

Complaints Policy

This policy has been produced in accordance with the Equality Act 2010 and the Special Education Needs Disability Act 2001, the SEND Code of Practice 2014 and the Children and Families Act 2014. It has been reviewed in accordance with all other school policies and related Acts.

The Governors and staff of Lowton Church of England High School are committed to the provision of a high quality education in a Christian context. We aim to provide a school where we can live out our ethos of Caring, Learning and Succeeding on a daily basis. At the heart of the commitment is the notion of the uniqueness and infinite worth of the individual, that every person is valuable in the eyes of God.

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Status	Approved
Person responsible	Headteacher
Version	4 – in this format

Introduction

Lowton Church of England High School and the Governing Body are committed to handling complaints in a fair, transparent and timely manner. This policy outlines our commitment to handling complaints in line with the Department of Education School Complaints Procedure www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-complaints

Scope

This procedure covers all complaints about any provision of community facilities or services by Lowton CE High School 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 Wigan Council 01942 488337
• 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) Lado@wigan.gov.uk who has local responsibility for safeguarding or the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Team

	(MAST). CINdutyteam@wigan.gov.uk
Exclusion or suspensions of children from school*	Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at: www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions. <i>*complaints about the application of the Behaviour Policy can be made through the School's Complaints Procedure.</i>
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 directly 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 directly 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 as a result 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 their service. Please contact them directly.
National Curriculum - content	Please contact the Department for Education at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus

If other bodies are investigating aspects of the complaint, for example the police, local authority (LA) safeguarding teams or tribunals, this may impact on our ability to adhere to the timescales within this procedure or result in the procedure being suspended until those public bodies have completed their investigations. If the timescales are impacted by investigations by other bodies, the School will inform the Complainant of the reasons for the delay.

If a Complainant commences legal action against Lowton CE High School 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.

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 Complaints Procedure. Lowton CE High School takes concerns seriously and will make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.

If you have difficulty discussing a concern with a particular member of staff, we will respect your views. In these cases, the Headteacher will refer you to another staff member. Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels unable to deal with a concern, the Headteacher will refer you to another staff member. The member of staff may be more senior but does not have to be. The ability to consider the concern objectively and impartially is more important.

How to raise a concern or make a complaint

We understand, however, that there are occasions when people would like to raise their concerns formally. In this case, Lowton CE High School will attempt to resolve the issue internally through the stages outlined within this Complaints Procedure. A concern or complaint can be made in person, in writing or by telephone. They may also be made by a third party acting on behalf of a Complainant, as long as they have appropriate consent from the Complainant. Where it is not clear that consent has been obtained, the relevant member of staff may ask for further information to confirm that consent has been provided.

Concerns should be raised with either the class teacher or headteacher. If the issue remains unresolved, the next step is to make a formal complaint.

Complainants should not approach individual governors to raise concerns or complaints. Governors have no power to act on an individual basis and it may also prevent them from considering complaints at Stage 2 of the Procedure.

Complaints against school staff (except the Headteacher) should be made in the first instance, to Mrs J Galbraith (Headteacher) via the Headteacher's PA, Mrs Ruth Harrison at - harrisonr@lowtonhs.wigan.sch.uk. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Complaints that involve or are about the Headteacher should be addressed to Mrs R Johnston (the Chair of Governors), via the Clerk to Governors, Mrs Ruth Harrison - harrisonr@lowtonhs.wigan.sch.uk. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Complaints about the Chair of Governors, any individual governor or the entire Governing Body should be addressed to the Clerk to the Governors, Mrs Ruth Harrison - harrisonr@lowtonhs.wigan.sch.uk. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

For ease of use, a template complaint form is included at the end of this Procedure. If you require help in completing the form, please contact Mrs Ruth Harrison - harrisonr@lowtonhs.wigan.sch.uk. You can also ask third party organisations like 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, by providing information in alternative formats, assisting complainants in raising a formal complaint or holding meetings in accessible locations. If you require reasonable adjustments to be made, please contact the Clerk to Governors so that the appropriate support can be provided.

