*
• Whistleblowing	We have an internal whistleblowing procedure for all our employees, including temporary staff and contractors. The Secretary of State for Education is the prescribed person for matters relating to education for whistle-blowers in education who do not want to raise matters direct with their employer. Referrals can be made at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus. Volunteer staff who have concerns about our school should complain through the school's complaints procedure. You may also be able to complain direct to the LA or the Department for Education (see link above), depending on the substance of your complaint.
• Staff grievances	Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the school's internal grievance procedures.
• Staff conduct	Complaints about staff will be dealt with under the school's internal disciplinary procedures, if appropriate. Complainants will not be informed of any disciplinary action taken against a staff member because of a complaint. However, the complainant will be notified that the matter is being addressed.
• Complaints about services provided by other providers who may use school premises or facilities	Providers should have their own complaints procedure to deal with complaints about service. Please contact them direct.
• National Curriculum - content	Please contact the Department for Education at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus

If there is an allegation or concern about physical or sexual misconduct towards a child, or there is a belief that a child may be at risk of serious harm, the school will immediately refer the case to child protection and welfare services. If it is decided that there is cause for an official investigation, the decisions by these authorities will supersede those made by the school and outlined in this document.

Where the complaint relates to a safeguarding referral made by a member of staff at the school, any consideration of that complaint by the school will be limited to a review of the reasonableness of the decision to make the referral in light of the evidence available to the member of staff at that time and in light of the school's safeguarding policies.

For more information on our school's provision for protecting our pupils, read our **child protection and safeguarding policy**, and the **whistleblowing** policy.

If a complainant commences legal action against West Pennard in relation to their complaint, we will consider whether to suspend the complaints procedure in relation to their complaint until those legal proceedings have concluded.

Anonymous complaints will not be examined under this document.

Complaints received outside of term time

We will consider complaints made outside of term time to have been received on the first school day after the holiday period.

Withdrawal of a Complaint

If a complainant wants to withdraw their complaint, we will ask them to confirm this in writing.

This policy will be made available via our school website.

Key People:

The Headteacher Tony Wheat	westpennardprimary@gmail.com	**Please use school address for correspondence:** West Pennard Church of England Primary School, Church Lane, West Pennard. BA6 8NT **01458 832866**
The Chair of Governors Sylvia Smith	ssmith@westpennardschool.co.uk	**Please use school address for correspondence:** West Pennard Church of England Primary School, Church Lane, West Pennard. BA6 8NT **01458 832866**
The Clerk of Governors Sharon Ibberson	Sibberson@ westpennardschool.co.uk	**Please use school address for correspondence:** West Pennard Church of England Primary School, Church Lane, West Pennard. BA6 8NT **01458 832866**

1. When an issue or concern first arises

If you have a concern that you would like to take up with the school you should initially inform a member of staff either in person, over the telephone or in writing. You may then be invited to an informal meeting with the member of staff most appropriate for dealing with your concern.

If the complaint is related to your child's education, behaviour or other pupils you should approach your child's class teacher first as they will be best placed to help you either directly or by figuring out which other member of staff you should be speaking to.

We encourage parents to approach staff with any concerns they may have and aim to resolve all issues with open dialogue and mutual understanding.

If your complaint is about a member of staff, you should first raise this with the Headteacher either in person or in writing, and a meeting can be arranged with the headteacher to discuss the issue at hand.

If your complaint is about the Headteacher, you should raise your concern in writing with the Chair of Governors Sylvia Smith via the school office.

If your complaint is about a Governor, you should raise your concern in writing with the Clerk to the Governing Body Sharon Ibberson via the school office.

Any Governor will refer complaints that are taken straight to them back to the appropriate member of staff unless one of the above exceptions applies.

1.2 **Initial informal meeting**

Once a concern has been raised you may be invited to attend an informal meeting with a member of staff or the Headteacher/Chair of Governors to discuss your concerns.

You are welcome to bring a friend, partner or, in the case of a pupil who has raised a concern, a parent to this meeting. It may be appropriate for a pupil to attend the meeting if their parent has raised a concern, depending on the nature of the issue.

Staff have a responsibility to ensure that you understand any future points of action that have been agreed upon in this meeting and should make a record of what has been discussed, as well as any outcomes and a plan of action, if one has been agreed.

All staff will do their best to ensure that your concerns are dealt with appropriately and efficiently but if you cannot come to an agreement, or are dissatisfied with the outcome of your meeting, you can make a formal complaint in writing to the Headteacher.

There is no suggested time-scale for resolution at this stage given the importance of dialogue through informal discussion although it would be expected that most issues would be resolved within 5 school days. **Most complaints are normally resolved at this stage.**

2. Formal complaints

In order to ensure that complaints are processed efficiently and effectively, West Pennard deals with formal complaints in three stages:

Stage 1

If you do not feel that your concern has been dealt with as you would like, are unhappy with the outcome of your informal meeting or feel that the issue is serious enough that it warrants it, you can make a formal complaint in writing to the Headteacher. If your complaint is about the Headteacher you should go straight to Stage 2 of this procedure. Your written complaint should provide sufficient detail of the issues to allow the Headteacher to investigate and respond to the complaint. You should also set out what you feel would resolve the complaint.

