Paulton Junior School

Complaints Policy

Reviewed: **May 2026**
Next Review: **December 2027**

Introduction

This complaints policy & procedure is mainly aimed at parents or carers of children who are registered at the school, but it is not limited to them. Any member of the public may make a complaint to Paulton Junior School about the provision of facilities or services that the school provides. Unless complaints are dealt with under separate statutory procedures, please see apprendix 1, the school will use this complaints policy and procedures.

The difference between a concern and a complaint

A **concern** may be defined as ***'an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought'.***

A **complaint** may be defined as ***'an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action'.***

The aim of this policy is to seek a resolution to a concern or complaint in a sympathetic and efficient way and to restore positive relationships and confidence of parents and pupils. For parental complaints, the aim is to arrive at a resolution that is in the best interests of their child whilst taking into account the interests of all pupils in our school. Paulton Junior School treats all concerns/complaints seriously and parents and/or pupils will never be made to feel that raising a concern/complaint will adversely affect the pupil's future at the school or place the pupil at a disadvantage in any way.

Throughout their school life, without a doubt, children will encounter moments of challenge, conflict, and disappointment. At Paulton Junior School, we work proactively to address these moments in a way that ensures all children feel listened to and supported. To help children navigate these experiences, we have a curriculum in place designed to equip them with the skills to de-escalate the situation, speak openly with an adult and build the emotional resilience to cope. **These are crucial life skills that children develop during their primary school years** and it is important that all adults, both at school and at home, model these skills. Teachers and support staff manage many minor disagreements among children daily. They use professional judgment to de-escalate conflicts and teach resolution skills. This way, children learn how to resolve issues independently, without every incident requiring a formal report. We aim to communicate any **significant** incidents in a timely manner. However, **not all minor incidents will be reported**, as many are effectively resolved within the school environment.

Stage 1

How to raise a concern or complaint

A concern or complaint can be made in person, in writing or by telephone. As a school, we will communicate with all parents/carers in a respectful and professional manner. We kindly ask that **any** communication with **any** member of staff or member of the governing body at Paulton Junior School reflects these same standards.

Concerns should be raised with the most relevant member of staff. For example, if a parent has a concern about their child's progress or a concern about a child's friendship with another child in their class this should always be raised with the **Class Teacher in the first instance** via the phone or in person at the end of the school day. Ideally, they can address your concerns on the spot, or can arrange a meeting with you to discuss the issue. The school office can be contacted for advice on who best to speak to about a concern.

If you have difficulty discussing a concern with a particular member of staff, the headteacher will **refer** you to another staff member. Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels they are not the best person to deal with a concern, the headteacher will **refer** you to another staff member. The member of staff may be more senior (but does not have to be). **The ability to consider the concern objectively and impartially is more important.** This does not escalate the stage of this policy as the matter is being dealt with.

Concerns will **wherever possible** be **acknowledged** within **2** school days of receipt and a response to the concern provided within **5** school days.

All concerns will be dealt with confidentially although the staff member may need to take notes if they feel that the matter may need to be taken further or it may arise again in the future.

We understand, however, that there are occasions when people would like to raise their concerns more formally. In this case, the school will attempt to resolve the issue internally, through the stages outlined within this complaints policy & procedure.

Complainants should not approach individual governors to raise concerns or complaints as they have no power to act on an individual basis and it may also prevent them from considering complaints at **Stage 3** of the procedure.

Scope of this complaint's procedure

This procedure covers all complaints about any provision of services or community facilities by Paulton Junior School, other than complaints that are dealt with under other statutory procedures, including those listed in appendix 1

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

Safeguarding

Whenever a complaint indicates that a child's wellbeing or safety is at risk, there is a duty to report this immediately to the school and the Local Authority. Any action taken will be in accordance with the schools Safeguarding and Child Protection policy which can be found on the school's website.

Complaints that result in staff capability, disciplinary or police investigation

If at any formal stage of the complaint it is determined that staff disciplinary or capability proceedings are necessary in order to resolve the issue, details of this action will remain confidential to the school. The complainant is not entitled to participate in the proceedings or receive any details about them.

If the subject of the complaints a matter being referred to the police, the complaints procedure will be suspended pending the outcome of that investigation and the complainant will be informed of the reason for this delay. Once the outcome of the police investigation is known, the complaint may continue if appropriate.

Anonymous complaints

Anonymous complaints will not be investigated under the procedure in this policy unless there are exceptional circumstances, as we are unable to respond to the complainant. The fact that a complaint is from an anonymous source would not rule out referral to other procedures as appropriate, e.g. child protection.

Complaint campaigns

If we receive what we consider to be a large volume of complaints, all based on the same subject and possibly from complainants not connected to the school, then we will treat these complaints as being part of a campaign and respond in one of the following two ways, depending upon the nature and scale of the complaint:

- send the same response to all complainants; or
- publish a single response on the school's website.

Timescales

Timescales in this policy are given in "School Days" i.e. during term time only, excluding school holidays and training days (INSET days).

Complainants must raise the complaint within 3 months of the incident, or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within 3 months of the last of these incidents.

We will consider complaints made outside of term time to have been received on the first school day after the holiday period.

Any complaint received within 5 school days of the end of a term will take longer to resolve due to school holidays and availability of personnel required for an investigation to be undertaken properly.

Every effort will be made to comply with timescales within each stage of this policy. This may not always be possible due to the complexity of the investigation required or the unavailability of a participant needed to attend a meeting. Where a timescale cannot be complied with this will be communicated to the complainant informing them of the reason for the delay and the new timescale that will apply.

Resolving complaints

At each stage in the procedure, the school wants to resolve the complaint. **If appropriate**, we will acknowledge that the complaint is upheld in whole or in part. In addition, we may offer one or more of the following:

- an explanation;
- an admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better;
- an assurance that we will try to ensure the event complained of will not recur;
- an explanation of the steps that have been or will be taken to help ensure that it will not happen again and an indication of the timescales within which any changes will be made;
- an undertaking to review school policies in light of the complaint;
- an apology.

If appropriate, we will acknowledge that the complaint is upheld in whole or in part.

Withdrawal of a complaint

- If a complainant wants to withdraw their complaint, we will ask them to confirm this in writing.
- If a complainant provides insufficient information to support an investigation, the investigation will end.
- If a complainant changes schools during the complaint, the complaints procedure will continue to be followed to its completion.

Stage 2

How to make a formal complaint

If, following your informal discussions you wish to make a more formal complaint you should put this in writing to the Headteacher (please see attached Complaint Form). You should state the outcome which you would feel would satisfy your complaint. The headteacher will undertake an investigation which may require a meeting with you or require you to provide additional information.

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:

- keep a written record of any meetings/interviews in relation to their investigation.
- if necessary, interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish;

At the conclusion of their investigation, the headteacher will provide a formal written response within 20 school days of the date of receipt of the complaint. If the headteacher is unable to meet this deadline, s/he 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 that the school will take to resolve the complaint. The headteacher will also advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 2.

Please note:

Complaints against school staff (except the headteacher) should be made in the first instance to the headteacher via the school office. Please mark any correspondence as 'private and confidential'.

Complaints that involve or are about the headteacher should be addressed to the chair of governors via the school office or chair.governor@paultonjuniorschool.co.uk Please mark any correspondence as 'private and confidential'.

Complaints about the Chair of governors, any individual governor or the whole governing body should be marked 'private and confidential' and sent to the **Clerk to the governing body** c/o Paulton Junior School, Plumptre Close, Paulton BS39 7QY

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 the majority of the governing body, Stage 1 will be considered by an independent investigator if appropriate. At the conclusion of its investigation, the independent investigator will provide a formal written response. A formal complaint may be made in person, in writing (preferably on the complaint form) or by telephone. The headteacher will record the date the complaint is received and will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 5 school days. Within this response, the headteacher will seek, if necessary, to clarify the nature of the complaint, ask what remains unresolved and what outcome the complainant would like to see. The headteacher can consider whether a face-to-face meeting is the most appropriate way of doing this.

Stage 3

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome at Stage 2

If you remain dissatisfied, you may make a formal complaint to the Chair of Governors. This formal complaint must be lodged within 10 school days of you receiving the findings of Stage 2. Any such formal complaint must be set out in writing and addressed to the Chair of Governors (the school secretary will advise you of the address for contact). The complaint should set out precisely why you are dissatisfied and indicate what, if any, steps should be taken to resolve the matter. The Chair of Governors will investigate or may nominate a Governor (or Governors) to do so, if appropriate. You may be invited to attend an interview by the investigating Governor/s in addition to any written submission you make.

Following the investigation by the Governor/s you will be sent a formal response informing you of the findings. This investigation will, where possible, be completed within three school weeks.

This is the final stage of the complaint's procedure.