Anonymous complaints

We will not normally investigate anonymous complaints. However, the Headteacher, or Chair of Governors if appropriate, will determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation.

Timescales

You must raise the Complaint within three months of the incident or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within three months of the last of these incidents. We will only consider complaints made outside of this timeframe if exceptional circumstances apply.

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.

Resolving Complaints

At each stage in the procedure, Lowton CE High School wants to resolve the Complaint. There is a desire to resolve complaints swiftly and informally before a formal complaint is made. We recognise, however, that complainants do have the right to use this Complaints Procedure before raising a concern or complaint informally.

If appropriate, we will acknowledge that the Complaint is upheld in whole or in part. In addition, we may offer one or more of the following:

- an explanation
- an admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better
- an assurance that we will try to ensure the event complained about will not recur
- an explanation of the steps that have been, or will be, taken to help to ensure that it will not happen again and an indication of the timescales within which any changes will be made
- an undertaking to review school policies in light of the Complaint
- an apology.

Complaint Stages

Stage 1:

Formal complaints must be made to the Headteacher (unless they are about the Headteacher), via the Headteacher's PA, Mrs Ruth Harrison - harrisonr@lowtonhs.wigan.sch.uk. This may be done in person, in writing (preferably on the Complaint Form), or by telephone.

The headteacher will record the date on which the Complaint is received and will **acknowledge** receipt of the Complaint in writing (either by letter or email) **within three school days**.

Within this response, the Headteacher may seek to clarify the nature of the Complaint, ask what remains unresolved and what outcome the Complainant would like to see. The Headteacher can consider whether a face-to-face meeting is the most appropriate way of doing this.

Note: The Headteacher may delegate the investigation of the Complaint to another member of the School's senior leadership team but not the decision to be taken.

During the investigation, the Headteacher (or investigator) will:

- if necessary, interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained about, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish

At the conclusion of their investigation, the Headteacher will **provide a formal written response within ten school days of the date of receipt of the Complaint.**

If the Headteacher is unable to meet this deadline, they will provide the Complainant with an update and revised response date.

The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions Lowton CE High School will take to resolve the complaint.

The Headteacher will advise the Complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 1.

If the Complaint is about the Headteacher, a suitably skilled governor will be appointed to complete all the actions at Stage 1.

Stage 2:

If the Complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome at Stage 1 and wishes to take the matter further, they can escalate the complaint to Stage 2. This will be conducted by the Governing Body's Complaints Committee, which will be formed of three impartial governors, and is the final stage of the Complaints Procedure.

A request to **escalate to Stage 2** must be made via the Clerk to Governors, Mrs Ruth Harrison - harrisonr@lowtonhs.wigan.sch.uk, **within ten school days of receipt of the Stage 1 response**.

The Clerk will record the date the Complaint is received and **acknowledge** receipt of the Complaint in writing (either by letter or email) **within five school days**.

Requests received outside of this timeframe will only be considered in exceptional circumstances.

The Complaints Committee will consist of at least three governors with no prior involvement in, or knowledge of, the Complaint. Prior to the meeting, they will decide amongst themselves who will act as the Chair of the Complaints Committee. If there are fewer than three governors from Lowton CE High School available, the Clerk will source any additional, independent governors through another local school or through their LA's Governor Services team, in order to make up the committee. Alternatively, an entirely independent committee may be convened to hear the complaint at Stage 2.

The Committee will decide whether to deal with the Complaint by inviting parties to a meeting or through written representations, but in making their decision they will be sensitive to the Complainant's needs.

Stage 2: Governors Committee Consideration:

The Committee will consider the Complaint within twenty school days of receipt of the Stage 2 request. It will not review any new Complaints at this stage or consider evidence unrelated to the initial Complaint to be included. New Complaints must be dealt with from Stage 1 of the Procedure.

The Committee will consider the Complaint and all the evidence presented. The Committee can:

- uphold the Complaint in whole or in part
- dismiss the Complaint in whole or in part.

If the Complaint is upheld in whole or in part, the Committee will:

- decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the Complaint
- where appropriate, recommend changes to the School's systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future.