The school has a complaints form that can be used to outline a complaint more clearly at this stage (see Appendix A). If you require help in completing the form, please contact the school office. You can also ask third party organisations like the Citizens Advice to help you.

In accordance with equality law, we will consider making reasonable adjustments if required, to enable complainants to access and complete this complaints procedure. For instance, providing information in alternative formats, assisting complainants in raising a formal complaint or holding meetings in accessible locations.

The Headteacher may call you in for a meeting to discuss the issue outcome, possible solutions, or to explain what has or will happen as a result of your complaint. The Headteacher will keep a record of all interactions with you and other staff, meetings and decisions made in reference to your complaint.

If the complaint is against a member of staff, the Headteacher will talk to that employee. If it is an allegation of abuse, a formal investigation may be instigated by the school or external child welfare authorities to whom the school reports. Please refer to our managing allegations against staff policy for an outline of this procedure.

The Headteacher will respond to you in writing within 5 school days outlining their response to your concern, and any action that has or will be taken. If they have decided not to take any further action on the issue, they will explain what they have decided, how they have reached this decision, and will outline your right to take the matter further and the steps to be taken.

Stage 2

If, having spoken to the Headteacher, you are dissatisfied with the outcome of your complaint or your complaint is about the Headteacher, you may lodge your complaint with the Chair of Governors. The complaint must be in writing preferably using (or with reference to) the School's Complaint Form.

If the complaint is against a member of staff, that employee will be given the opportunity to write a response, which will be sent to the Chair of Governors within 2 school days of the complaint being lodged with them.

The Chair of Governors will respond to you in writing within 10 school days outlining their response to your concern, and any action that has or will be taken. If they have decided not to take any further action on the issue, they will explain what they have decided, how they have reached this decision, and will outline your right of appeal and how you can start your appeal.

3. Appeals

Stage 3:

If you would like to lodge an appeal following the outcome of a formal complaint at Stage 2, this will be taken to the appeals panel. You should write to the Clerk to the Governing Body to exercise this right within 10 school days. If no request for an appeals panel hearing is received within 10 school days, it will be deemed that the decision is accepted, and the complaint will be closed.

If an appeals panel is requested, the Clerk to Governors will acknowledge your appeal and make the necessary arrangements and will usually convene the appeals panel within 15 school days from the acknowledgement being sent. Where it is not possible to find a mutually convenient date within that timescale, the school will take reasonable steps to agree a time and date mutually convenient to all parties.

The Clerk will ensure that all parties to the appeal have access to the same documentation and set out a timetable to support the collation and circulation of documents. Any supporting documentation relevant to the complaint must be submitted to the appeals panel by both parties at least 5 days before the appeals panel hearing.

You should attend the meeting in order to provide additional information or to answer questions. You are entitled to be accompanied to the appeals panel hearing and should notify the Clerk in advance if you attend to bring anyone.

Complaints would not be heard by the whole Governing Body at any stage, as this could compromise the impartiality of any Governor that might need to be on a panel associated with a complaint.

The appeals panel

The appeals panel will be made up of between three to five members of the Governing Body. If there are insufficient Governors available for the panel then the school will invite additional Governors from other schools to participate. Legislation requires academies to ensure any complaints panel includes one person who is independent of the management and running of the school.

No person can sit on the appeals panel if they have had any former knowledge or involvement in the case that is being dealt with at that time. The Chair of the panel will be nominated from within the group of panel members. All panel members will be familiar with and have access to the complaints policy.

The panel will give careful consideration to how the complainant can be made to feel most comfortable presenting to the panel, especially in the case of a child having to present or explain information.

Appeals procedure

The Appeals Panel will determine the procedure to be followed to ensure that it is best placed to deal with the issues arising from the complaint. The procedure for an appeal is usually as follows:

1. The complainant and Headteacher will enter the hearing together (witnesses may be called in as required).
2. The Chair will introduce the panel members and outline the process.
3. The complainant will explain the complaint.
4. The Headteacher and panel will question the complainant.
5. The Headteacher will explain the school's actions (any witnesses will also give testimony).
6. The complainant and panel will question the Headteacher.
7. The complainant will sum up their complaint.
8. The Headteacher will sum up the school's actions.
9. The Chair will explain that both parties will hear from the panel within 10 school days.
10. Both parties will leave together while the panel decides.
11. The Clerk will stay to assist the panel with its decision making.

Please note – if there is likely to be distress caused by jointly giving evidence, the complainant and Headteacher can give evidence separately. Witnesses are only required to attend for the part of the hearing in which they give their evidence,

The Chair of the panel/Clerk to Governors will notify the complainant of the panel's decision in writing within 10 school days of the appeal hearing. The letter will set out the decision of the panel together with the reasons underpinning that decision. The letter may set out recommendations which will be made to the Governing body.

The appeals panel may:

- dismiss all or part of the complaint

- uphold all or part of the complaint
- decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint
- evaluate all the evidence available and recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures as a preventative step against similar problems arising in the future.

