Complaints Procedure

This policy was adopted by the Governing Body in September 2025.
It is reviewed annually.

This policy is due for review September 2026

LISCARD PRIMARY SCHOOL

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
- Ensure 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 ensure 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 unreasonable complaints.

3. 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."

4. 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 Liscard Primary 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 the complaints procedure.

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. Liscard Primary 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, Liscard Primary School will refer you to another staff member. Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels unable to deal with a concern, Liscard Primary School 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, Liscard Primary School will attempt to resolve the issue internally, through the stages outlined within this complaints procedure.

5. How to raise a concern or make a complaint

A concern or complaint can be made informally in person, in writing or by telephone. They may also be made by a third party acting on behalf on a complainant, if they have appropriate consent to do so.

Concerns should be raised with the class teacher. If you are not satisfied with how the situation has been resolved, this should in turn be raised with Year Leader, Deputy Head and then finally with the 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 Mrs Sue Talbot, Headteacher via the School Business Manager (Joanne Johnson). Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Complaints that involve or are about the Headteacher should be addressed to The Chair of Governors, via the Clerk to Governors (Joanne Johnson). 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.

6. 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.

7. Time scales

The complainant 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 consider complaints made outside of this time frame if exceptional circumstances apply.

8. 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.

9. Scope of this Complaints Procedure

This procedure covers all complaints about any provision of community facilities or services by Liscard Primary School, other than complaints that are dealt with under other statutory procedures, including those listed below.

Exceptions	Who to contact
• Admissions to schools • Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs • School re-organisation proposals	Concerns about admissions, statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs, or school re-organisation proposals should be raised with Wirral Council.
• Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation	Complaints about child protection matters are handled under our child protection and safeguarding policy and in accordance with relevant statutory guidance. **If you have serious concerns, you may wish to contact the local authority designated officer (LADO) who has local responsibility for safeguarding.** **Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO)** 0151 4442 / 5525 Mob: 07748873560 pamelacope@wirral.gov.uk or **Wirral Safeguarding Children Partnership** https://www.wirralsafeguarding.co.uk or **Wirral Integrated Front Door** Tel: 0151 606 2008 ifd@wirral.gov.uk Tel: 0151 677 6557 (out of hours)

• Exclusion of children from school*	Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at: www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions. **Complaints about the application of the behaviour policy can be made through the school's complaints procedure. The school's Positive Behaviour Policy can be found on the school website.*
• Whistleblowing	The school has an internal whistleblowing procedure for all employees, including temporary staff and contractors. The Secretary of State for Education is the prescribed person for matters relating to education for whistleblowers in education who do not want to raise matters direct with their employer. Referrals can be made at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus. Volunteer staff who have concerns about the school should complain through the school's complaints procedure. It may be possible to complain direct to the Local Authority or the Department for Education (see link above), depending on the substance of the complaint.
• Staff grievances	Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the school's internal grievance procedures.
• Staff conduct	Complaints about staff will be dealt with under the school's internal disciplinary procedures, if appropriate. Complainants will not be informed of any disciplinary action taken against a staff member because of a complaint. However, the complainant will be notified that the matter is being addressed.
• Complaints about services provided by other providers who may use school premises or facilities	Providers should have their own complaints procedure to deal with complaints about service. Please contact them directly.
• National Curriculum - content	Please contact the Department for Education at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus

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

If a complainant commences legal action against Liscard Primary 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.

12. Resolving complaints

At each stage in the procedure, Liscard Primary 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
- admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better
- assurance that we will try to ensure the event complained of will not recur
- 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
- undertaking to review school policies considering the complaint
- an apology.

13. Withdrawal of a Formal Complaint

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

14. Stages of a Formal Complaint

Stage 1

Formal complaints must be made to the Headteacher (unless they are about the Headteacher), via the School Business Manager. This must be done in writing using the Complaint Form attached.

The School Business Manager will record the date the complaint is received. The Headteacher (or investigator) will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 5 school days.

Within this response, the Headteacher (or investigator) will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, ask what remains unresolved and what outcome the complainant would like to see. The Headteacher (or investigator) 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 (or investigator) will provide a formal written response within 10 school days of the date of acknowledgement.

If the Headteacher (or investigator) 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 Liscard Primary School will take to resolve the complaint.

The Headteacher (or investigator) will advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 1.

If the complaint is about the Headteacher, or a member of the governing body (including the Chair or Vice-Chair), a suitably skilled governor will be appointed to complete all the actions at Stage 1.

If the complaint is:

- jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair or
- the entire governing body or most of the governing body

Stage 1 will be considered by an independent investigator appointed by the governing body. 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 the first three, impartial, governors available. This is the final stage of the complaints procedure.

A request to escalate to Stage 2 must be made to the Clerk to Governors, via the school office, within 10 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 5 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 10 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 based on 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 Liscard Primary School available, the Clerk will source any additional, independent governors through another local school, or through their Governor Services team, 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 complaints procedure. Complainants will be advised that any staff conduct complaints will be considered under staff disciplinary procedures, if appropriate, but outcomes will not be shared with them.

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

- At least 5 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 10 school days before the meeting.

Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least 5 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 Liscard Primary School with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within 10 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 Liscard Primary School.

If the complaint is:

- jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair or
- the entire governing body or
- the majority of the governing body

Stage 2 will be heard by a committee of independent governors.

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 Liscard Primary 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 Liscard Primary School. They will consider whether Liscard Primary School has adhered to education legislation and any statutory policies connected with the complaint.

