

# Grazeley Parochial Primary School

‘Be courageous; Be strong; Do everything in love’

1 Corinthians 16 v13-14

We are a loving community of courageous learners, building resilience and hope for the future based on our caring Christian foundation.

## COMPLAINTS POLICY & PROCEDURES

DATE OF THIS REVIEW :

September 2024

REVIEWED BY :

Headteacher  
Clare Payne

APPROVED BY:

Full Governing Body

DATE OF NEXT REVIEW :

September 2025

Version	DATE	DESCRIPTION
2	29.8.24	No changes

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### 1. Aims

Our school aims to meet its statutory obligations when responding to complaints from parents of pupils at the school, and others.

When responding to complaints, we aim to:

- Be impartial and non-adversarial
- Facilitate a full and fair investigation by an independent person or panel, where necessary
- Address all the points at issue and provide an effective and prompt response
- Respect complainants’ desire for confidentiality
- Treat complainants with respect and courtesy
- Make sure that any decisions we make are lawful, rational, reasonable, fair and proportionate, in line with the principles of administrative law
- Keep complainants informed of the progress of the complaints process
- Consider how the complaint can feed into school improvement evaluation processes

We try to resolve concerns or complaints by informal means wherever possible. Where this is not possible, formal procedures will be followed.

The school will aim to give the complainant the opportunity to complete the complaints procedure in full.

To support this, we will make sure we publicise the existence of this policy and make it available on the school website.

Throughout the process, we will be sensitive to the needs of all parties involved, and make any reasonable adjustments needed to accommodate individuals.

## 2. Legislation and guidance

This document meets the requirements of section 29 of the [Education Act 2002](#), which states that schools must have and make available a procedure to deal with all complaints relating to their school and to any community facilities or services that the school provides.

It is also based on [guidance for schools on complaints procedures](#) from the Department for Education (DfE), including the model procedure, and model procedure for dealing with serial and unreasonable complaints.

In addition, it addresses duties set out in the [Early Years Foundation Stage statutory framework](#) with regards to dealing with complaints about the school's fulfilment of Early Years Foundation Stage requirements.

## 3. Definitions and scope

### 3.1 Definitions

The DfE guidance explains the difference between a concern and a complaint:

- A concern is defined as “an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought”
- A complaint is defined as “an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action”

### 3.2 Scope

The school intends to resolve complaints informally where possible, at the earliest possible stage.

There may be occasions when complainants would like to raise their concerns formally. This policy outlines the procedure relating to handling such complaints.

This policy does not cover complaints procedures relating to:

- Admissions
- Statutory assessments of special educational needs (SEN)
- Safeguarding matters
- Suspension and permanent exclusion
- Whistle-blowing
- Staff grievances
- Staff discipline
- School re-organisation proposals
- Curriculum
- Collective worship

Please see our separate policies for procedures relating to these types of complaint.

Complaints about services provided by other providers who use school premises or facilities should be directed to the provider concerned.

For the avoidance of doubt, this policy is distinct from formal staff disciplinary proceedings. Complainants will never be advised of the outcome of internal disciplinary procedures.

There may be occasions when a complaint gives rise to disciplinary procedures and in such an instance, the complaints procedure will be put on hold until the disciplinary procedures are concluded. The complainant will be informed of the pause in the complaints procedure.

This policy does not cover complaints made against Wokingham Borough Council or the Oxford Diocesan Board of Education. Complainants are directed to the complaints procedures of those particular bodies.

## 4. Roles and responsibilities

### 4.1 The complainant

The complainant will get a more effective and timely response to their complaint if they:

- Follow these procedures
- Co-operate with the school throughout the process, and respond to deadlines and communication promptly
- Ask for assistance as needed
- Treat all those involved with respect
- Do not publish details about the complaint on social media

### 4.2 The investigator

An individual will be appointed to look into the complaint and establish the facts. They will:

- Interview all relevant parties, keeping notes
- Consider records and any written evidence and keep these securely
- Prepare a comprehensive report, which includes the facts and potential solutions

### 4.3 The complaints co-ordinator

The complaints co-ordinator can be:

- The Headteacher
- A designated governor
- Any other staff member providing administrative support

The complaints co-ordinator will:

- Keep the complainant up to date at each stage in the procedure
- Make sure the process runs smoothly by liaising with staff members, the Headteacher, Chair of Governors, Clerk and local authority
- Be aware of issues relating to:
  - Sharing third party information
  - Additional support needed by complainants, for example interpretation support or where the complainant is a child or young person
- Keep records

