Complaints Policy

Ludlow Junior School

Date of last review: July 2026

Date of next review: July 2028

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Approved by: Policy Working Party

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 Ludlow Junior School about any provision of facilities or services that we provide. Unless complaints are dealt with under separate procedures such as appeals relating to exclusions or admissions or the School's disciplinary procedures, we will use this complaints procedure.

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*'.

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. Ludlow Junior 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, the Headteacher, will refer you to another staff member. Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels unable 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.

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

How to raise a concern or make a complaint

A concern or complaint can be made 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 an appropriate member of staff, depending on what the complaint is linked to. If the issue remains unresolved, the next step is to make a formal complaint.

Complainants must 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 2 of the procedure.

Formal complaints against school staff (except the headteacher) should be made in the first instance, to the Headteacher via the school office**.** Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Formal complaints that involve or are about the headteacher should be addressed to the Chair of Trustees via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Formal complaints about the Chair of Trustees, any individual trustees or the trustees as a body, should be addressed to the 'Clerk to the Governing Body' via the school office. 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 may also ask third party organisations like the Citizens Advice Bureau to help you.

In accordance with relevant 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.

Anonymous complaints

Anonymous complaints are discouraged as the investigator will be unable to ask you follow-up questions, which frequently leads to complaints being dismissed due to lack of evidence or substance. However, the Headteacher or Chair of Trustees, as appropriate, will determine whether an anonymous complaint warrants investigation.

Time scales

You 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.

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.

Scope of this Complaints Procedure

This procedure covers all complaints about any provision of community facilities or services by Ludlow Junior 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 Southampton Local Authority.
• 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 or the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH). MASH - (023) 8083 3004 LADO - (023) 80915535/ 07500952037
• Suspension 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.*

• Whistleblowing	We have an internal whistleblowing procedure for all our 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 our school should complain through the school's complaints procedure. You may also be able to complain direct to the LA or the Department for Education (see link above), depending on the substance of your 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 as a result 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 direct.
• 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 Ludlow Junior 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.

Resolving complaints

At each stage in the procedure, Ludlow Junior 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.

Withdrawal of a Complaint

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

Stage 1

Formal complaints must be made to the Headteacher (unless they are about the headteacher), via the school office. This may be done in person, in writing (preferably on the Complaint Form), or by telephone.

The Headteacher will record the date the complaint is received in the School's complaint log 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 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.

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 delegated investigator will:

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

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, 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 Ludlow Junior School will take to resolve the complaint.

The headteacher will advise the complainant 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 trustees (including the Chair or Vice-Chair), a suitably skilled trustee will be appointed to complete all Stage 1 actions.

Complaints about the Headteacher or member of the trustees must be made to the Clerk, via the school office.

If the complaint is:

- jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair;
- the entire body of trustees; or
- the majority of the trustee 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.

Information about the complaint will be recorded in the School's complaint log and associated documentation with due regard for the rights of the individuals referenced within that log, including but not limited to those afforded under data protection law.

The relevant complaint log and documentation will be made available for inspection on the school premises by the Headteacher and the Governing Body.

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 this procedure.

A request to escalate to Stage 2 must be made to the Clerk, 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 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 amongst themselves who will act as the Chair of the Complaints Committee. If there are fewer than three governors from Ludlow Junior School available, the Clerk will source any additional, independent governors through another local school or through their LA'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.

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 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 other organisations such as the media or journalists are not permitted to attend.

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; and
- 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 3 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 not review any new complaints at this stage or consider evidence unrelated to the initial complaint. New complaints shall be dealt with from Stage 1 of the procedure.

The meeting will be held in private. Electronic recordings of meetings or conversations are not permitted unless a complainant requires reasonable adjustments. Prior knowledge and consent of all parties attending must be sought before meetings or conversations take place. Consent will be recorded in the minutes of the meeting. The School may take legal action against individuals recording the meeting without knowledge and consent of all parties.

The committee will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented. The committee can:

- uphold the complaint in whole or in part; or
- dismiss the complaint in whole or in part.

Following the hearing, the committee will make findings and recommendations.

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, procedures or practices to prevent similar issues arising in the future.

The Chair of the Committee will provide the complainant with a full explanation of the committee's decision, findings and recommendations, together with the reasons for the decision, in writing within 5 school days.

Where relevant, a copy of the findings and recommendations will also be provided to the person complained about.

The School's response 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 Ludlow Junior School.

If the complaint is:

- jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair;
- the entire body of trustees; or
- the majority of the trustee 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 deemed relevant to the response, details of actions Ludlow Junior School will take to resolve the complaint will be included.

The response will also advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied after this Stage 2 escalation.Information about the complaint will be recorded in the School's complaint log and associated documentation with due regard for the rights of the individuals referenced within that log, including but not limited to those afforded under data protection law.

The relevant complaint log and documentation will be made available for inspection on the school premises by the Headteacher and the Governing Body.

Record Keeping

Ludlow Junior School shall maintain a written record of all formal complaints made in accordance with this procedure.

