



Leamington Federation
Sydenham Primary School and Lighthorne Heath Primary School
Complaints Policy for Dealing with Concerns and Complaints

The Governing Body of the Leamington Federation has adopted this procedure for dealing with concerns and complaints about Sydenham Primary School and Lighthorne Heath Primary School. It applies to complaints from parents and carers, pupils, former pupils, members of the public and others about the provision of facilities or services by either school, except where a separate statutory procedure applies.

This policy has been reviewed with regard to section 29 of the Education Act 2002 and the Department for Education (DfE) Best practice guidance for school complaints procedures. The Governing Body will ensure that this procedure is published on the website of each school in the federation.

1. Principles of the complaints procedure

Our aim is to resolve concerns and complaints fairly, promptly and at the lowest appropriate level, while ensuring that complainants are able to complete the published procedure. The procedure is designed to be:

- simple to understand and use;
- impartial, fair and non-adversarial;
- accessible, including through reasonable adjustments where required;
- capable of enabling a full and fair investigation;
- respectful of confidentiality and data protection requirements;
- focused on addressing all points at issue and providing an effective response and appropriate redress where necessary;
- used as a source of learning so that school systems and services can improve.

The school will not insist that a concern must be resolved informally before a formal complaint is accepted. Where informal resolution is appropriate, it will be encouraged, but a complainant who wishes to make a formal complaint may do so.

2. The difference between a concern and a complaint

A concern is an expression of worry or doubt about an issue for which reassurance is sought. A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about actions taken or a lack of action. We will take concerns seriously and make every reasonable effort to resolve them at the earliest opportunity.

3. Who can make a complaint?

This procedure is not limited to parents or carers of pupils currently on roll. Anyone may make a complaint about provision, facilities or services provided by the school, unless the matter is subject to a separate statutory or other prescribed procedure. A complaint may be made in person, by telephone, in writing or by a third party acting on behalf of the complainant. Where a third party is acting for a complainant, the school will normally require the complainant's written consent before sharing personal information.

We will make reasonable adjustments where required by the Equality Act 2010. This may include accepting a complaint in a format other than the complaint form, providing assistance with putting a complaint in writing, arranging an interpreter, or making appropriate adjustments to meetings.

4. Complaints that fall outside this procedure

Some matters are dealt with under separate procedures. Where this applies, the school will explain the appropriate route. Examples include:

- admissions to school and admission appeals;
- statutory assessments of special educational needs and Education, Health and Care Plan decisions made by the local authority;
- suspensions and permanent exclusions, which are subject to separate statutory procedures (although complaints about the application of the school behaviour policy may be considered under this procedure);
- matters likely to require a child protection investigation, which will be handled under the Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy and relevant safeguarding procedures;
- staff grievances, which are dealt with under the school's internal grievance procedures;
- staff conduct matters where disciplinary procedures may apply. The complainant will be told that the matter is being addressed but will not be given confidential employment information or details of disciplinary action;
- whistleblowing by employees, temporary staff and contractors;
- complaints about services provided by an external provider using school premises, which should normally be made under that provider's complaints procedure;
- complaints about the content of the national curriculum, which should be directed to the DfE; complaints about the delivery of the curriculum are within this procedure;
- requests for information or complaints about data protection, Freedom of Information or subject access requests, where separate statutory rights and review routes apply.

5. Time limits

Complaints should normally be raised within three months of the incident or, where a series of related incidents has occurred, within three months of the last incident. We will consider complaints made outside this period where there are exceptional circumstances and it is fair and reasonable to do so.

Where a published timescale cannot be met because further investigation is required, the school will inform the complainant, explain the reason for the delay and provide a revised date. School holidays and periods of closure may affect the availability of staff or governors; any revised timescale will remain reasonable and proportionate.

6. Informal resolution of concerns

Many concerns can be resolved quickly through discussion. A complainant may wish to raise a concern with the member of staff most directly involved, the class teacher, a senior leader or the Executive Headteacher, depending on the nature of the issue. The school will listen, clarify the concern and explore what outcome the complainant is seeking.

Possible responses may include an explanation, an apology where appropriate, acknowledgement that a situation could have been handled differently, an assurance about future practice, or a commitment to review a policy or procedure. An acknowledgement that something could have been handled better is not the same as an admission of negligence or unlawful action.

7. Formal complaints - Stage 1

A formal complaint should normally be addressed to the Executive Headteacher. It may be submitted in person, by telephone, by email, in writing or using the complaint form at Appendix 1. A complaint form is provided for convenience but its use is not compulsory. Written complaints may be sent via the school office at Sydenham Primary School, Calder Walk, Leamington Spa, Warwickshire, CV31 1SA, or Lighthorne Heath Primary School, Stratford Road, Lighthorne Heath, Warwickshire, CV33 9TW.

The school will:

- acknowledge the complaint within 5 school days;
- clarify the complaint, the issues that remain unresolved and the outcome sought;
- decide who is best placed to investigate, ensuring that the investigator is impartial and has no conflict of interest;
- conduct a proportionate investigation, which may include reviewing records and speaking to relevant people;
- keep a clear record of the complaint, investigation and outcome;

- provide a written response normally within 15 school days of acknowledgement, or explain any delay and provide a revised date.

The Stage 1 response will address the points raised, explain the conclusions reached and any action the school proposes to take. It will also explain how the complainant may request Stage 2 if dissatisfied.

8. Complaints about the Executive Headteacher, governors or the Governing Body

To preserve fairness and impartiality, the route will be adapted where the subject of the complaint would otherwise be responsible for considering it:

- A complaint about the Executive Headteacher should be sent to the Clerk to the Governing Body and will normally be investigated at Stage 1 by the Chair of Governors or another suitably skilled and impartial governor.
- A complaint about the Chair of Governors or an individual governor should be sent to the Clerk. Stage 1 will normally be considered by a suitably skilled and impartial governor with no prior involvement.
- A complaint about both the Chair and Vice-Chair, or about the Governing Body as a whole, should be sent to the Clerk. The Clerk will arrange an appropriate independent process, which may include an independent investigator at Stage 1 and governors from another school at Stage 2.

Any necessary deviation from the published procedure will be documented, with reasons, and will preserve the complainant's right to a fair and impartial process.

9. Mediation

Mediation may be offered at any appropriate point where both parties agree that it may help resolve the complaint or rebuild relationships. It is voluntary and will not replace a formal investigation. A complainant will not be prevented from progressing to the next formal stage merely because mediation is declined or unsuccessful.

10. Stage 2 - Governing Body Complaints Panel

If the complainant remains dissatisfied after Stage 1, they may request a Stage 2 review by a panel of the Governing Body. The request should normally be made to the Clerk within 10 school days of the Stage 1 response, stating the grounds for escalation and the outcome sought. Requests made later will be considered where there are exceptional circumstances.

The Clerk will acknowledge the request within 5 school days and will arrange a panel meeting as soon as reasonably practicable, normally within 20 school days. If this is not possible, the complainant will be given a revised date and an explanation.

11. Composition and independence of the panel

The panel will normally consist of three governors who have had no prior involvement in the complaint and who can act impartially. No person with a conflict of interest, financial interest or prior involvement may sit on the panel. If the federation cannot identify sufficient impartial governors, suitably skilled and independent governors from another school may be invited to serve.

The panel will consider the complaint afresh. It is not limited to reviewing whether Stage 1 was handled correctly. The panel hearing will be held in private and will be conducted in a way that is fair, proportionate, welcoming and non-adversarial.

12. Preparing for and attending the panel hearing

The Clerk will write to the complainant with the date, time, venue or online arrangements, the names of panel members and the procedure to be followed. Relevant documents should normally be submitted in advance so that both parties have a fair opportunity to consider them. The Clerk will circulate the same papers to all parties and panel members, subject to lawful redaction of confidential information.

A complainant may be accompanied by a friend, relative or supporter. Legal representation is not normally necessary because the panel is not a legal hearing, although the school will consider requests for legal representation where there are exceptional reasons. Reasonable adjustments will be made where required.

Meetings will not normally be audio or video recorded. Any request to record a meeting must be discussed in advance and will be considered in light of data protection, confidentiality and reasonable-adjustment

requirements. Covert recordings will not normally be accepted as evidence unless exceptional circumstances justify doing so.

13. Format of the panel hearing

The Chair of the panel may adapt the order where necessary to ensure fairness, but the usual format will be:

1. The Chair introduces those present, confirms the purpose of the hearing and explains the procedure.
2. The complainant explains the complaint and the outcome sought.
3. The panel and the school representative may ask relevant questions of the complainant.
4. The school representative explains the school's actions and response.
5. The panel and the complainant may ask relevant questions of the school representative.
6. Any witnesses are heard as appropriate and may be questioned through the Chair.
7. The complainant and the school representative are each invited to summarise their position.
8. The Chair explains when and how the panel's written decision will be communicated.
9. The panel considers the complaint in private with the Clerk present to advise on procedure and record the decision.

14. Panel outcomes

The panel may:

- dismiss the complaint in whole or in part;
- uphold the complaint in whole or in part;
- decide on appropriate action to resolve the complaint;
- recommend changes to the school's systems, policies or procedures to help prevent similar issues recurring.

The panel cannot make or overturn decisions that are reserved to other statutory or employment procedures, and it will not disclose confidential information about pupils or staff. The Clerk will normally send the panel's written decision, reasons and any recommendations to the complainant and the school within 5 school days of the hearing.

15. After the school procedure is complete

The Stage 2 decision letter will make clear that the school's complaints procedure is complete. If the complainant believes that the Governing Body has acted unreasonably in the exercise of its education functions, has failed to carry out a duty under education law, has prevented completion of the complaints procedure, or otherwise meets the DfE criteria for intervention, they may complain to the Department for Education. The DfE does not normally re-investigate the substance of a complaint simply because a complainant disagrees with the school's decision; it considers whether the school has acted lawfully and reasonably and followed its published procedure.

Ofsted may consider qualifying complaints from parents about matters affecting the school as a whole, such as the quality of education or pupils' wellbeing and safety. Ofsted normally expects concerns to have been raised with the school first.

16. Confidentiality, records and data protection

Complaints will be handled confidentially as far as possible. Information will be shared only with those who need it for the purpose of investigating, deciding or administering the complaint, or where disclosure is required by law or safeguarding duties. The school will keep secure records of complaints, investigations, correspondence, outcomes and actions in accordance with its data protection and records-retention arrangements.

Governors who are not involved in the complaint will not receive identifying information that could compromise the independence of any later panel. Learning from complaints may be reported to the Governing Body in anonymised form.

17. Anonymous, withdrawn, duplicate and campaign complaints

Anonymous complaints will be considered at the school's discretion, taking account of the seriousness of the issues raised, the information available and any safeguarding implications. Where a complainant withdraws a

complaint, the school may keep a record of the withdrawal and may continue to consider matters that raise safeguarding, legal or significant school-improvement concerns.

Where a complaint has completed the procedure and a substantially identical complaint is later raised by another person, the school may explain that the issue has already been considered and the local procedure is complete, while ensuring that any genuinely new issues are considered appropriately.

Where the school receives a large number of complaints on the same subject as part of a campaign, it may use a proportionate alternative process, for example issuing a common response or publishing a response on the school website. Any such process will preserve confidentiality and will be consistent with the published procedure.

18. Managing serial, persistent or unreasonable complaints

The school will remain courteous and helpful to complainants and will not label a person as serial or persistent simply because they are dissatisfied, have made more than one complaint or have exercised a right to contact their MP or the DfE. Any restriction will relate to the behaviour or the repeated subject matter, not to the individual as a person.

Once the complaints procedure has been completed, the school may decide not to respond to further correspondence that repeats substantially the same points where:

- every reasonable step has been taken to address the concerns;
- the complainant has been given a clear statement of the school's position and their available options;
- the complainant continues to make substantially the same points repeatedly.

Where communication becomes significantly disruptive, abusive, threatening or excessive, the school may adopt a proportionate communication strategy, such as requiring contact through a single named person or limiting the frequency of contact. Any such arrangement will be reviewed and will not prevent the school from responding to new safeguarding concerns, statutory requests or genuinely new complaints.

19. Monitoring and review

The Governing Body will monitor the effectiveness of this policy and the learning arising from complaints. The policy will normally be reviewed annually, and sooner where there is a significant change in law or DfE guidance.

Policy ratified:	September 2026
Review date:	September 2027
Executive Headteacher:	Juliette Westwood
Chair of Governors:	Richard Butler



Leamington Federation

Sydenham Primary School and Lighthorne Heath Primary School

Complaint Form - Appendix 1

You may use this form to make a formal complaint, but you do not have to use it. Complaints can also be made in person, by telephone, by email or in writing. Please contact the school office if you need help to put your complaint in writing or require a reasonable adjustment.

Your name:

Your relationship to the school (for example parent, carer, neighbour or member of the public):

Address:

Postcode:

Telephone number:

Email address:

If applicable, name of child(ren) at school:

Please give details of your complaint

What action, if any, have you already taken to try to resolve the complaint?

Please include who you spoke to and what response you received.

What outcome would you like the school to consider?

Are you attaching any documents? If so, please list them.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

If a representative is submitting this complaint on your behalf, please confirm that you consent to the school communicating with them about the complaint.

Name of representative: _____ Consent confirmed: Yes / No

Official use

Date received:

Date acknowledgement sent:

Complaint referred to:

Stage / date: