# The Cardinal Wiseman Catholic School

## Complaints Procedure September 2026

**Approved by:** Board of Governors — *Date: 1/10/2026* **Last reviewed on:**
**Next review due by:**

## Quick-reference summary

This section gives a quick overview. Please refer to the full procedure below for details.

**What we need from you**

- Raise concerns as soon as possible — we will not normally consider matters that happened more than three months ago (see *Time scales*).
- Try to resolve matters informally first, with the class teacher, form tutor, Head of Year or the person concerned , this is usually the quickest way to sort things out.
- Explain your concern or complaint clearly, including what happened, what has already been done, and what you would like us to do to put things right (see *Raising a concern or complaint effectively*).
- Use the Complaint Form (or the Stage 2 Review Request Form if escalating) so we have everything we need.
- Treat our staff and governors with courtesy — we will not accept inappropriate, abusive or threatening behaviour (see *Repeated, Vexatious or Unreasonable Complaints*).
- Please avoid discussing the details of your complaint publicly, including on social media, while we are investigating.

**What you can expect from us**

- We will treat you with respect and courtesy at all times.
- We will acknowledge a formal complaint within 2 school days, and provide a written response within 10 school days.
- If you ask us to escalate to Stage 2, we will aim to convene a committee meeting within 15 school days and confirm the decision in writing within 3 school days of the meeting.

- We will help if you need adjustments to use this procedure or assistance with writing your complaint.

## Introduction

In a Catholic school, parental/carers' concerns are of particular importance. As the first educators of their children, parents/carers have a duty to take an active interest in their school. "Since parents have given children their life, they are bound by the most serious obligation to educate their offspring." (*Gravissimum Educationis*). To this end, "there must be the closest co-operation between parents and the teachers to whom they entrust their children to be educated. In fulfilling their task, teachers are to collaborate closely with the parents and willingly listen to them." (Can. 796) In a Catholic school, therefore, dealing with parental/carers' concerns will be an intrinsic part of the school's ethos and mission.

No-one likes criticism but an open organisation will always be willing to listen to concerns and anxieties and be ready to learn from them if appropriate. In a school, most concerns are likely to be expressed by the parents or carers of its pupils, though some may come from pupils themselves, former pupils, parishioners, or from other interested parties such as neighbours or users of the premises. It is appropriate for a complaint to be processed from wherever it arises.

For the purposes of this policy all references to schools include academies.

Nearly all concerns or questions can be resolved very quickly and informally if parents/carers feel able to voice them as soon as they arise. Obviously, the more information the school gives to them the less scope there is for misunderstanding. As part of this information, parents/carers should be told that feedback is always welcome and that, therefore, they are warmly encouraged to voice any concerns straightaway, preferably to the person concerned. In most cases, discussion, explanation, further information — or an apology, if appropriate — will resolve the issue. Every effort should be made to allay concerns at this level and with the least possible formality. **The ideal is that no concern should ever become a formal complaint.**

Occasionally, however, a concern will be too serious to be handled in this way, perhaps needing greater investigation; or the person concerned may not feel that the answers given so far have been acceptable or adequate. In such circumstances, the concern will become a complaint and the formal procedure should be rigorously followed. Even in these cases, every effort should be made to resolve the issue at the lowest possible level of the procedure. It should be very rare indeed that a complaint needs to be decided at the Appeal Stage by a Complaints Appeals Panel.

It is very important that all governors and members of staff be familiar with the school complaints procedure and that they know who the complaints co-ordinator for the school is so that they can refer

complaints to that person when approached by someone with a complaint. Regular training on complaints procedures is provided by the Diocese. In all circumstances the published procedure must be followed closely. Should difficulties arise, advice can be sought from the Diocesan Education Service.

## 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 The Cardinal Wiseman Catholic 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 this complaints procedure.

We will not investigate matters raised anonymously under this procedure — see *Anonymous complaints* below.

## What do we mean by feedback, a concern and a complaint?

At the informal stage, you may want to share:

- **Feedback** — where you want to share your voice with us without needing us to respond, but you want us to listen and take it on board.
- **A concern** — "an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought."
- **A complaint** — "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. The Cardinal Wiseman Catholic School takes concerns seriously and will make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.

## A note on words used in this procedure

- A **"meeting" or "hearing"** can take place in person, by telephone or by video call, as long as everyone can take part and is happy to do so. In exceptional circumstances, including where there

are concerns about the safety or wellbeing of any participant, we reserve the right to determine the format of the meeting without the agreement of all parties, and will explain our reasons for doing so.

- **"School days"** means days when our school is open to pupils. It does not include weekends, school holidays, or days when the school is closed to pupils.

## Raising a concern

If you have difficulty discussing a concern with a particular member of staff, we will respect your views. In these cases, Mr D P Coyle , Head teacher will refer you to another staff member. Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels unable to deal with a concern, they 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, The Cardinal Wiseman Catholic 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 of a complainant, as long as they have appropriate consent to do so.

Concerns should be raised with either the class teacher or 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 Mr D P Coyle via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Complaints that involve or are about the headteacher should be addressed to Mrs Nicole AlexanderMorrell, the Chair of Governors, via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Complaints about the Chair of Governors, any individual governor or the whole governing 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 (Annex 1), and a template Stage 2 review request form is also included (Annex 2). If you require help in completing either form, please contact the school office. You can also ask third-party organisations like 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.

## Raising a concern or complaint effectively

When raising a concern or complaint, it will help us to help you if you can explain clearly:

- what your concern or complaint is;
- what has already been done to try to resolve it, and who you spoke to;
- the names of any witnesses, and dates, times and copies of any relevant documents; and
- what you would like us to do about it to put things right.

We encourage you to focus on the relevant facts, to direct your concern towards processes or decisions rather than at individuals personally, and to suggest realistic outcomes so that we can see what is possible and try to resolve the matter constructively. Please note that certain outcomes are not available under this procedure, including staff disciplinary action (any disciplinary matters are handled confidentially under our internal staff procedures, and you will not be informed of any action taken) and financial compensation or payments of any kind.

We ask that you keep your complaint and any supporting documents short and focused on the issues that matter , as a guide, we would not expect a letter or email to be longer than about two sides of A4 (roughly 1,000 words). If you send us substantially more than this, we may ask you to tell us which issues and documents are most important, and put the timescales in this procedure on hold until you do.

If you choose to use artificial intelligence (AI) tools such as ChatGPT, Microsoft Copilot or Google Gemini to help you draft or structure your concern or complaint, please read the guidance at Annex 3 before doing so.

## Anonymous complaints

We will not normally investigate anonymous complaints. A complaint will be regarded as "anonymous" if the complainant cannot be identified, or their identity cannot be verified, from the information provided ,this includes complaints submitted using contact details that do not reveal who has made the complaint. However, the headteacher or Chair of Governors, if appropriate, will determine whether an anonymously raised matter warrants investigation, for example under our child protection and safeguarding policy.

## 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.

## Other circumstances that may affect timescales

- If we need more information from you to understand your concern or complaint, or the outcome you are seeking, we will let you know what we need and pause the timescales in this procedure until we have it.
- If you threaten or start legal action against us about matters which are the same, substantially similar to, or based on the same facts as your complaint, we may need to pause our consideration of the matter until the legal action is concluded.
- We encourage you not to approach other organisations (for example, Ofsted, the Local Authority or the Teaching Regulation Agency) about your concern or complaint until you have completed this procedure. If another body is investigating the same issue, we may need to pause our consideration of the matter until their investigation has concluded.
- Where you raise more than one concern or complaint at the same time, or raise a new one while an existing matter is still being considered, we may combine these and deal with them together. Where you raise a new concern or complaint while a Stage 2 hearing on an earlier complaint is pending, we may pause that hearing until the new matter has been investigated and responded to at Stage 1.

## Scope of this Complaints Procedure

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

| Excluded matter | Who to contact |
|---|---|
| Admissions to schools; School reorganisation proposals; Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs; Appeals procedure | Governing Body / Ealing 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) or the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH). **LADO contact:** Natalie Cernuda, 020 8825 8930 / 07890 940241, asv@ealing.gov.uk |
| Exclusion of children from school* | Further information at www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions. *Complaints about the application of the behaviour policy can be made through this complaints procedure — see the school's Behaviour Policy. |
| Whistleblowing | We have an internal whistleblowing procedure for all employees, including temporary staff and contractors. The Secretary of State for Education is the prescribed person for whistleblowers in education. Referrals: www.education.gov.uk/contactus. Volunteer staff with concerns should complain through this procedure, or direct to the LA/DfE depending on the substance of the complaint. |
| Staff grievances | Dealt with under the school's internal grievance procedures. |
| Staff conduct | Dealt with under the school's internal disciplinary procedures, if appropriate. Complainants will not be informed of any disciplinary action taken as a result of a complaint, but will be told that the matter is being addressed. |
| Complaints about services provided by other providers using school premises/facilities | Providers should have their own complaints procedure — please contact them directly. |
| National Curriculum content | Department for Education, www.education.gov.uk/contactus |

If other bodies are investigating aspects of the complaint ,for example the police, LA safeguarding teams or tribunals , this may affect our ability to adhere to the timescales in this procedure, or result in the procedure being suspended until those investigations are complete.

If a complainant commences legal action against The Cardinal Wiseman Catholic School in relation to their complaint, we will consider whether to suspend the complaints procedure until those proceedings have concluded.

## Resolving complaints

At each stage in the procedure, The Cardinal Wiseman Catholic 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 it will not happen again, and a timescale for any changes
- an undertaking to review school policies in light of the complaint
- an apology.

Staff disciplinary action and financial compensation are not outcomes available under this procedure.

## Withdrawal of a Complaint

If a complainant wants to withdraw their complaint, we will ask them to confirm this in writing to the person currently dealing with the complaint, or to the school office if they are unsure who that is.

## Stage 1

Formal complaints must be made to the headteacher (unless they are about the headteacher), via the school office. This must be done in person on the Complaint Form at Annex 1. Please note that the school will return complaints that are not on the Stage 1Complaint Form.

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 **2 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, telephone call or video call 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. Informal concerns raised with staff should also be logged on the school's normal recording systems (e.g. CPOMS), with any serious concerns reported to the Headteacher.

At the conclusion of their investigation, the headteacher will provide a formal written response within **10 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 The Cardinal Wiseman Catholic School will take to resolve the complaint.

The headteacher 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 ViceChair), a suitably skilled governor will be appointed to complete all the actions at Stage 1. Complaints about the headteacher or a member of the governing body must be made to the Clerk, via the school office.

If the complaint is jointly about the Chair and Vice-Chair, the entire governing body, or the majority of the governing body, Stage 1 will be considered by an independent investigator appointed by the governing body or Westminster Diocese. At the conclusion of their investigation, the independent investigator will provide a formal written response.

# Annex 1: Stage 1 Complaint Form

*Please complete and return to Mr D P Coyle, Headteacher, who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.*

| **Section A: Your Details** | |
|---|---|
| **Your name** | |
| **Pupil's name (if relevant)** | |
| **Pupil's year group/class (if relevant)** | |
| **Your relationship to the pupil (if relevant)** | |
| **Address** | |
| **Postcode** | |
| **Daytime telephone number** | |
| **Evening telephone number** | |
| **Email address** | |

| **Section B: Details of Your Complaint** |
|---|
| **Please give details of your complaint, including whether you have spoken to anybody at the school about it:** |

| |
|---|
| |

| What would you like the Head teacher to do that might resolve the problem at this stage? |
|---|
| |

| Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details: |
|---|
| |

| Section C: Declaration | |
|---|---|
| **Signature** | |
| **Date** | |

| For Official Use Only |
|---|

| | |
|---|---|
| **Date acknowledgement sent** | |
| **By whom** | |
| **Complaint referred to** | |
| **Date** | |

*Personal information on this form will be processed in accordance with UK GDPR and the school's Privacy Notice, and used only to investigate and respond to your complaint.*

## 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 should be made using the Stage 2 Review Request Form at Annex 2, and must be sent to the Clerk, via the school office, within **20 school days** of receipt of the Stage 1 response.

The Clerk will record the date the request is received and acknowledge receipt in writing (either by letter or email) within **2 school days**.

Please note that the Stage 2 request form must be completed otherwise the complaint will be returned.

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, and will aim to convene a meeting within **15 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 The Cardinal Wiseman Catholic School available, the Clerk will source any additional, independent governors through another local school, through the LA's Governor Services team, or through the Diocese of Westminster, in order to make up the committee. Alternatively, an entirely independent committee may be convened to hear the complaint at Stage 2. A member of the Diocesan Education Service may be invited to advise and support the panel.

The committee will decide whether to deal with the complaint by inviting parties to a meeting or through written representations, but will be sensitive to the complainant's needs when making this decision. Meetings may be held in person, by telephone, or by video call, provided everyone can take part; in exceptional circumstances, including where there are concerns about the safety or wellbeing of any participant, the committee may determine the format without the agreement of all parties, and will explain its reasons.

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 and wishes to be supported by union and/or legal representation. Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

*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.*

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 the venue and proceedings are accessible;
- request copies of any further written material to be submitted to the committee at least 3 school days before the meeting.

Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least 3 school days before the meeting. The committee will not normally accept, as evidence, recordings of conversations 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.

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, and consent will be recorded in any minutes taken.

The committee will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented, and can uphold the complaint in whole or in part, or 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 and, where appropriate, recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in future.

The Chair of the Committee will provide the complainant and The Cardinal Wiseman Catholic School with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within **3 school days**. The letter will include details of how to contact the Department for Education if the complainant is dissatisfied with how their complaint has been handled.

If the complaint is jointly about the Chair and Vice-Chair, 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, provide a full explanation of the decision and its reasons, and, where appropriate, details of actions the school will take to resolve the complaint. It will also advise the complainant how to escalate further if they remain dissatisfied.

# Annex 2: Stage 2 Complaint Form : Committee Review

*Please complete this form if you are dissatisfied with the outcome of your Stage 1 complaint and wish it to be reviewed by the Governors' Complaints Committee. Return it, marked "Private and Confidential", to the Clerk to the Governing Body, c/o The Cardinal Wiseman Catholic School, within 10 school days of receiving the Stage 1 response. The Clerk will acknowledge receipt and explain what will happen next.*

| **Section A: Your Details** | |
|---|---|
| **Your name** | |
| **Pupil's name (if relevant)** | |
| **Pupil's year group/class (if relevant)** | |
| **Your relationship to the pupil (if relevant)** | |
| **Address** | |
| **Postcode** | |
| **Daytime telephone number** | |
| **Evening telephone number** | |
| **Email address** | |

| **Section B: Your Stage 1 Complaint** | |
|---|---|
| **Date Stage 1 complaint submitted** | |
| **Who dealt with your Stage 1 complaint** | |
| **Date of the Stage 1 outcome letter** | |

| Section C: Request for Complaints Committee Review |
| --- |
| **Please summarise your original complaint and explain why you are dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 1:** |
| |

| Which aspects of the Stage 1 decision would you like the Committee to review? |
| --- |
| |

| What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage? |
| --- |
| |

| Are you attaching any paperwork (including the Stage 1 outcome letter)? If so, please give details: |
| --- |
| |

| Section D: The Committee Meeting | |
| --- | --- |
| Will you attend the meeting? (Yes / No) | |
| Will you be accompanied? If so, by whom and in what capacity? | |
| Do you have any access or other needs we should be aware of? | |
| Dates/times you are unavailable in the next 20 school days | |

| Section E: Declaration | |
| --- | --- |
| Signature | |
| Date | |

| For Official Use Only (Clerk to the Governing Body) | |
|---|---|
| **Date form received** | |
| **Date acknowledgement sent** | |
| **By whom** | |
| **Committee members appointed** | |
| **Date of Committee meeting** | |
| **Date written outcome sent** | |

*Personal information on this form will be processed in accordance with UK GDPR and the school's Privacy Notice, and used only to investigate and respond to your complaint.*

## Part 3: Repeated, Vexatious or Unreasonable Complaints

In rare cases, we may not follow the usual procedure. This includes where a concern or complaint is repetitious, vexatious, or pursued in an otherwise unreasonable manner. The decision to classify a concern or complaint in this way will be made by Mr D P Coyle (Headteacher) or Mrs Nicole AlexanderMorrell (Chair of Governors), as appropriate.

### Repeated complaints

If a complainant makes a complaint that is the same, substantially similar, or based on the same facts as one we have already fully considered, and we have done everything we can reasonably do to address the concern and given a clear explanation of our position and the complainant's options, we will write to say that the complaints procedure is finished and that we will not respond to further correspondence about that matter. We will explain how to contact the Department for Education if the complainant wishes to take things further.

If we have already fully considered a complaint about the same subject from another member of the complainant's family, we may advise that the matter has already been considered and the school-level process is complete.

## Vexatious complaints and complaints pursued unreasonably

A concern or complaint may be considered vexatious if it:

- is obsessive, persistent, harassing or repetitive;
- pursues matters that have no merit, or seeks unrealistic outcomes;
- pursues matters in an unreasonable way;
- is designed to cause disruption or annoyance; or
- demands action that has no serious purpose or value.

Examples include (but are not limited to):

- refusing to explain the concern or complaint, or the outcome sought, even when we offer to help;
- refusing to cooperate with our investigation, or refusing to accept that some issues are not covered by this procedure;
- insisting we deal with a concern or complaint in a way that does not fit this procedure or good practice;
- raising trivial or irrelevant information and expecting a response, or asking many detailed but unimportant questions and demanding immediate answers;
- changing what the complaint is about as we investigate, or seeking unrealistic outcomes such as asking for a named member of staff to be dismissed;
- making excessive demands on staff time through frequent, lengthy or complicated contact;
- knowingly providing false information;
- posting information about the complaint on social media or other public forums while it is being considered;
- encouraging or coordinating with other parents to submit multiple complaints about the same issue (this may instead be treated as a Complaint Campaign — see below); or
- using AI tools to draft complaints, or to cite laws, regulations or guidance, where the AI-generated content is inaccurate, misleading, or makes the complaint more complex than necessary (see Annex 3 for guidance on using AI tools appropriately).

We will not accept behaviour or language towards staff or governors that is aggressive, abusive, offensive, discriminatory, threatening, or that makes insulting personal comments or threats about staff.

## Action we may take

In these situations, we may:

- issue a verbal or written warning setting clear expectations for future conduct, which may include a communication plan to manage future contact;
- pause the complaints process until the unacceptable behaviour stops;
- hold a Stage 2 review based on written documents only, without a hearing;
- refuse to consider the complaint any further and direct the complainant to the Department for Education;
- restrict access to the school, staff or governors — for example requiring contact in writing only, with a named person only, or limiting the days/times/number of contacts, or restricting access to the school premises in line with our Parent/Behaviour Code of Conduct; and/or
- where behaviour is so extreme that it threatens the safety or welfare of staff or governors, consider other options such as reporting the matter to the police, or taking legal action — in such cases we may not give prior warning.

Any decision to cease responding to correspondence, or to decline to consider a complaint further, will be communicated in writing, with reasons.

## Part 4: Complaint Campaigns

Occasionally schools become the focus of complaint campaigns, where we receive concerns or complaints from **three or more people** about the same issue, often from persons unconnected to the school. When this happens, we will not follow the usual procedure. Instead, we will send the same response to everyone who has raised the concern/complaint, and/or publish a single response on the school website. The method of response will be determined by the number of complaints received and will be decided by the Chair of Governors.

Where the complaint campaign involves complainants who are parents or carers of pupils currently attending the school, they remain entitled to escalate their complaint to a Stage 2 committee hearing if they are dissatisfied with our response. We will consider how best to manage such hearings in these circumstances.

If a complainant is not happy with our response to a complaint campaign, they can refer the matter to the Department for Education, which has limited powers to consider complaints about schools. The DfE cannot change our response but can review whether we handled it properly.

## Legal Representation

The Complaints Appeal Panel hearing is intended to be a non-adversarial meeting. It is not part of legal proceedings, and it is intended that the complaint should be heard, that the complainant and the school should be reconciled, and any mistakes rectified. It is not therefore appropriate for the complainant or the school to be legally represented. Legal representatives/advisers will only be admitted in exceptional circumstances and with written permission obtained in advance from the panel.

## Next Steps

If the complainant believes the school did not handle their complaint in accordance with the published complaints procedure, or acted unlawfully or unreasonably in exercising its duties under education law, they can contact the Department for Education after completing Stage 2. We encourage complainants not to approach the DfE, Ofsted or the Local Authority until this procedure has been completed, as parallel investigations may delay the resolution of the matter.

The Department for Education will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by The Cardinal Wiseman Catholic 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 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

## Complaints to Ofsted

The Education and Inspections Act 2006 at s.160 provides a procedure for Ofsted to investigate parents' complaints about a school. A complaint cannot be investigated unless the school's complaints procedure has been exhausted, subject to the Chief Inspector's discretion to waive this requirement.

## Complaints to the Secretary of State — The School Complaints Unit

If a complaint has completed the school procedures and the complainant remains dissatisfied, they have the right to refer their complaint to the Secretary of State. The Secretary of State has a duty to consider all complaints raised but will only intervene where the governing body has acted unlawfully or unreasonably and where it is expedient or practical to do so.

The School Complaints Unit (SCU) considers complaints relating to LA-maintained schools in England on behalf of the Secretary of State. The SCU will look at whether the complaints policy and any other relevant statutory policies were adhered to, and whether statutory policies adhere to education legislation. However, the SCU will not normally reinvestigate the substance of the complaint — this remains the responsibility of the school. The SCU will not overturn a school's decision about a complaint except in exceptional circumstances where it is clear the school has acted unlawfully or unreasonably. If the SCU finds that the school has not handled a complaint in accordance with its procedure, it may request that the complaint is looked at again.

Further information can be obtained from the SCU by calling the National Helpline on 0370 000 2288, going online at www.education.gov.uk/help/contactus, or by writing to:

Department for Education
School Complaints Unit
2nd Floor, Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

## 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; and
- if using AI tools to help draft a complaint, follow the guidance at Annex 3.

## 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 relevant people, consideration of records and other relevant information, and 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 questioning;
- keep notes of interviews or arrange for an independent note-taker;
- 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, a designated complaints governor, or another staff member providing administrative support)** The complaints co-ordinator should:

- ensure the complainant is fully updated at each stage of the procedure;
- liaise with staff members, the headteacher, the Chair of Governors, the Clerk, and the Local Authority (if appropriate) to ensure the smooth running of the procedure;
- be aware of issues regarding sharing third-party information, and additional support that may be needed by complainants — including interpretation support or support for a child or young person complainant;
- keep records.

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## Clerk to the Governing Body

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 legal rights and duties, including under legislation relating to school complaints, education law, the Equality Act 2010, the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act 2018 and UK GDPR;

- set the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring the dates are convenient to all parties (if 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, nominated in advance of the complaint meeting, should ensure that:

- both parties are asked (via the Clerk) to provide any additional information by a specified date in advance of the meeting;
- the procedure is properly followed (with the support of the Diocesan Education Service if requested);
- the meeting is conducted informally, is not adversarial, and everyone is treated with respect and courtesy;
- complainants unused to speaking at such a meeting are put at ease — 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 UK GDPR;

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- if a new issue arises, everyone has the opportunity to consider and comment on it — this may require a short adjournment;
- 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 and key findings of fact are made;

  the committee is open-minded and acts independently;
- no committee member has an external interest in the outcome, 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, and be seen to be, independent and impartial — no governor may sit on the committee if they have had prior involvement in the complaint or the circumstances surrounding it;
- the aim is to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant, though it may only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations;
- many complainants will feel nervous and inhibited in a formal setting, and parents/carers often feel emotional when discussing an issue affecting their child;
- extra care is needed when the complainant is a child/young person and present during all or part of the meeting, ensuring the atmosphere does not feel intimidating, and that the child/young person's views are given 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 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 — though agreement might not always be possible if the committee considers attendance is not in the child/young person's best interests;
- the welfare of the child/young person is paramount.

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## Role of the Diocesan and Local Authority Representatives

To advise the panel on procedure. The Diocesan and Local Authority officers are there in an advisory capacity only. They do not have a vote and do not participate in the panel's decision-making process.

## General Points

## Recording and Reporting Complaints

In order to turn complaints to positive effect, it is important that records are kept so that at regular intervals (perhaps termly) both the senior managers of the school and the governing body can reflect on issues that have arisen and on the way in which they have been handled. The complaints co-ordinator is the most obvious person to hold these records and to collate them into a report for the headteacher (if he or she is not the co-ordinator) and the governing body. Such a report could be a valuable self-evaluation tool. The governing body may also wish to consider reporting to parents any changes made to the school's procedures as a result of parental feedback — it need not be specified that the feedback was in the form of a complaint.

## Confidentiality

All records of complaints must be kept strictly confidential, except where a legitimate subject access request is made under the Data Protection Act 2018. Complainants are entitled to a copy of the records of a complaint, including notes and outcomes. Records of complaints should be retained for three years following completion of the complaints process and then destroyed.

## Complaints Made Other Than in Accordance with the Procedure

Sometimes a complainant may be unfamiliar with, or unaware of, the complaints procedure; sometimes they may choose to take their complaint straight to governors or to other parties, such as the Diocese or the Local Authority. In every such case, the procedure must be strictly adhered to, and the complaint redirected to its proper stage in the procedure. It is, therefore, important that all members of staff and all governors are fully aware of the procedure, and that it is publicly available. It is particularly important that governors know they must not attempt to deal with complaints themselves, but should direct complainants to the school's complaints co-ordinator.

## Annex 1: Complaint Form

Please complete and return to Mr D P Coyle, Headteacher, who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

- Your name:
- Pupil's name (if relevant):
- Pupil's year group/class (if relevant):

- Your relationship to the pupil (if relevant):
- Address:
- Postcode:
- Day time telephone number:
- Evening telephone number:
- Email address:

**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:* _____

## Annex 2: Request for a Stage 2 Complaints Committee Review

*[New form — adapted from good practice, to make Stage 2 requests easier to administer]*

Please complete and return to the Clerk to the Governing Body, via the school office, marked Private and Confidential, within 20 school days of receiving your Stage 1 outcome.

- Your name:
- Pupil's name (if relevant):
- Date of your original complaint:
- Date of the Stage 1 outcome letter:
- Please explain why you are not satisfied with the Stage 1 outcome (please note the committee cannot reinvestigate your complaint or consider new complaints or evidence unrelated to your original complaint):
- What outcome are you hoping for from the review?

- Are you attaching any new documents relevant to your original complaint? If so, please give details:
- Do you intend to bring someone with you to the meeting (name and role)?

Signature: _____ Date: _____

*Official use — Date received:* _____ *Date acknowledgement sent:* _____ *Committee members appointed:* _____ *Hearing date:* _____

## Annex 3: Guidance on Using AI Tools to Raise a Concern or Complaint

### Introduction

AI tools (such as ChatGPT, Microsoft Copilot, Google Gemini and similar large language model applications) can help you organise your thoughts, structure your concern or complaint clearly, and express yourself effectively. However, these tools have significant limitations and must be used with care.

### Important limitations and risks

- AI tools do not know what happened — they can only work with the information you give them, and they may fill gaps with invented details that sound convincing but are untrue (sometimes called "hallucination").
- AI tools may generate references to laws, regulations, policies or legal rights that do not exist, are out of date, or do not apply to your situation.
- AI tools may produce language that is overly formal, legalistic or aggressive, which may not reflect your genuine concern and may make it harder for us to resolve the matter constructively.
- Any personal data (including names, dates of birth, or other identifying information about your child, other children, staff or other individuals) that you enter into an AI tool may be stored, processed or used by the AI provider in ways outside your control, and may breach data protection law.
- AI-generated complaints that do not accurately reflect your experience may cause delays, as we may need to spend time clarifying what actually happened.
- AI tools predict the most likely answer based on their training data. They do not check whether their output is accurate or relevant to your particular situation. AI tools are also designed to make you feel helped and understood, which means they may agree with your point of view or present

your complaint in a one-sided way rather than a balanced account of what happened — this can wrongly reinforce your position and make it harder for us to work together to resolve the matter.

## What to avoid

- Copying and pasting AI-generated text without reading and checking it thoroughly.
- Submitting a complaint that contains facts, events or details you have not personally verified as accurate.
- Relying on any legal advice, references to legislation, or statements about your rights generated by an AI tool, without checking them independently.
- Entering the names or personal data of your child, other children, staff members or any other individuals into an AI tool.
- Using AI to generate multiple or repetitive complaints about the same issue.

## Example prompts for using AI tools effectively

In each case, replace the descriptions in square brackets with your own details, taking care not to include any personal data or names.

**Example 1 — Organising your thoughts:**
*"I want to raise a concern with my child's school about [describe the issue in general terms]. The key things that happened are: [list the main events in order, using descriptions such as 'my child' or 'the class teacher' instead of names]. Can you help me organise these into a clear, chronological summary that I can use when speaking to the school?"*

**Example 2 — Structuring a written complaint:**
*"I need to write a formal complaint to my child's school. The issue is [describe the issue]. I have already tried to resolve this informally by [describe what you did]. The key facts are [list the facts]. The outcome I am looking for is [describe what you want to happen]. Can you help me structure this into a clear letter, using plain language and a respectful tone? Do not add any facts or details that I have not provided."*

**Example 3 — Checking tone and clarity:**
*"I have drafted the following complaint to my child's school: [paste your draft, with names removed]. Can you suggest how I could make this clearer and more constructive in tone, without changing the facts or adding anything new?"*

**Example 4 — Identifying what outcome to request:**

*"I am raising a complaint with my child's school about [describe the issue]. I am not sure what outcome to ask for. Based on the facts I have described, can you suggest some realistic outcomes I could request? Please do not suggest legal remedies or refer to specific laws."*