The complainant can refer their complaint to the Department for Education online at:
https://www.gov.uk/contact-dfe

Or contact the DfE by phone - DfE helpline: 0370 000 2288 Monday to Friday, 9:30am to 5pm

15. Persistent Complaints

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
- Makes a complaint that is obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific, defamatory or repetitive
- Knowingly provides false information
- Insists on pursuing a complaint that is unfounded, or out of scope of the complaints procedure
- 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 time frames it sets out
- Changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation goes on
- 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

16. Steps we will take

We will take every reasonable step to address the complainant's concerns and give them a clear 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
- Limit the number of times the complainant can make contact, such as a fixed number per term
- 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

Stopping Responding

We may stop responding to the complainant when all 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.

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.

17. 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 consider.

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 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.

18. 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:

i. Publishing a single response on the school website

ii. Sending a template response to all the complainants

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

19. 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 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 for Education (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 records management policy/record retention schedule.

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 body 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 body, who will not unreasonably withhold consent.

20. Learning Lessons

The governing body will review any underlying issues raised by complaints with the headteacher/senior leadership team, 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.

21. Monitoring Arrangements

The governing body/Complaints committee will monitor the effectiveness of the complaints procedure in ensuring that complaints are handled properly. The governing body will track the number and nature of complaints and review underlying issues. The complaints records are logged and managed by the headteacher.

This policy will be reviewed by the headteacher and full governing body every 2 years. At each review, the policy will be approved by the full governing body.

22. Links with other Policies

Policies dealing with other forms of complaints include:

- Child protection and safeguarding policy and procedures

- Admissions policy
- Exclusions policy
- Staff grievance procedures
- Staff disciplinary procedures
- SEN policy and information report
- Privacy notices

CONCERNS AND COMPLAINTS GUIDANCE NOTES FOR PARENTS

If you have a concern or complaint

We would like you to tell us about it. We welcome suggestions for improving our work in the school. Be assured that no matter what you want to tell us, our support and respect for you and your child in the school will not be affected in any way. Please tell us of your concern as soon as possible. It is difficult for us to investigate properly an incident or problem which has happened some time ago.

What to do first

Most concerns can be sorted out quickly by speaking with your child's class teacher.

Any teacher or the office staff can help you find the right member of staff. If you have a concern which you feel should be looked at by the Headteacher in the first instance you can contact her straight away if you prefer. It is usually best to discuss the problem face to face. You may need an appointment to do this and can make one by ringing or calling in at the school office. You can take a friend or relation to the appointment with you if you would like to so that they can support you.

All staff will make every effort to resolve your problem informally. They will make sure that they understand what you feel went wrong, and they will explain their own actions to you. They will ask what you would like the school to do to put things right. Of course, this does not mean that in every case they will come round to your point of view but it will help both you and the school to understand both sides of the question. It may also help to prevent a similar problem arising again.

What to do next

If you are dissatisfied with the initial response, you can make a complaint to the Headteacher. Please put your complaint in writing, using the complaints form in Appendix A (at the end of this policy), addressed to the Headteacher who will investigate the complaint and contact you to provide a suitable time to meet and discuss the issue.

If your complaint is about an action of the Headteacher personally, then you should refer it to the Senior Leadership Team who will refer it to the Chair of Governors. Or you may write direct to the Chair of Governors whose details are available on the School Website or from the school office.

You may also find it helpful at this stage to read the full statement of the General Complaints Procedure as this explains in detail what procedures are followed. This is available later in this document.

The Headteacher will ask to meet you for a discussion of the problem. Again, you may take a friend or

someone else with you if you wish. The Headteacher will conduct a full investigation of the complaint and may interview any members of staff or pupils involved. You will be invited to discuss the Headteacher's findings and her response to the issues. You may also receive a written response to the complaint if you wish.

If you are still unhappy

The problem will normally be solved by this stage. However, if you are still not satisfied you may wish to contact the Chair of the Governing Body to ask for referral of your complaint to the Complaints Committee of the governing body. It will then be heard by a group of three governors who have no previous knowledge of the problem and so will be able to give it a fresh assessment. You will be invited to attend and speak to the committee at a meeting which the Headteacher will also attend.

Further Action

Complaints about school problems are almost always settled within school but in exceptional cases it may be possible to refer the problem to an outside body such as the Ombudsman (in rare circumstances but particularly in relations to admissions) or the Secretary of State for Education and Skills.

Independent Advice

Parents and carers can receive independent advice from both the National Confederation of Parent Teacher Associations and the Advisory Centre for Education, 1c Aberdeen Studios, 22 Highbury Grove, London N5 2DQ. Both organisations may offer advice but will not support individuals in pursuit of a complaint.

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
- analyzing information
- liaising with the complainant and the School Business Manager 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.

School Business Manager/Clerk to Governors

School Business Manager/Clerk to Governors should:

ensure that the complainant is fully updated at each stage of the procedure

- liaise with staff members, Chair of Governors, Clerk and LA (if appropriate) to ensure the smooth running of the complaints procedure
- be aware of issues regarding:
  - sharing third party information
  - additional support. This may be needed by complainants when making a complaint including interpretation support or where the complainant is a child or young person
  - keep records.

Appendix 1

Complaint Form

Please complete and return it to the Headteacher who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

Your name:
Pupil's name (if relevant):
Your relationship to the pupil (if relevant):
Address:
Postcode:
Day time telephone number:
Evening telephone number:
Please give details of your complaint, including whether you have spoken to anybody at the school about it.

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 whom:
Complaint referred to:
Date: