

Compliments and Complaints Procedure

Date Adopted:	September 2019
Date of next review:	When reviewed by Wigan LA
Name of Responsible Person:	Mr K Larkin

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.

Signed: _____ **Headteacher**

Date: September

Based on the DfE Model School Complaints Procedure

Availability of the Compliments and Complaints Policy:

The school Compliments and Complaints Policy must be published on the school website.

Compliments:

It is always good to receive positive feed-back, this can be given verbally or in writing to the school office. It is encouraging to hear when situations go well and are appreciated, and your comments will always be shared with staff and students where appropriate. There is also an opportunity to give compliments through our regular questionnaires.

Who can make a complaint?

This complaints procedure is not limited to parents or carers of children that are registered at the school. Any person, including members of the public, may make a complaint to Lowton CE High School about any provision of facilities or services that we provide. Unless complaints are dealt with under separate statutory procedures (such as appeals relating to exclusions or admissions), we will use this complaints procedure.

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.

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.

How to raise a concern or make a complaint:

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 to do so.

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. They 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 Mr K Larkin (Headteacher) via the school office. 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 school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Complaints about the Chair of Governors, any individual governor or the whole Governing Body should be addressed to Mrs R Harrison (the Clerk to the Governing Board) via the school office. 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 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.

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.

Time scales:

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 time frame 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.

Scope of this Complaints Procedure:

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
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Admissions to schools • Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs • School re-organisation proposals 	<p>Concerns about admissions, statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs, or school re-organisation proposals should be raised with Wigan Council 01942 488337</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation 	<p>Complaints about child protection matters are handled under our child protection and safeguarding policy and in accordance with relevant statutory guidance.</p> <p>If you have serious concerns, you may wish to contact the local authority designated officer (LADO) Llado@wigan.gov.uk who has local responsibility for safeguarding or the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Team (MAST). CINdutyteam@wigan.gov.uk</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exclusion of children from school* 	<p>Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at: www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions.</p> <p><i>*complaints about the application of the behaviour policy can be made through the school's complaints procedure.</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whistleblowing 	<p>We have an internal whistleblowing procedure for all our employees, including temporary staff and contractors.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff grievances 	Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the school's internal grievance procedures.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff conduct 	<p>Complaints about staff will be dealt with under the school's internal disciplinary procedures, if appropriate.</p> <p>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.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 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.

Resolving complaints:

At each stage in the procedure, Lowton CE High School wants to resolve the complaint. 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 of will not recur
- an explanation of the steps that have been or will be taken to help 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.

Serial or Persistent Complaints:

If the complainant contacts the school repeatedly about the same matter then such communications may be viewed as 'serial' or 'persistent' and the school may choose not to respond. However, schools must not mark a complaint as 'serial' before the complainant has completed the procedure.

The decision to stop responding should never be taken lightly. A school needs to be able to say yes to all of the following:

- The school has taken every reasonable step to address the complainant's needs;
- The complainant has been given a clear statement of the school's position and their options (if any); and
- The complainant is contacting the school repeatedly but making substantially the same points each time.

The case is stronger if the school agrees with one or more of these statements:

- The school has reason to believe the individual is contacting them with the intention of causing disruption or inconvenience
- Their letters/emails/telephone calls are often or always abusive or aggressive.
- They make insulting personal comments about or threats towards staff.

The application of a 'serial or persistent' marking should be against the subject or complaint itself rather than the complainant

Where the Headteacher and/or Chair of Governors, judges a complaint to be serial or persistent they should take appropriate action which may include rejecting the complaint and/or restricting contact between the complainant and the school.

The Headteacher or Chair of Governors, as appropriate, should write to the complainant and explain this decision and the reasons for it and what action will follow, if applicable.

Where a complainant seeks to reopen a matter which is the same as, or similar to, a matter previously considered under the procedure, the Headteacher or Chair of Governors has the right to inform him/her that the procedure has been exhausted and the matter is closed.

The Department for Education does not itself use the term 'vexatious' when dealing with serial or persistent correspondents as it could potentially be inflammatory. However, it is a recognised term. In the context of Freedom of Information requests, 'vexatious' could be defined as the '*...manifestly unjustified, inappropriate or improper use of a formal procedure.*' An exemption therefore exists in Section 14(1) of the FOI Act. However, this exemption can only be applied to requests themselves, and not the individuals who submit them.

More information about dealing with vexatious requests for information is available on the [Information Commissioner's Office \(ICO\) website](#).

The Policy for Unreasonable Complainants is published as an addendum to this policy (Appendix 1).

Banning from School Premises:

Schools are private places; the public has no automatic right of entry. If an individual's behaviour is a cause for concern, a school can ask him/her to leave school premises.

In serious cases, the headteacher or the local authority can notify them in writing that their implied permission to be on school premises has been temporarily removed subject to a later review. If this decision is taken, schools are advised to always put it in writing and explain how the decision can be appealed. Schools should also give the individual the opportunity to formally express their views on the decision to ban in writing.

The decision should then be reviewed and either confirmed or lifted. If the decision is confirmed the individual should be notified in writing, explaining how long the ban will be in place.

Anyone wishing to complain about being banned can do so, by letter or email, to the headteacher or Chair of Governors. However, complaints about banning cannot be escalated to the Department for Education. Once the school procedure has been completed, the only remaining avenue of appeal is through the Courts; independent legal advice must therefore be sought.

Withdrawal of a Complaint:

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

Stage 1:

Formal complaints must be made to the headteacher (unless they are about the headteacher), via the school office. This may be done in person, in writing (preferably on the Complaint Form), or by telephone.

The headteacher will record the date 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 will 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 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 of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish
- keep a written record of any meetings/interviews in relation to their investigation.

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.

Complaints about a member of the Governing Body must be made to the Chair, via the school office

If the complaint is:

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

Stage 1 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:

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 – a meeting with members of the governing body's complaints committee, which will be formed of three, impartial, governors. This is the final stage of the complaints' procedure.

A request to escalate to Stage 2 must be made to the Clerk, via the school office, 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 time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.

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.

The complaints committee will consist of at least three governors with no prior involvement 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.

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. However, there may 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 complaint's 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 them.

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 committee will also 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 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.

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.

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

Stage 2 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

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 response will also advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied.

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 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.

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

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.

Policy for Unreasonable Complaints:

Lowton CE 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 the school. However, we do not expect our staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour and will act to protect staff from that behaviour, including that which is abusive, offensive or threatening.

Lowton CE High School defines unreasonable complainants as *'those who, because of the frequency or nature of their contacts with the school, hinder our consideration of their or other people's complaints'*.

A complaint may be regarded as unreasonable when the person making the complaint:-

- 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 while still wishing their complaint to be resolved
- refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of a complaints' procedure
- insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the adopted complaints procedure or with good practice
- introduces trivial or irrelevant information which the complainant expects to be taken into account and commented on, or raises large numbers 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 complaint 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, complicated and stressful contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with

A complaint may also be considered unreasonable if the person making the complaint does so either face-to-face, by telephone or in writing or electronically:

- maliciously
- aggressively
- using threats, intimidation or violence
- using abusive, offensive or discriminatory language
- knowing it to be false
- using falsified information
- publishing unacceptable information in a variety of media such as in social media websites and newspapers

Complainants should limit the numbers of communications with a school while a 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 or Chair of Governors will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying an 'unreasonable' marking.

If the behaviour continues the headteacher will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and asking them to change it. For complainants who excessively contact Lowton CE High School causing a significant level of disruption, we may specify methods of communication and limit the number of contacts in a communication plan. This will usually be reviewed after 6 months.

In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, the concerns and actions taken will be put in writing immediately and the police informed. This may include banning an individual from Lowton CE High School.

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.

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

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

Signature:

Date:

Official use

Date acknowledgement sent:

By who:

Complaint referred to:

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 the 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.