The Chair of the Committee will provide the Complainant and Lowton CE High School with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within ten school days of considering the Complaint.

The letter to the Complainant will include details of how to contact the Department for Education if they are dissatisfied with the way their Complaint has been handled by Lowton CE High School.

If the Committee decide to hold a meeting with the Complainant present, the Clerk will write to the Complainant to inform them of the date of the meeting. They will aim to convene a meeting within twenty school days of receipt of the Stage 2 request. If this is not possible, the Clerk will provide an anticipated date and keep the Complainant informed.

If the complainant rejects the offer of three proposed dates without good reason, the Clerk will decide when to hold the meeting. It will then proceed in the Complainant's absence on the basis of written submissions from both parties.

If the Complainant is invited to attend the meeting, they may bring someone along to provide support. This can be a relative or friend. Generally, we do not encourage either party to bring legal representatives to the Committee meeting. There may, however, be occasions when legal representation is appropriate. For instance, if a School employee is called as a witness in a Complaint meeting, they may wish to be supported by union and/or legal representation.

Note: Complaints about staff conduct will not generally be handled under this Complaints Procedure. Complainants will be advised that any staff conduct complaints will be considered under staff disciplinary procedures, if appropriate, but outcomes will not be shared with complainants.

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

At least twelve school days before the meeting, the Clerk will:

- confirm and notify the Complainant of the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that, if the Complainant is invited, the dates are convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible
- request copies of any further written material to be submitted to the Committee at least seven school days before the meeting.

Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least five school days before the date of the meeting. The Committee will not normally accept as evidence recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.

The meeting will be held in private. Electronic recordings of meetings or conversations are not normally permitted unless a Complainant's own disability or special needs require it. Prior knowledge and consent of all parties attending must be sought before meetings or conversations take place. Consent will be recorded in any minutes taken.

Complaints about the Governing Body

Formal Complaints about a member of the Governing Body must be made to the Chair, via the Clerk to Governors, Mrs Ruth Harrison - harrisonr@lowtonhs.wigan.sch.uk

This may be done in person, in writing (preferably on the Complaint Form), or by telephone.

Complaints at Stage 1 and Stage 2 will be heard by the Governing Body's Complaints Committee, which will be formed of three impartial governors.

Stage 1 and Stage 2:

The Clerk will record the date on which the Complaint is received and will acknowledge receipt of the Complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within three school days.

Within this response, the Clerk may seek to clarify the nature of the Complaint. The Clerk will arrange a Governors Complaints Committee to consider the complaint.

The Chair of Committee may delegate the investigation of the Complaint to another member of the Governing Body but not the decision to be taken.

The Committee will consider the Complaint within fifteen school days of receipt of the Stage 1 request.

The committee will consider the Complaint and all the evidence presented. The Committee can:

- uphold the Complaint in whole or in part
- dismiss the Complaint in whole or in part.

If the Complaint is upheld in whole or in part, the committee will:

- decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the Complaint
- where appropriate, recommend changes to the School's systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future.

The Chair of the Committee will provide the Complainant and Lowton CE High School with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within ten school days of considering the Complaint.

If the Complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome at Stage 1 and wishes to take the matter further, they can escalate the complaint to Stage 2. The Chair of Panel will advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint. Stage 2 will be conducted by a second Governing Body's Complaints Committee, which will be formed of three new impartial governors, and is the final stage of the Complaints Procedure.

If the Complaint is:

- jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair or
- the entire Governing Body or
- the majority of the Governing Board

it will be considered by an independent investigator appointed by the Governing Board. At the conclusion of their investigation, the independent investigator will provide a formal written response.

Stage 2

The Committee will consider the complaint within twenty school days of receipt of the Stage 2 request. It will not review any new complaints at this stage or consider evidence unrelated to the initial complaint to be included. New complaints must be dealt with from Stage 1 of the procedure.

The Committee will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented. The Committee can:

- uphold the Complaint in whole or in part
- dismiss the Complaint in whole or in part.

If the complaint is upheld in whole or in part, the committee will:

- decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the Complaint
- where appropriate, recommend changes to the School's systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future.

The Chair of the Committee will provide the Complainant and Lowton CE High School with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within **ten** school days of considering the complaint.

The letter to the Complainant will include details of how to contact the Department for Education if they are dissatisfied with the way their Complaint has been handled by Lowton CE High School.

If the Complaint is:

- jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair or
- the entire Governing Body or
- the majority of the Governing Board

it will be heard by a Committee of independent co-opted governors.

Where complaints against a governor are upheld at either Stage 1 or Stage 2 the Governing Body may consider suspending¹ or removing² a governor from the board

¹ The School Governance (Roles, Procedures and Allowances) (England) Regulations 2013

² The School Governance (Constitution) (England) Regulations 2012 and The School Governance (Constitution and Federations) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2017

Next Steps

If the Complainant believes that 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 Lowton CE High School. They will consider whether Lowton CE High School 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

Withdrawal of a Complaint

If a Complainant wants to withdraw their Complaint, we will ask them to confirm this in writing and this will conclude the matter.

Serial, Persistent or Vexatious Complaints

Lowton Church of England High School is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially and to providing a high quality service to those who complain. We will not normally limit the contact complainants have with our School. There may, however, be instances when a complainant behaves unreasonably when making a complaint.

Lowton Church of England High School defines unreasonable behaviour as that which hinders our consideration of complaints because of the frequency or nature of the Complainant's contact with the school. This behaviour may result in the Complaint being labelled as *serial, persistent or vexatious* and includes but is not limited to:

If 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 co-operate with the Complaints investigation process

- refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of the Complaints Procedure
- insists on the Complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the Complaints Procedure or with good practice
- introduces trivial or irrelevant information that they expect to be taken into account and commented on
- raises a large quantity or a great number 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 School's Complaints Procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed including referral to the Department for Education
- seeks an unrealistic outcome
- makes excessive demands on school time by frequent, lengthy and complicated contact with staff regarding the Complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the Complaint is being dealt with
- knowingly provides falsified information
- publishes unacceptable information on social media or other public forums.

Complaints considered to be 'frivolous' or 'vexatious' have the following characteristics, as defined by The Office of the Independent Adjudicator:

- complaints which are obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific or repetitious
- insistence upon pursuing unmeritorious complaints and/or unrealistic outcomes beyond all reason
- insistence upon pursuing meritorious complaints in an unreasonable manner
- complaints that are designed to cause disruption or annoyance
- demands for redress that lack any serious purpose or value

We do not expect our staff to tolerate behaviour which is abusive, offensive or threatening and will act to protect staff from that behaviour by following the School's Expectations of Visitors and Parental Conduct Policy.

Dealing with Serial, Persistent or Vexatious Complaints

While the Complaint is being progressed, it is not helpful if repeated correspondence is sent (either by letter, phone, email or text), as it could delay the outcome being reached.

Whenever possible, the Headteacher will discuss any concerns with the Complainant informally before applying an '*unreasonable*' marking. The application of a 'serial, persistent or vexatious' will be against the subject or Complaint itself rather than the Complainant.

If the behaviour continues, the Headteacher will write to the Complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and will ask them to change it. For Complainants who excessively contact Lowton Church of England High School thereby causing a significant level of disruption, we may specify methods of communication and limit the number of contacts in a communication plan. This will be reviewed after six months.

Complaint Form:

Please complete and return to *Mrs R Harrison Clerk to Governors* who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

Your name:	
Student's name (if relevant):	
Your relationship to the student (if relevant):	
Address: Postcode: Day time telephone number: Evening telephone number:	
Please give details of your complaint, including whether you have raised it with anybody at the school.	
Have you already raised this complaint at Stage 1 of this procedure	

What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?

Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details.

Signature:

Date:

Roles and Responsibilities

Complainant:

The Complainant will receive a more effective response to the Complaint if they:

- explain the Complaint in full as early as possible
- co-operate with the School in seeking a solution to the complaint
- respond promptly to requests for information or meetings or in agreeing the details of the complaint
- ask for assistance as needed
- treat all those involved in the Complaint with respect
- refrain from publicising the details of their Complaint on social media and respect confidentiality.

