



# Complaints Policy

## Purpose of the policy

This policy aims to outline the process through which both informal and formal complaints can be made at Wildwood Nature School. The policy follows guidelines from the DfE's guidance on the Independent School Standards, 2019, Part 7: *Manner in which complaints are handled*.

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### 1. Who can raise a complaint

Parents of children currently enrolled or children themselves can make a complaint using this process.

For parents, the policy is available on the public website to refer to if they wish to make a complaint.

For children, we have a nurturing, child-centred approach that gives each child frequent, planned opportunities to talk about how they feel about the school and to raise worries or concerns with their key teacher. However, teachers also make the children aware, explicitly, that they are able to go to the head of school at any time if they have a complaint about an aspect of the school.

## 2. The complaints process

### **Stage 1 – Informal**

All complaints in the first instance should be raised with the head of school, verbally (by phone or in person) or by email. There is no set format for how these complaints should be set out, and emails can be of an informal nature, however, it should be made clear that a complaint is being made.

The head of school may refer the complaint to the most relevant member of the team or take on the complaint themselves. That person will respond verbally or by email, either at the time of the complaint or within 5 working days.

The staff member will attempt to resolve the complaint through informal discussions with the complainant.

The staff member dealing with the complaint keeps detailed, dated notes about what was said by each party, what was agreed, and the outcomes.

After 15 working days from the initial complaint, if the complainant feels that there has been no satisfactory resolution, they may escalate to a stage 2 (formal) complaint.

### **Stage 2 – Formal**

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

In most cases, the head of school will meet the complainant concerned, normally within 7 working days of receiving the complaint, to discuss the matter. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage.

It may be necessary for the head of school to carry out further investigations.

The head of school will keep written dated records of all communications, agreed actions and outcomes related to the complaint.

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

The head of school will aim to give this final response within 15 working days of receiving the complaint, although in some cases more time will be needed and may take up to 30 working days.

If the complainant is still not satisfied with the decision, they should proceed to Stage 3 of this procedure.

### **Stage 3 – Trustees and panel hearing**

If unhappy with the resolution provided by the head of school at stage 2, the complainant should put their complaint in writing to the head of the trustees, whose name and address is on the public website.

The head of trustees will organise a panel hearing, and will aim to schedule the hearing for within 15 working days of receiving the complaint, but at the latest within 30 working days of receiving the complaint.

They will offer at least two alternative dates and times and ensure that the complainant has at least 5 working days advance notice.

The complainant is encouraged to attend, but it is not obligatory. Once the hearing is scheduled, it will proceed even if the complainant does not attend.

The complainant may bring one person with them to the hearing for emotional support. They may also call up to three witnesses to give evidence on their behalf at the hearing, so long as they have given at least 2 working days notice of their intention to do so, and so long as the witnesses' evidence is directly relevant to the complaint in hand.

The head of trustees will ensure that the panel is made up of at least three people not directly involved in the complaint and at least one person not connected with the running of the school.

The panel will write to the complainant informing them of its decision and the reasons for it, normally within 7 working days of the hearing, but at latest by 14 working days after. 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 head of trustees.

## Further complaints – the Department for Education (DfE)

If a parent is still unhappy after following the complaints procedure or has grave concerns about the running of the school, they can [raise a concern with the DfE](#). The DfE will not investigate individual complaints, but will consider any reports of a major failure to meet the Independent School Standards.

### Complaining about the head of school

If the complaint is against the head of school, the complainant should contact the head of trustees (contact details on the website) in the first instance. The same process (informal / formal / panel) will apply, but with the complaint being handled by the head of trustees all the way through.

## 3. Record keeping

Written, dated records will be kept of all communications (including agreed actions), documentation and outcomes related to complaints from stage 1–3. 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 sensitive data such as information relating to physical or mental health, where this is necessary owing to the nature of the complaint.

Families 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 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 7 years after the pupil leaves the school.

#### 4. Reviewing complaints

The head of school and board of trustees meet to review all complaints received once a year. The purpose of this is to identify any repeated complaints and any areas of the Wildwood Nature School provision that need development or overhaul because they are failing to deliver on our mission of building a community of caring relationships in which children feel good about themselves.

##### **Policy review**

Policy created: October 2022

Last reviewed:

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