The record will include:

- the date the complaint was received;
- the nature of the complaint;
- the action taken by the school;
- whether the complaint was resolved following the formal procedure; and

- whether the complaint proceeded to a Complaints Committee hearing.

Information about the complaint will be recorded in the School's complaint log and associated documentation with due regard for the rights of the individuals referenced within that log, including but not limited to those afforded under data protection law. The complaint log will retain information in line with the School's retention policies, which is currently no longer than seven years from the date of the complaint resolution.

In line with applicable law, the correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints are to be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the 2008 Act requests access to them.

Confidentiality

Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except where:

- disclosure is required as part of the investigation of the complaint;
- disclosure is required by law;
- the Secretary of State requests access to the records; or
- a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the Education and Skills Act 2008 requests access to the records.

All parties involved in the complaints process will be expected to respect the confidential nature of the process. Information will only be shared on a need-to-know basis and in accordance with data protection legislation.

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 applicable law, they may contact the Department for Education following the conclusion of Stage 2 of this process.

The Department for Education do not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by Ludlow Junior School. They will consider whether Ludlow Junior School has adhered to applicable legislation and any policy relevant to the complaint.

The complainant can refer their complaint to the Department for Education 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.

Unreasonable or Vexatious Complaints

The School is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, and to providing a high quality service to those who complain. We do not normally limit the contact complainants have with the school. Operating from a position of mutual respect, 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, threatening or vexatious.

Ludlow Junior School defines unreasonable complaints as “those who, because of the frequency or nature of their contacts with the school, hinder our consideration of their or other people’s complaints”.

A complaint may be regarded as unreasonable or vexatious when the person making the complaint:

- refuses to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcomes sought by raising the complaint, despite offers of assistance;
- refuses to co-operate with the complaints investigation process while still wishing for their complaint to be resolved;
- refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of this procedure;
- insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the school’s complaints procedure or with good practice;
- demands trivial or irrelevant information be taken into account and commented on;
- raises large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions, and insists they are fully answered, often to the complainant’s self-defined timescales;
- makes unjustified comments about staff who are trying to deal with the issues, and seeks to have them replaced;
- changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds;
- raises the same complaint repeatedly despite previous investigations or responses concluding that the complaint has been addressed;
- refuses to accept the outcome of an investigation where this procedure has been fully and properly conducted, up to and including referral to the Department for Education;
- seeks unrealistic outcomes; or
- makes excessive demands on school time by frequent, lengthy, complicated and stressful contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with.

A complaint may also be considered unreasonable if the person making the complaint does so either face-to-face, by telephone or in writing or electronically:

- maliciously;
- aggressively;
- using threats, intimidation or violence;
- using abusive, offensive or discriminatory language;
- knowing it to be false;
- using falsified information; or
- publishing unacceptable information in a variety of media such as in social media websites and newspapers.

Complainants should limit the numbers of communications with a school while a complaint is being progressed. Repeated correspondence must not be sent regardless of channel as it delays the investigation and outcome.

The Headteacher or Chair of Governors will attempt to discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before considering it unreasonable or vexatious.

If the above behaviour continues the Headteacher will write to the complainant stating that their behaviour is unacceptable. Where complainants excessively contact Ludlow Junior School causing a significant level of disruption, the School may impose acceptable frequency and methods of communication via a communication plan, which will usually be reviewed after six months following the determination of unreasonable or vexatious behaviour.

Should the School, in its sole opinion, be subject to any serious incident of aggression or violence, the concerns and actions taken will be put in writing immediately and the police informed, which may result in significant action taken including prohibiting individual(s) from Ludlow Junior School premises.

Complaint Form

Please complete and return this form to the Headteacher, who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken in line with the above policy and process.

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 who:
Complaint referred to:
Date:

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 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
- maintain a written record of all formal complaints received, including whether complaints were resolved following the formal procedure or proceeded to a Complaints Committee hearing;
- ensure complaint records are retained in accordance with the school's records management and data retention arrangements.

Clerk to the trustees

The Clerk is the contact point for the complainant and the committee and should:

- ensure that all people involved in the complaint procedure are aware of their statutory rights and duties, including those relating to school complaints, and afforded by relevant education and data protection law
- 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 minuted
- 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.

- many complainants will feel nervous and inhibited in a formal setting

  Parents/carers often feel emotional when discussing an issue that affects their child.

- extra care needs to be taken when the complainant is a child/young person and present during all or part of the meeting

  Careful consideration of the atmosphere and proceedings should ensure that the child/young person does not feel intimidated.

  The committee should respect the views of the child/young person and give them equal consideration to those of adults.

  If the child/young person is the complainant, the committee should ask in advance if any support is needed to help them present their complaint. Where the child/young person's parent is the complainant, the committee should give the parent the opportunity to say which parts of the meeting, if any, the child/young person needs to attend.

  However, the parent should be advised that agreement might not always be possible if the parent wishes the child/young person to attend a part of the meeting that the committee considers is not in the child/young
  person's best interests.

- the welfare of the child/young person is paramount.