Investigator:

The investigator's role is to establish the facts relevant to the Complaint by:

- providing a comprehensive, open, transparent and fair consideration of the complaint through:
 - sensitive and thorough interviewing of the Complainant to establish what has happened and who has been involved
 - interviewing staff and children/young people and other people relevant to the Complaint
 - consideration of records and other relevant information
 - analysing information
- liaising with the Complainant and the Complaints Co-ordinator as appropriate to clarify what the Complainant feels would put things right.

The Investigator should:

- conduct interviews with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning
- keep notes of interviews or arrange for an independent note taker to record minutes of the meeting
- ensure that any papers produced during the investigation are kept securely pending any appeal
- be mindful of the timescales to respond
- prepare a comprehensive report for the Headteacher or Complaints Committee that sets out the facts, identifies solutions and recommends courses of action to resolve problems.

The Headteacher or Complaints Committee will then determine whether to uphold or dismiss the Complaint and communicate that decision to the Complainant, providing the appropriate escalation details.

Clerk to the Governing Board:

The Clerk is the contact point for the complainant and the committee and should:

- ensure that all people involved in the Complaint procedure are aware of their legal rights and duties, including any under legislation relating to school complaints, education law, the Equality Act 2010, the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act (DPA) 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)
- set the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that the dates are convenient to all parties (if they are invited to attend) and that the venue and proceedings are accessible
- collate any written material relevant to the Complaint (for example; Stage 1 paperwork, School and Complainant submissions) and send it to the parties in advance of the meeting within an agreed timescale
- record the proceedings
- circulate the minutes of the meeting
- notify all parties of the Committee's decision.

Committee Chair:

The Committee's Chair, who is nominated in advance of a Complaint meeting, should ensure that:

- both parties are asked (via the Clerk) to provide any additional information relating to the complaint by a specified date in advance of the meeting
- the meeting is conducted in an informal manner, is not adversarial, and that, if all parties are invited to attend, everyone is treated with respect and courtesy
- complainants who may not be used to speaking at such a meeting are put at ease. This is particularly important if the Complainant is a child/young person
- the remit of the Committee is explained to the Complainant
- written material is seen by everyone in attendance, provided it does not breach confidentiality or any individual's rights to privacy under the DPA 2018 or GDPR. If a new issue arises it would be useful to give everyone the opportunity to consider and comment upon it; this may require a short adjournment of the meeting
- both the Complainant and the School are given the opportunity to make their case and seek clarity, either through written submissions ahead of the meeting or verbally in the meeting itself
- the issues are addressed

- key findings of fact are made
- the Committee is open-minded and acts independently
- no member of the Committee has an external interest in the outcome of the proceedings or any involvement in an earlier stage of the procedure
- the meeting is minuted
- they liaise with the Clerk (and Complaints Co-ordinator, if the school has one).

Committee Member:

Committee members should be aware that:

- the meeting must be independent and impartial, and should be seen to be so
No governor may sit on the committee if they have had a prior involvement in the Complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it.
- the aim of the meeting should be to resolve the Complaint and achieve reconciliation between the School and the Complainant
We recognise that the Complainant might not be satisfied with the outcome if the meeting does not find in their favour. It may only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations.
- many complainants will feel nervous and inhibited in a formal setting
Parents/carers often feel emotional when discussing an issue that affects their child.
- extra care needs to be taken when the Complainant is a child/young person and present during all or part of the meeting
Careful consideration of the atmosphere and proceedings should ensure that the child/young person does not feel intimidated.
The committee should respect the views of the child/young person and give them equal consideration to those of adults.
If the child/young person is the Complainant, the Committee should ask in advance if any support is needed to help them present their complaint. Where the child/young person's parent is the Complainant, the Committee should give the parent the opportunity to say which parts of the meeting, if any, the child/young person needs to attend.
However, the parent should be advised that agreement might not always be possible if the parent wishes the child/young person to attend a part of the meeting that the Committee considers is not in the child/young person's best interests.
- the welfare of the child/young person is paramount.