A request to escalate to **Stage 3** must be made to the clerk, marked 'private and confidential' and sent to the **Clerk to the Governing Body c/o Paulton Junior School, Plumptre Close, Paulton BS39 7QY**, within 10 school days of receipt of the Stage 2 response. Requests received outside of this timeframe will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.

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.

The clerk will write to the complainant to inform them of the date of the meeting of the governing body's complaints committee. S/he will aim to convene a meeting within 20 school days of receipt

of the Stage 2 request. If this is not possible, the clerk will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed.

If the complainant rejects the offer of three proposed dates without good reason, the clerk will decide when to hold the meeting. It will then proceed in the complainant's absence on the basis of written submissions from both parties.

The complaints committee will consist of at least three governors with no prior involvement or knowledge of the complaint. Prior to the meeting, they will decide among themselves who will act as the chair of the complaints committee. If there are fewer than three governors from Paulton Junior School available, the clerk will source any additional, independent governors through another local school or through their local authority's governor services team, in order to make up the committee. Alternatively, an entirely independent committee may be convened to hear the complaint at Stage 2.

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 committee will decide whether to deal with the complaint by inviting parties to a meeting or through written representations, but in making its decision it 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. Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend. The meeting is not a court case, it will be held in private and will be as informal as circumstances allow.

At least 10 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 5 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. 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 the headteacher with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within 5 school days.

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 that the 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 3.

The DfE will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by Paulton Junior School. They will consider whether the school has adhered to education legislation and any statutory policies connected with the complaint.

The complainant can refer their complaint to the DfE online at www.education.gov.uk/contactus , by telephone on 0370 000 2288 or by writing to:

Department for Education
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

Dealing with unreasonably persistent or vexatious complaints and behaviour.

Paulton Junior School is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, and to providing a high-quality service to those who complain. We will not normally limit the contact that complainants have with our school. However, we do not expect our staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour and will take action to protect staff from that behaviour, including that which is abusive, offensive or threatening.

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

- Refuses to co-operate with the complaint's investigation process
- Refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of the complaint's procedure
- Insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the complaint's procedure or with good practice
- Raises large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions, and insists they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales
- Repeatedly makes the same complaint (despite previous investigations or responses concluding that the complaint is groundless or has been addressed)
- Refuses to accept the findings of the investigation into that complaint where the school's complaint procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed, including referral to the Department for Education

- Seeks an unrealistic outcome
- Makes excessive demands on school time by frequent, lengthy and complicated contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with
- Acts aggressively either face to face, by telephone or in writing
- Uses abusive, offensive or discriminatory language or violence
- Publishes unacceptable information on social media or other public forums

Please note: the above list is not intended to be exhaustive and it is at the discretion of the school what is deemed to be unreasonable.

Complainants should try to limit their communication with the school that relates to their complaint, while the complaint is being progressed. It is not helpful if repeated correspondence is sent (either by letter, phone, email or any other means) as it could delay the outcome being reached.

Whenever possible, the headteacher or chair of governors will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before deeming them to be 'unreasonable'. If the behaviour continues the headteacher will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and asking them to change it. For complainants who excessively contact the school, causing a significant level of disruption, we may specify methods of communication and limit the number of contacts in a communication plan. This will be reviewed after 6 months.

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 the school premises.

Serial/persistent correspondence

If complainants frequently contact the school, causing a significant level of disruption, but refuse to engage with the complaint's procedure, Paulton Junior School can:

- restrict the complainant to a single point of contact via an email address; and/or
- limit the number of times the complainant can make contact.

This restriction will be limited to the complainant's capacity to complain. For all other issues the complainant can contact the school as normal.

Roles and responsibilities

Complainant

The complainant will receive a more effective response to the complaint if they:

- explain the complaint in full as early as possible
- co-operate with the school in seeking a solution to the complaint
- respond promptly to requests for information or meetings or in agreeing the details of the complaint
- ask for assistance as needed
- treat all those involved in the complaint with respect
- refrain from publicising the details of their complaint on social media and respect confidentiality.

Investigator

The investigator's role is to establish the facts relevant to the complaint by providing a comprehensive, open, transparent and fair consideration of the complaint through:

- sensitive and thorough interviewing of the complainant to establish what has happened and who has been involved
- interviewing staff and children/young people and other people relevant to the complaint
- consideration of records and other relevant information
- analysing information
- liaising with the complainant and the complaints co-ordinator as appropriate to clarify what the complainant feels would put things right.