The panel's decision is final. If you are unhappy with the outcome, you may wish to put your complaint to the Secretary of State. Complaints can be submitted online at https://www.gov.uk/complain-about-school.

4. Vexatious/persistent complaints

Whilst it is hoped that this document will reduce any dissatisfaction with the school, it is acknowledged that there may be rare occasions where a complainant continues to be dissatisfied with the school and the outcomes achieved under the complaints procedure.

Where a complainant attempts to re-open an issue which has already been dealt with under the complaints procedure, the Chair of Governors will contact them to inform them that the matter has already been dealt with and that either that stage of the policy has been exhausted or that the complaints procedure has been exhausted and the matter is considered closed. Where further correspondence is received on the same matter, this may be considered vexatious and the school will be under no obligation to respond to that correspondence.

If the complainant subsequently contacts the school again about the same issue, the school can choose not to respond. The normal circumstance in which we will not respond is if:

- the school has taken every reasonable step to address the complainant's needs, and the school's position has been clearly set out in writing together with the complainant's options
- the complainant is contacting the school repeatedly but making substantially the same points each time
- the school reasonably believes the aim of the contact is to cause disruption or inconvenience
- that the complainant acts or communicates in an inappropriate way towards school staff.

Once the school has decided that it is appropriate to stop responding, the complainant will be informed in writing. The school may decide to take steps to address such behaviour e.g. warning notices, restricting forms of communication to writing only and to particular persons etc.

5. Governing body – records, review and monitoring of complaints

The school will record the progress of all complaints, including information about actions taken at all stages, the stage at which the complaint was resolved, and the final outcome. The records will also include copies of letters and emails, and notes relating to meetings and phone calls. This material will be treated as confidential and held centrally and will be viewed only by those involved in investigating the complaint or on the review panel.

Records of complaints will be kept securely, only for as long as necessary and in line with data protection law.

West Pennard will review and evaluate all complaints no matter how far they are taken or what the outcome to ensure that similar problems are avoided in the future or to see if they could have been managed any more effectively. All records of any complaints will be kept confidential but may be inspected where appropriate by the Secretary of State or any inspection body.

The Governing body will review the complaints procedure every 2 year(s).

6. Staff complaints

Staff who have a concern about a colleague or a volunteer member of staff should refer to our **Low Level Concerns Policy and our Whistleblowing Policy.**

The procedure for dealing with any other staff complaints or employment grievances is set out in the school's **staff discipline and grievance policy** or our **code of conduct.**

7. Next Steps

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 2.

The Department for Education will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by West Pennard They will consider whether West Pennard 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.

Appendix A

School Complaints Procedure Complaint Form

Your Name: **Pupil's name:** **Your relationship to the pupil:** **Address:** **Postcode:** **Daytime telephone number:** **Evening telephone number:**
Please give details of your complaint:
What action, if any, have you already taken to try and resolve your complaint? (Who did you speak to and what was the response)?
What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?
Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details.
Signature: **Date:**
<u>School use</u> **Date acknowledgement sent:**

By whom:

Complaint referred to:

Date:

Appendix B

West Pennard Parental Complaints Procedure

Stage	Type of Complaint	Who should this complaint be made to?	How should this be made	What outcome can you expect?
0	Informal complaint (concern)	• If the complaint is relating to a child or their education make the complaint to their class teacher. • If the complaint is about a member of staff then it should be made to the Headteacher. • If the complaint is about the Headteacher then it should be made to the Chair of Governors. • If the complaint is about a Governor then it should be made to the Clerk to Governors.	In person, over the phone or in writing.	There may be a request for an informal meeting to gather more information about the complaint. A solution is reached and steps forward are agreed upon. Any complaints referred to the wrong person will be passed back to the appropriate member of staff.
1	Formal complaint	If you are dissatisfied with the outcome you have received from speaking to a member of staff then please make a formal complaint to the Headteacher. If your complaint is about the Headteacher please move on to Stage 2.	In writing, preferably using (or with reference to) the School's Complaint Form (Appendix A in the Complaint's policy on our website).	The Headteacher may call you in for a meeting to further discuss the complaint. The Headteacher will send a written report within 5 school days explaining their decisions, rationale and any further actions.
2		If, having spoken to the Headteacher, you are dissatisfied with the outcome of your complaint or your complaint is about the Headteacher, you may lodge your complaint with the Chair of Governors.	In writing, preferably using (or with reference to) the School's Complaint Form (Appendix A in the Complaint's policy on our website).	The Chair of Governors will send a written report within 10 school days explaining their decisions, rationale and any further actions. They will also outline your right of appeal.
3	Appeals	If you would like to lodge an appeal following the outcome of Stage 2 this will be taken to the appeals panel. You should write to the Clerk to the Governing Body to exercise this right within 10 school days.	In writing.	You will receive an acknowledgement of your letter from the Clerk. An appeal panel meeting will be convened within 15 days of the acknowledgement being sent. A letter of outcome will be issued within 10 working days to the panel.

4	Further action	The appeal panel's decision is final. If you are still unhappy with the outcome or process then you can complain to the Secretary of State.	Complaints can be submitted online at: https://www.gov.uk/complain-about-school.	