



Wonder Star School

Complaints Policy

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Purpose and commitment

Wonder Star School welcomes concerns and complaints as an opportunity to resolve problems, safeguard pupils and improve practice. We will handle complaints fairly, impartially, respectfully and without disadvantaging a pupil because a complaint has been made.

This policy explains how parents and carers can raise a concern, make a formal complaint and request a panel hearing. It also explains how the school will manage conflicts of interest, safeguarding matters and records.

Legal framework

This policy has been prepared with regard to Part 7 of the Schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026, the Equality Act 2010, the UK General Data Protection Regulation and the Data Protection Act 2018.

1. Scope

The statutory procedure applies to complaints from parents of pupils currently registered at the school. For this policy, parent includes a person with parental responsibility. The school will also accept a complaint from a carer or authorised representative where the parent has given consent or the person is otherwise authorised to act for the child.

Where appropriate, the school may use this procedure for concerns from former parents, prospective parents or other people, but the statutory panel entitlement applies to parents of current pupils and to complaints begun while the pupil was on roll.

Concern and complaint

A concern is an expression of worry or doubt for which reassurance or an explanation is sought. A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction about an action taken, a failure to act, or a service provided by the school. A complaint does not need to use the word complaint to be treated as one.

Matters using another procedure

Some matters require a different process. The school will explain the appropriate route where a concern relates to:

- a safeguarding concern or an allegation about an adult, which will also be managed under the safeguarding and allegations procedures;
- a staff grievance, disciplinary matter or whistleblowing concern;
- an Education Health and Care Plan decision or another decision carrying a separate statutory right of appeal;
- a data protection rights request or complaint to the Information Commissioner; or
- a matter already subject to legal proceedings where continuing the complaints process could prejudice those proceedings.

Using another procedure does not prevent the school from considering any separate service failure that falls within this policy.

2. How to raise a concern or complaint

Matter	Send to	Contact route
General concern or complaint	Lauren Pierpoint, Head of School	lauren@wonderstarschool.co.uk 07380 359730
Complaint about the Head of School	Kirsty Woolridge, Proprietor	Mark correspondence Private and Confidential for the Proprietor and send or hand deliver it to the school address. Telephone 07380 359730 if assistance is needed.
Complaint about the Proprietor	Chair of the Governing Body	Mark correspondence Private and Confidential for the Chair and send or hand deliver it to the school address.
Complaint involving both the Head and Proprietor	Chair of the Governing Body	The Chair will arrange independent handling and use the school postal address.

School address: Wonder Star School, Chapel Lane, Rode Heath, Stoke-on-Trent, ST7 3SD.

A complainant may use the form at Appendix 2, but does not have to. The school will make reasonable adjustments and provide help where a person has difficulty putting a complaint in writing. A complainant may be accompanied at meetings.

Working days and time limits

Working day means a weekday during the school term, excluding bank holidays and INSET days. A complaint received outside term time will be treated as received on the first working day of the next term. The school may accept a complaint outside the normal escalation time limits where there is a reasonable explanation.

Where a deadline cannot be met, the school will write before it expires, explain the reason, identify the person responsible and give a revised date. Safeguarding action will never be delayed because the school is closed or because a complaints deadline has not started.

3. Stage 1 informal resolution

Most concerns can be resolved through early discussion. The complainant should raise the matter with the relevant member of staff or the Head of School. A concern about the Head of School should be raised directly with the Proprietor. A concern about the Proprietor should be raised with the Chair of the Governing Body.

The school will acknowledge the concern within 2 working days and aim to provide an informal response within 10 working days. The response may be given at a meeting, by telephone or in writing, depending on the circumstances. A brief written record will be kept.

A complainant may proceed directly to Stage 2 where the matter is serious, informal resolution is inappropriate, or earlier attempts have not resolved it.

4. Stage 2 formal complaint

A formal complaint must be made in writing. It should identify what happened, the aspects complained about, any relevant dates or evidence, the outcome sought and whether support or a reasonable adjustment is required. The school will help record the complaint where needed.

Acknowledgement and appointment

The school will acknowledge a formal complaint within 3 working days. The acknowledgement will identify the person responsible for the investigation and confirm the expected response date.

Complaint concerns	Stage 2 responsibility
A member of staff or school service	Head of School or an impartial investigator appointed by the Head
The Head of School or decisions made under the Head's leadership	Proprietor or an impartial investigator appointed by the Proprietor
The Proprietor	Chair of the Governing Body or an impartial investigator appointed by the Chair
The Head and Proprietor together, or the governing body collectively	An external investigator appointed by an uninvolved person on behalf of the school

Investigation

The investigator must be impartial and have had no material involvement in the matters complained about. The investigator may meet the complainant and relevant people, obtain written accounts and examine records. The investigation will be proportionate to the issues raised and will consider evidence that supports and does not support the complaint.

Contemporaneous records will be preserved in their original form. An original incident report or account will not be overwritten. If information is later corrected or clarified, this will be recorded in a separately dated addendum showing what changed, why it changed and the source of the revised information.

People whose actions are criticised will be told the substance of the concern and given a fair opportunity to respond, unless an external safeguarding or criminal process requires a different approach.

Formal response

The school will aim to send the Stage 2 response within 15 working days of receiving the formal complaint. The response will:

- summarise the issues considered and the investigation undertaken;
- state whether each complaint is upheld, partially upheld or not upheld, with reasons;
- identify any remedy, learning or action the school can appropriately disclose; and
- explain how and by when the complainant may request a Stage 3 panel hearing.

Where a complaint results in a staff capability or disciplinary process, the complainant will be told that the matter has been addressed under the appropriate procedure but will not be given confidential employment information.

5. Stage 3 panel hearing

If the complainant remains dissatisfied after Stage 2, they may request a panel hearing in writing within 10 working days of the Stage 2 response. The request should explain which findings remain disputed and the outcome sought. A late request may be accepted where there is a reasonable explanation.

Panel membership and independence

The panel will be appointed by or on behalf of the Proprietor and will consist of at least three people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint. At least one panel member will be independent of the management and running of the school. Where the complaint concerns the Proprietor, the Chair of the Governing Body or another uninvolved person will arrange the panel.

A panel member will declare any actual or potential conflict of interest. A person will not sit where their involvement, relationship or prior knowledge could reasonably call their impartiality into question.

Arrangements

The school will acknowledge the request within 3 working days and aim to hold the hearing within 20 working days. The date will take reasonable account of the complainant's availability. At least 5 working days before the hearing, the clerk will provide the panel, complainant and school representative with the documents to be considered.

The parent may attend and be accompanied by a relative, friend or supporter. Reasonable adjustments will be made where required. Legal representation is not normally necessary, but any request will be considered fairly in the circumstances. If the complainant chooses not to attend,

the panel may consider the complaint on the written evidence after taking reasonable steps to facilitate attendance.

Conduct and outcome

The hearing is a review meeting, not a court. The Chair will ensure that each party can explain their position and respond to relevant points. The panel may ask questions, request further information and adjourn if this is necessary for a fair decision. A clerk will keep an accurate record of the hearing.

The panel may uphold, partially uphold or not uphold the complaint. It may make findings and recommendations, including recommendations about remedies, policy, training, risk controls or governance oversight.

The panel's written findings and recommendations will normally be issued within 5 working days of the hearing to:

- the complainant;
- the Proprietor and Head of School; and
- the person complained about, where relevant.

A copy will be available for inspection on the school premises by the Proprietor and Head of School. The panel hearing concludes the school's complaints procedure.

6. Safeguarding complaints and external investigations

The safety and welfare of children take priority over the complaints timetable. Any information suggesting that a child may be at risk, or that an adult working with children may have harmed a child, posed a risk of harm, committed a relevant criminal offence or may be unsuitable to work with children, will be acted upon immediately under the safeguarding and allegations procedures. This may include consultation or referral to children's social care, the Local Authority Designated Officer, the police or another relevant agency.

The school will not conduct questioning or evidence gathering that could compromise an external safeguarding or criminal process. After taking advice from the relevant agency, the school may pause or limit part of its complaint investigation. The complainant will be told that this has happened, why information is limited where it is lawful to explain, and when the position will be reviewed. Acknowledgement, immediate protective action, evidence preservation and appropriate communication will continue.

When the external process permits, the school will resume and complete any outstanding parts of the complaints procedure. A safeguarding referral does not determine the outcome of the complaint, and the complaint does not determine the outcome of a safeguarding process.

7. Fairness confidentiality and support

- Complaints will be decided on the evidence and the balance of probabilities, without predetermination.
- No pupil will be treated less favourably because a parent or carer has raised a concern or complaint.
- Information will be shared only with those who need it to handle the complaint, safeguard a child, meet legal duties or support inspection and regulatory oversight.

- The school will make reasonable adjustments and will consider communication, language, disability and accessibility needs.
- Anonymous concerns will be considered proportionately, particularly where they raise safeguarding or safety issues, although the school may be unable to provide a response.
- If a complaint is withdrawn, the school may still investigate where safeguarding, safety, regulatory compliance or wider learning requires it.

8. Persistent or unreasonable contact

The school will not treat a complaint as unreasonable merely because it is persistent, strongly expressed or difficult. Where the substance has been fully considered and contact becomes abusive, threatening, repetitious or prevents the school from carrying out its duties, the Proprietor may set proportionate communication arrangements. Any restriction will be explained in writing, kept under review and will not prevent new safeguarding information from being considered.

9. Records and monitoring

The school will keep a written record of every complaint made under Stage 2 and whether it was resolved at Stage 2 or proceeded to a Stage 3 panel hearing. The record will also show the action taken by the school as a result, whether or not the complaint was upheld.

Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except where access is requested by the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the Education and Skills Act 2008, or where disclosure is otherwise required by law.

Complaint records will be retained securely in accordance with the school's retention schedule and data protection policy. Safeguarding records will be retained separately in accordance with safeguarding requirements. The number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year will be made available to parents and prospective parents.

The Proprietor will review themes, actions and completion of recommendations. Complaint records will not be altered retrospectively. Corrections and updates will be added as dated entries so that the audit trail remains clear.

10. External routes after Stage 3

The Department for Education does not normally determine the merits of an individual dispute with a private school. It may consider whether an independent school is meeting the Independent School Standards or whether there has been a major regulatory failure. Information is available at www.gov.uk/complain-about-school/private-schools.

A safeguarding concern may be reported directly to the relevant local authority or police at any time. Call 999 where a child is in immediate danger. Using an external safeguarding route does not require the complainant to complete the school's complaints stages first.

11. Review and publication

This policy will be published on the school website and made available to parents on request. It will be reviewed at least annually and sooner following a significant complaint, safeguarding incident, regulatory change or identified weakness in the procedure.

Appendix 1: Complaints process at a glance

Stage	Lead	What happens	Target time
Stage 1	Relevant staff member, Head, Proprietor or Chair	Informal discussion, clarification and early resolution.	Acknowledge within 2 working days; respond within 10
Stage 2	Impartial person with no conflict	Written investigation and reasoned formal response.	Acknowledge within 3 working days; respond within 15
Stage 3	Panel of at least three uninvolved people, including one independent member	Panel hearing, findings and recommendations.	Hearing normally within 20 working days; outcome within 5

Choosing the correct route

- Complaint about a staff member or service: send to the Head of School.
- Complaint about the Head or decisions made under the Head's leadership: send to the Proprietor.
- Complaint about the Proprietor, or both the Head and Proprietor: send to the Chair of the Governing Body.
- Immediate safeguarding concern: use the safeguarding route without waiting for the complaints process.

Appendix 2: Complaints Form

Please complete and return to Lauren Pierpoint, who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken. Alternatively, this form to be filled in by Lauren if a complaint is taken over the phone.

Name of person raising concern / complaint:	
Learner's name:	
Relationship to the learner:	
Address:	
Postcode:	
Daytime telephone number:	
Evening telephone number:	
Details of the complaint:	
What action, if any, have you already taken to try and resolve your complaint?	
What action do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?	
Are you providing any paperwork? If so, please give details.	
Signature:	
Date:	
Office use only	
Date acknowledgement sent:	
Acknowledgement sent by:	
Complaint referred:	
Signature:	

Complaint Tracking

	Findings/Documentation <i>Include all phone calls, electronic and paper communication and meeting records, including dates.</i>
Steps taken to investigate the complaint	
Date(s) this took place on	
Witness statements or evidence accumulated	
Investigation findings	
Suggested resolution	
Date Communicated to Parent/Carer	

Witness Statement

Brief description of Incident: _____

Witness statement taken on; Date: _____ Time: _____

Name of Witness: _____

Witness Address: _____

Employee/Learner: _____

Statement

This statement (consisting of ____ page(s), each signed by me) is true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Signed by Witness: _____

This statement was taken by: _____

Signed: _____ Date: _____ Time: _____

Page No.: _____

Witness statement - Continuation page

This statement (consisting of ___ page(s), each signed by me) is true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Signed by Witness: _____

This statement was taken by: _____

Signed: _____ Date: _____ Time: _____

Page No.: _____