### 4.4 Clerk to the governing board

The Clerk will:

- Be the contact point for the complainant and the complaints co-ordinator, including circulating the relevant papers and evidence before complaints panel meetings
- Arrange the complaints hearing
- Record and circulate the minutes and outcome of the hearing

## 4.5 Panel chair

The panel chair will:

- Chair the meeting, ensuring that everyone is treated with respect throughout
- Make sure all parties see the relevant information, understand the purpose of the panel meeting, and are allowed to present their case

## 5. Principles for investigation

When investigating a complaint, we will try to clarify:

- What has happened
- Who was involved
- What the complainant feels would put things right

### 5.1 Time scales

The complainant must raise the complaint within 3 months of the incident. If the complaint is about a series of related incidents, they must raise the complaint within 3 months of the last incident.

We will consider exceptions to this timeframe in circumstances where there were valid reasons for not making a complaint at that time and the complaint can still be investigated in a fair manner for all involved.

When complaints are made out of term time, we will consider them to have been received on the first school day after the holiday period.

If at any point we cannot meet the timescales we have set out in this policy, we will:

- Set new time limits with the complainant
- Send the complainant details of the new deadline and explain the delay

### 5.2 Complaints about our fulfilment of early years requirements

We will investigate all written complaints relating to the school's fulfilment of the Early Years Foundation Stage requirements, and notify the complainant of the outcome within 28 days of receiving the complaint. The school will keep a record of the complaint (see section 10) and make this available to Ofsted on request.

Parents and carers can notify Ofsted if they believe that the school is not meeting Early Years Foundation Stage requirements, by calling 0300 123 4666, or by emailing [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk). An online contact form is also available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted#org-contacts>.

We will notify parents and carers if we become aware that the school is to be inspected by Ofsted. We will also supply a copy of the inspection report to parents and carers of children attending the setting on a regular basis.

## 6. Stages of complaint (not complaints against the Headteacher or governors)

At each stage of the complaints process, the conclusion will be:

- The complaint is upheld, either in part or in full, and where appropriate, some form of action is taken
- The complaint is not upheld, and reasons for this are clearly given

It may be appropriate to offer one or more of the following:

- An apology
- An explanation
- An admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better
- An assurance that the event complained of will not recur

- An explanation of the steps that have been taken to ensure that it will not happen again
- An undertaking to review school policies and procedures in light of the complaint

## 6.1 Stage 1: informal

The school will take informal concerns seriously and make every effort to resolve the matter quickly. It may be the case that the provision or clarification of information will resolve the issue.

The complainant should raise the complaint as soon as possible with the relevant member of staff or the Headteacher as appropriate, either in person or by letter, telephone or email. If the complainant is unclear who to contact or how to contact them, they should contact the school office by phone: 0118 988 3340 or by email: [admin@grazeley.wokingham.sch.uk](mailto:admin@grazeley.wokingham.sch.uk).

The school will acknowledge informal complaints within 3 school days, and investigate and provide a response within a further 5 school days.

The informal stage will involve a meeting between the complainant and the Headteacher and/or the subject of the complaint, as appropriate.

If the complaint is not resolved informally, it can be escalated to a formal complaint.

## 6.2 Stage 2: formal

Formal complaints can be raised:

- By letter or email
- Over the phone
- In person
- By a third party acting on behalf of the complainant

The complainant should complete the form shown as an appendix to this policy, which asks for details such as relevant dates, times, and the names of witnesses of events, alongside copies of any relevant documents, and what they feel would resolve the complaint.

If complainants need assistance raising a formal complaint, they can contact the school office by phone: 0118 988 3340 or by email: [admin@grazeley.wokingham.sch.uk](mailto:admin@grazeley.wokingham.sch.uk).

The Headteacher or complaints co-ordinator will record the date the complaint is received and will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 3 school days.

The Headteacher (or designated member of the senior leadership team) or investigator will arrange a meeting to clarify concerns, and seek a resolution. The complainant may be accompanied to this meeting, and should inform the school of the identity of their companion in advance.

In certain circumstances, the school may need to refuse a request for a particular individual to attend any such meeting – for example, if there is a conflict of interest. If this is the case, the school will notify the complainant as soon as they are aware, so that the complainant has the opportunity to arrange alternative accompaniment.

The Headteacher or investigator will then conduct their own investigation. The written conclusion of this investigation will be sent to the complainant within 10 school days.

If the complainant wishes to proceed to the next stage of the procedure, they should inform the Clerk to the governing board within 5 school days. Requests received outside of this timeframe will be considered in exceptional circumstances.

How to escalate a complaint

Complaints can be escalated by contacting the Clerk to the governing board:

- By letter or email
- Over the phone
- In person

- Through a third party acting on behalf of the complainant

The Clerk will need the details of the complaint as set out above, but must additionally include details from the complainant on how they feel the previous stage of the procedure has not addressed their complaint sufficiently, and what they feel would resolve the complaint.

The clerk will acknowledge receipt of the request within 3 school days.

### **6.3 Stage 3: submit the complaint to the review panel**

#### **Convening the panel**

The review panel consists of the first 3 members of the governing board available, who don't have direct knowledge of the complaint. These individuals will have access to the existing record of the complaint's progress (see section 10). The governors will select a panel chair from among themselves.

If not enough impartial governors are available, we will seek panel members from other schools, the local authority or the diocese. We will make sure the governors we source are suitably skilled and can demonstrate that they are independent and impartial.

The complainant must have reasonable notice of the date of the review panel. The clerk will aim to find a date within 15 school days of the request, where possible.

If the complainant rejects the offer of 3 proposed dates without good reason, the clerk will set a date. The hearing will go ahead using written submissions from both parties. Complainants do not have to attend the panel meeting if they would prefer not to, and all written evidence will be considered.

Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least 3 school days before the date of the meeting.

#### **At the meeting**

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 will be sought before meetings or conversations take place. Consent will be recorded in any minutes taken.

At the review panel meeting, the investigator, the complainant will be present, along with representatives from the school, as appropriate. Each will have an opportunity to set out written submissions prior to the meeting or oral submissions during the meeting. Witnesses may be invited by either the complainant or the school, but may not necessarily be called (see below), and otherwise must only attend for the part of the meeting in which they give their evidence. Written evidence may be considered, if submitted prior to the deadline outlined above.

The complainant must be allowed to attend the panel hearing and be accompanied by a suitable companion if they wish. We don't encourage either party to bring legal representation, but will consider it on a case-by-case basis. For instance, if a school employee is called as a witness in a complaint meeting, they may wish to be supported by their union.

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

At the meeting, the initial focus will be on the investigation performed at stage 2 of the complaints process, as above. The panel will review the investigation to test if it was sufficiently complete, rigorous, clear, unbiased and timely. The investigator will be questioned by the panel, and the complainant and school representative will have the opportunity to ask questions. At this point the panel will decide on one of the following:

- The investigation meets all the above tests, and no further evidence needs to be sought
- The investigation is largely complete and that any gaps can be addressed at the meeting by the witnesses available, including the complainant and the school representative
- The investigation is either substantially flawed, or that the absence of certain witnesses at the meeting means that a conclusion cannot be reached

If the applicable witnesses are available, the panel will conduct further questioning and the complainant and the school representative will be given the chance to ask and reply to questions.

If the panel determines that it is not in possession of sufficient facts to reach a conclusion in this meeting, it will adjourn and reconvene at a later date, agreed by all. The investigator may be asked to re-open the investigation to incorporate the required information, or the panel may decide to commission a new investigation by a different person.

If the investigation is determined to be complete, or can be completed at the meeting, the focus will then turn to the judgements made by the investigator and the conclusions reached.

The complainant and the school representative will each be given the opportunity to present their statements, and ask and answer any questions not yet addressed. Once the complainant and school representatives have completed presenting their cases, they will be asked to leave and evidence will then be considered.

The panel will then put together its findings and recommendations from the case. The panel will also provide copies of the minutes of the hearing and the findings and recommendations to the complainant and, where relevant, the subject of the complaint, and make a copy of the findings and recommendations available for inspection by the Headteacher.

### **The outcome**

The panel can:

- Uphold the complaint, in whole or in part
- Dismiss the complaint, in whole or in part

If the complaint is upheld, the panel will:

- Decide the appropriate action to resolve the complaint
- Where appropriate, recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future

The school will inform those involved of the decision in writing within 5 school days.

## **7. Complaints against the Headteacher, a governor or the governing board**

### **7.1 Stage 1: informal**

Complaints made against the Headteacher or any member of the governing board should be directed to the Clerk to the governing board in the first instance. All such complaints are not appropriate to be dealt with informally, and so the process must start with stage 2, below.

### **7.2 Stage 2: formal**

Formal complaints can be raised:

- By letter or email
- Over the phone
- In person
- By a third party acting on behalf of the complainant

The complainant should complete the form shown as an appendix to this policy, which asks for details such as relevant dates, times, and the names of witnesses of events, alongside copies of any relevant documents, and what they feel would resolve the complaint.

If complainants need assistance raising a formal complaint, they can contact the school office by phone: 0118 988 3340 or by email: [admin@grazeley.wokingham.sch.uk](mailto:admin@grazeley.wokingham.sch.uk).

If the complaint is:

- About the Headteacher or
- One particular governor



The Clerk will record the date the complaint is received and will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 3 school days.

An appropriate complaints co-ordinator will be appointed, and they will contact the complainant to advise the proposed actions and timelines.

An investigator will carry out the steps set out in section 6.2 above. They will be appointed by the governing board, and will write a formal response at the end of their investigation. The written conclusion of this investigation will be sent to the complainant within 10 school days.

If the complaint is:

- Jointly about the chair and vice-chair or
- The entire governing board or
- The majority of the governing board

An external investigator will carry out the steps set out in section 6.2 above. They will be appointed by the diocese, and will write a formal response at the end of their investigation. The written conclusion of this investigation will be sent to the complainant within 15 school days.

If the complainant wishes to proceed to the next stage of the procedure, they should inform the Clerk to the governing board within 5 school days. Requests received outside of this timeframe will be considered in exceptional circumstances.

How to escalate a complaint

Complaints can be escalated by contacting the Clerk to the governing board:

- By letter or email
- Over the phone
- In person
- Through a third party acting on behalf of the complainant

The Clerk will need the details of the complaint as set out above, but must additionally include details from the complainant on how they feel the previous stage of the procedure has not addressed their complaint sufficiently, and what they feel would resolve the complaint.

The clerk will acknowledge receipt of the request within 3 school days.

### **7.3 Stage 3: review panel**

If the complaint is:

- About the Headteacher or
- One particular governor

A panel meeting will be convened and carry out the steps as set out in section 6.3 above.

If the complaint is:

- Jointly about the chair and vice-chair or
- The entire governing board or
- The majority of the governing board

A panel of independent governors will hear the complaint. They will be sourced from local schools, the local authority or diocese and will carry out the steps as set out in section 6.3 above.

## **8. Referring complaints on completion of the school's procedure**

If the complainant is unsatisfied with the outcome of the school's complaints procedure, they can refer their complaint to the DfE.

The DfE will not re-investigate the matter of the complaint. It will look at whether the school's complaints policy and any other relevant statutory policies that the school holds were adhered to. The DfE also looks at whether the school's statutory policies adhere to education legislation.

The DfE will intervene where a school has:

- Failed to act in line with its duties under education law
- Acted (or is proposing to act) unreasonably when exercising its functions

If the complaints procedure is found to not meet regulations, the school will be asked to correct its procedure accordingly.

For more information or to refer a complaint, see the following webpage:

<https://www.gov.uk/complain-about-school>

We will include this information in the outcome letter to complainants.

## 9. Persistent complaints

### 9.1 Unreasonably persistent complaints

Most complaints raised will be valid, and therefore we will treat them seriously. However, a complaint may become unreasonable if the person:

- Has made the same complaint before, and it's already been resolved by following the school's complaints procedure
- Takes an aspect of a previous complaint which may not have been specifically addressed, but is substantially part of the same incident, and could have been specifically raised by the complainant previously
- Makes a complaint, or a series of complaints that are obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific, defamatory or repetitive
- Insists on pursuing a complaint that is unfounded, or out of scope of the complaints procedure, beyond all reason
- Pursues a valid complaint, but in an unreasonable manner e.g. refuses to articulate the complaint, refuses to co-operate with this complaints procedure, or insists that the complaint is dealt with in ways that are incompatible with this procedure and the timeframes it sets out
- Makes a complaint designed to cause disruption, annoyance or excessive demands on school time
- Seeks unrealistic outcomes, or a solution that lacks any serious purpose or value
- Uses Freedom of Information requests excessively and unreasonably
- Insists on dealing only with the Headteacher on all occasions, irrespective of the issue and the level of delegation in the school to deal with such matters

For the purpose of the policy, harassment is the unreasonable pursuit of such actions above in any of the following ways, in that they:

- Appear to be targeted over a significant period of time on one or more members of school staff
- Cause ongoing distress to individual member(s) of school staff
- Have a significant adverse effect on the whole/parts of the school community
- Are pursued in a manner which can be perceived as intimidating and oppressive by the recipient. This could include situations where persistent demands and criticisms, whilst not particularly taxing or serious when viewed in isolation, have a cumulative effect over time of undermining confidence, well-being and health.

#### Steps we will take

We will take every reasonable step to address the complainant's concerns, and give them a clear written statement of our position and their options. We will maintain our role as an objective arbiter throughout the process, including when we meet with individuals. We will follow our complaints procedure as normal (as outlined above) wherever possible.

If the complainant continues to contact the school in a disruptive way, we may put communications strategies in place. We may:

- Give the complainant a single point of contact via an email address
- Restrict our response to communication, other than in case of emergencies and safeguarding
- Insist upon third parties being present at all future meetings, with notes being taken
- Ask the complainant to engage a third party to act on their behalf, such as [Citizens Advice](#)
- Put any other strategy in place as necessary, including restricting all non-emergency communication to third parties such as our legal representatives or pursuing a case under anti-harassment legislation

### **Stopping responding**

We may stop responding to the complainant when all of these factors are met:

- We believe we have taken all reasonable steps to help address their concerns
- We have provided a clear statement of our position and their options
- The complainant contacts us repeatedly, and we believe their intention is to cause disruption or inconvenience

Where we stop responding, we will inform the individual that we intend to do so. We will also explain that we will still consider any new complaints they make, which do not fall into the categories defined above, and which are raised in accordance with the communication restrictions above, subject to legal advice.

In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, we will immediately inform the police and communicate our actions in writing. This may include barring an individual from our school site.

## **9.2 Duplicate complaints**

If we have resolved a complaint under this procedure and receive a duplicate complaint on the same subject from a partner, family member or other individual, we will assess whether there are aspects that we hadn't previously considered, or any new information we need to take into account.

If we are satisfied that there are no new aspects, we will:

- Tell the new complainant that we have already investigated and responded to this issue, and that the local process is complete
- Direct them to the DfE if they are dissatisfied with our original handling of the complaint

If there are new aspects, we will follow this procedure again.

## **9.3 Complaint campaigns**

Where the school receives a large volume of complaints about the same topic or subject, especially if these come from complainants unconnected with the school, the school may respond to these complaints by:

- Publishing a single response on the school website
- Sending a template response to all of the complainants

If complainants are not satisfied with the school's response, or wish to pursue the complaint further, the normal procedures will apply.

## **10. Record keeping**

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.

This is except where the secretary of state (or someone acting on their behalf) or the complainant requests access to records of a complaint through a freedom of information (FOI) request or through a subject access request under the terms of the Data Protection Act, or where the material must be made available during a school inspection.

Records of complaints will be kept securely, only for as long as necessary and in line with data protection law, our privacy notices and record retention schedule. This is normally in line with the Local Authority requirement of six years.

The details of the complaint, including the names of individuals involved, will not be shared with the whole governing board in case a review panel needs to be organised at a later point.

Where the governing board is aware of the substance of the complaint before the review panel stage, the school will (where reasonably practicable) arrange for an independent panel to hear the complaint.

Complainants also have the right to request an independent panel if they believe there is likely to be bias in the proceedings. The decision to approve this request is made by the governing board, who will not unreasonably withhold consent.

## 11. Learning lessons

The governing board will review any underlying issues raised by complaints with the Headteacher, where appropriate, and respecting confidentiality, to determine whether there are any improvements that the school can make to its procedures or practice to help prevent similar events in the future.

## 12. Monitoring arrangements

The governing board will monitor the effectiveness of the complaints procedure in making sure that complaints are handled properly. The governing board will track the number and nature of complaints, and review underlying issues as stated in section 11.

The complaints records are logged and managed by the Headteacher.

This policy will be reviewed by the full governing board every two years.

At each review, the policy will be approved by the full governing board.

## 13. Links with other policies

Policies dealing with other forms of complaints include:

- Child protection and safeguarding policy and procedures
- Admissions policy
- Suspension and permanent exclusion policy
- Staff grievance procedures
- Staff disciplinary procedures
- SEN policy and information report
- Privacy notices
- Collective Worship Policy

## 14. Appendix – Complaints Form

Name	
Pupil Name	
Relationship to Pupil	
Email address	
Daytime telephone	
Evening telephone	

Please give the details of your complaint. It may be helpful to build a timeline here and then expand upon each entry in the text box below.

Date	Time	Event	Persons involved	Witnessed by

What action, if any, have you taken to resolve your complaint?			
What actions do you feel may resolve the problem?			
Please add any other information which you feel is pertinent here:			
Please attach any paperwork that supports your complaint			
Signature		Date	