The investigator should:

- conduct interviews with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning
- keep notes of interviews or arrange for an independent note taker to record minutes of the meeting
- ensure that any papers produced during the investigation are kept securely pending any appeal
- be mindful of the timescales to respond
- prepare a comprehensive report for the headteacher or complaints committee that sets out the facts, identifies solutions and recommends courses of action to resolve problems.

The headteacher or complaints committee will then determine whether to uphold or dismiss the complaint and communicate that decision to the complainant, providing the appropriate escalation details.

Complaints Co-ordinator

This could be the headteacher / designated complaints governor or other staff member providing administrative support.

The complaints co-ordinator should:

- ensure that the complainant is fully updated at each stage of the procedure
- liaise with staff members, headteacher, Chair of Governors, Clerk and LAs (if appropriate) to ensure the smooth running of the complaint's procedure

be aware of issues regarding:

- the 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.

Clerk to the Governing Body

The Clerk should:

- ensure that all people involved in the complaint procedure are aware of them legal rights and duties, including any under legislation relating to school complaints, education law, the Equality Act 2010, the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act (DPA) 2018 and the General Data
- Protection Regulations (GDPR)

- set the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that the dates are convenient to all parties (if they are invited to attend) and that the venue and proceedings are accessible
- collate any written material relevant to the complaint (for example; Stage 1 paperwork, school and complainant submissions) and send it to the parties in advance of the meeting within an agreed timescale
- record the proceedings
- circulate the minutes of the meeting
- notify all parties of the committee's decision.

Committee Chair

The committee's chair, who is nominated in advance of the complaint meeting, should ensure that:

- both parties are asked (via the Clerk) to provide any additional information relating to the complaint by a specified date in advance of the meeting
- the meeting is conducted in an informal manner, is not adversarial, and that, if all parties are invited to attend, everyone is treated with respect and courtesy
- complainants who may not be used to speaking at such a meeting are put at ease. This is particularly important if the complainant is a child/young person
- the remit of the committee is explained to the complainant
- written material is seen by everyone in attendance, provided it does not breach confidentiality or any individual's rights to privacy under the DPA 2018 or GDPR. If a new issue arises it would be useful to give everyone the opportunity to consider and comment upon it; this may require a short adjournment of the meeting
- both the complainant and the school are given the opportunity to make their case and seek clarity, either through written submissions ahead of the meeting or verbally in the meeting itself
- the issues are addressed
- key findings of fact are made
- the committee is open-minded and acts independently
- no member of the committee has an external interest in the outcome of the proceedings or any involvement in an earlier stage of the procedure
- the meeting is minute
- they liaise with the Clerk (and complaints co-ordinator, if the school has one).

Committee Member

Committee members should be aware that:

- the meeting must be independent and impartial, and should be seen to be so. **No governor may sit on the committee if they have had a prior involvement in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it.**

- the aim of the meeting should be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant.

We recognise that the complainant might not be satisfied with the outcome if the meeting does not find in their favour. It may only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations.

Learning lessons

The governing body 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.

Appendix 1: COMPLAINTS EXCLUDED FROM THIS COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

The types of complaint set out below are subject to other statutory procedures that are separate from this complaints policy & procedure

EXCEPTIONS	Who to contact
Admissions to schools.	Local Authority
Statutory Assessment of Special Educational Needs (SEND)	Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs proposals Concerns about statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs and the content of any resulting statutory plans should be raised with the relevant Local Authority. General concerns about SEND support at the school may be raised under this policy.
Safeguarding and Child Protection	Protection/Safeguarding Complaints about child protection matters are handled under the 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.
Suspension and permanent exclusion policy	Exclusion of children from school. Further information can be found in the Exclusion Policy.
Whistleblowing	Paulton Junior school has its own Whistleblowing policy available to view on the website. The Secretary of State for Education is the prescribed person for matters relating to education for whistle- blowers in education who do not want to raise matters direct with their employer. Referrals can be made at: https://www.education.gov.uk/help/contactus/dfe. Volunteer staff who have concerns about our school should complain through the complaint's procedure.
Staff Grievance	Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the internal grievance procedures, if appropriate.
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 as a result of a complaint. However, the complainant will be notified that the matter is being addressed.
School re-organisation	Should be raised with the local authority
Curriculum	National Curriculum – content. Please contact the Department for Education at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus
Complaints about services provided by other providers	Complaints about services provided by other providers who use school premises or facilities should be directed to the provider concerned.