



Adventure Wellbeing School

Complaints Policy and Procedure

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Introduction

Adventure Wellbeing School (AWS) provides an outstanding and nurturing educational environment where every child can achieve their best potential. As a specialist school, we aim to offer therapeutic education, health, and care solutions for children and young people with complex and additional needs. Our ethos centres on openness, transparency, and the continuous development of our services through constructive feedback.

We believe that listening to the voices of our pupils, parents, carers, staff, and stakeholders is critical in our journey to excellence. Positive and negative feedback plays an important role in shaping our services, addressing concerns, and making necessary improvements. Adventure Wellbeing School takes complaints seriously, viewing them as an opportunity to learn and improve. We ensure that matters are resolved in a fair and timely manner.

To support the complaints process, AWS has appointed the Head of School to oversee all complaints, ensuring they are managed professionally, impartially, and in compliance with The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, Ofsted requirements, and Cheshire West and Chester Council guidelines.

This complaints policy is designed to handle all concerns or complaints about the school, including but not limited to issues related to education, care, or school environment. AWS is committed to treating every complaint seriously and fostering a culture where concerns are welcomed to enhance our teaching and care.

Aims of the Complaints Policy

This policy aims to provide pupils, parents, carers, staff, and other stakeholders with a clear framework to raise concerns or complaints about any aspect of the school. This policy seeks to:

- **Ensure Accessibility:** Provide a complaints procedure that is easily accessible and widely publicised.
- **Promote Simplicity:** Ensure the complaints process is easy to understand and follow, with minimal complexity.
- **Encourage Informal Resolution:** Encourage complaints to be resolved informally whenever possible, fostering a collaborative approach to problem-solving.
- **Guarantee Timeliness:** Establish and adhere to clear timescales for handling complaints and appeals, ensuring complaints are resolved promptly.
- **Ensure Impartiality:** Ensure that complaints are handled impartially and, where necessary, investigated by an independent person.
- **Promote Confidentiality:** Maintain the confidentiality of all parties involved in the complaints process, sharing information only on a need-to-know basis.
- **Provide Transparency:** Offer clear guidance to all parties handling complaints, ensuring fairness and transparency throughout the process.
- **Drive Improvement:** Use feedback from complaints to drive service development and organisational change, ensuring continuous improvement across all areas of the school. This commitment to improvement reassures our stakeholders that we are dedicated to their well-being and the quality of our services.

Who Can Make a Complaint?

This complaints policy applies to all stakeholders of Adventure Wellbeing School, including:

- **Pupils** attending the school.
- **Parents or carers** of pupils.

- **Local authorities** or external agencies involved in the care or education of the pupils.
- **Contractors**, partner agencies, or service providers.
- **Community members** or any other individuals with an interest in the school.

Staff members with concerns about employment or contractual issues should follow the Adventure Wellbeing School Staff Grievance Procedure rather than the complaints process outlined in this policy.

Complaints should generally be raised within three months of the relevant event(s). Complaints raised after this period may still be considered at the discretion of the Head of School, mainly if there are valid reasons for the delay.

Publicity and Access to the Complaints Policy

It is a legal requirement that the school makes the complaints procedure readily available to all stakeholders. To ensure transparency, Adventure Wellbeing School will publicise the complaints policy in several ways, including:

- **Website:** The complete complaints policy will be available on the Adventure Wellbeing School website, ensuring easy and continuous access for all parents, carers, and stakeholders.
- **Newsletters and Bulletins:** School newsletters and bulletins will include periodic reminders about the complaints policy's availability and importance.
- **Printed Copies:** Anyone in the school community who requests physical copies of the complaints policy will receive one upon request.

Confidentiality

Maintaining confidentiality is essential throughout the complaints process. All complaints, whether informal or formal, will be handled discreetly and with respect for all involved parties. AWS requests that complainants also respect the confidentiality of the process and allow the school to follow its procedures without unnecessary public discussion.

Information relating to complaints will be shared only with those who are directly involved in investigating and resolving the issue. Personal data and records associated with complaints will be stored securely in line with Adventure Wellbeing School's GDPR Policy.

However, there are certain circumstances where the school may be required to share information beyond the immediate parties involved, such as:

- When a child's or vulnerable person's safety is at risk (e.g., safeguarding concerns).
- When required by law, such as responding to requests from **Ofsted**, the **Secretary of State for Education**, or **Cheshire West and Chester Council** as part of an inspection or investigation.

Equal Access, Accompaniment, and Representation

Adventure Wellbeing School is committed to ensuring everyone has equal access to the complaints process regardless of background. Commitment to equality and inclusivity ensures that all stakeholders feel respected and valued.

- Complainants may accompany a friend, relative, or advocate to any meetings or discussions during the complaints process.
- Where necessary, complaints may be submitted on behalf of another person (e.g., a parent submitting a complaint on behalf of a pupil), provided appropriate consent has been given.

- The school will make reasonable adjustments to accommodate accessibility needs, such as providing interpreters for non-English speakers or holding meetings in accessible venues for those with physical disabilities.

The school encourages respectful behaviour from all parties involved in the complaints process. This commitment ensures that all stakeholders feel safe and respected throughout the process.

Definition of a Complaint

A complaint is defined as any written or oral expression of dissatisfaction or disquiet. It may involve disputed decisions, concerns about service quality, non-delivery, or staff conduct.

Staff are trained to recognise that many queries or concerns may arise daily as part of the school's normal workload. These are often resolved at the source before escalating into a formal complaint. However, if a service user expresses dissatisfaction requiring further investigation, it is essential to promptly acknowledge and address their concerns.

Staff members are encouraged to listen carefully to any concerns raised. If unsure whether a matter should be escalated to a formal complaint, they should consult their manager or supervisor.

Legal Framework

The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014

As an independent school, Adventure Wellbeing School is legally required to comply with Part 7 of The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, which outlines the requirements for managing complaints. The regulations mandate that:

- **Written Complaints Procedure:** Schools must have a straightforward, written complaints procedure available to parents, carers, and other stakeholders.
- **Publicised and Accessible:** The complaints procedure must be publicised in an easily accessible format.
- **Stages of Complaint:** The procedure must include the option to raise complaints informally in the first instance, followed by a formal investigation and an appeal process involving an independent panel.
- **Record Keeping:** Schools must keep a written record of all complaints, whether they are resolved informally or require formal investigation and escalation.
- **Confidentiality:** The confidentiality of complainants and all parties involved must be maintained, except in cases where disclosure is legally required.

Ofsted and External Oversight

Ofsted is responsible for inspecting and regulating schools to ensure they meet high standards of care and education. As part of this role, Ofsted monitors how schools handle complaints and ensure they comply with the required regulations.

If a complainant believes that Adventure Wellbeing School has failed to resolve their complaint in line with this policy, they have the right to escalate their concerns to **Ofsted**. Ofsted can investigate complaints about the school's failure to meet regulatory requirements or concerns that the school is acting unlawfully. However, it does not reinvestigate the complaint's substance but focuses on whether the school adhered to its policies and statutory obligations.

- **Contact Information for Ofsted:** Complainants can visit the **Ofsted Complaints Page** or contact Ofsted via phone or email for guidance on escalating a complaint.

Cheshire West and Chester Council Guidance

In addition to following independent school regulations, Adventure Wellbeing School complies with local authority guidance from **Cheshire West and Chester Council**. The council's guidelines emphasise:

- **Fair and Impartial Complaint Handling:** Complaints must be dealt with impartially, ensuring that all parties are treated fairly and respectfully throughout the process.
- **Timely and Transparent Processes:** Complaints must be handled within a clear and reasonable timeframe, with communication at each process stage.
- **Local Oversight:** Adventure Wellbeing School collaborates with the local authority when appropriate, particularly in safeguarding cases or when public services are involved in a child's welfare.

Scope of the Complaints Policy

This policy applies to all complaints relating to the services and facilities provided by Adventure Wellbeing School, with the following exceptions:

- **Admissions:** This policy does not cover Complaints about admissions decisions and should be addressed through the school's admissions process.
- **Special Educational Needs (SEN) Assessments:** Complaints related to statutory SEN assessments should be directed to the local authority.
- **Exclusions:** Complaints about exclusions should follow the process outlined by the Department for Education.
- **Whistleblowing:** Any concerns raised by staff or volunteers about public interest should be handled through the **AWS Whistleblowing Policy**.
- **Staff Grievances and Disciplinary Issues:** Staff members with grievances related to employment or discipline should follow the school's staff grievance procedures.
- **Complaints About Third-Party Services:** If complaints relate to services provided by external organisations using AWS facilities, these complaints should be raised directly with the service provider.

In certain situations, the complaints procedure may parallel other legal or disciplinary processes, such as safeguarding concerns, criminal investigations, or staff-related grievances. Where necessary, the Head of School will determine the appropriate course of action and inform the complainant of any relevant procedural changes.

The Complaints Procedure

The following outlines the steps Adventure Wellbeing School will follow when handling complaints. The procedure is designed to resolve concerns promptly and efficiently, ensuring fairness at all stages.

Stage 1: Informal Complaint

Initial Concerns

Adventure Wellbeing School encourages informal resolution of concerns whenever possible. Many issues can be resolved quickly through open communication and dialogue. If a parent, pupil, or stakeholder has a concern, they should raise it directly with the relevant staff member, such as the class teacher or subject lead.

Resolution at the Informal Stage

The informal stage aims to address concerns before they escalate into formal complaints. Staff should attempt to resolve the issue by offering:

- **An explanation** of the situation.
- **An apology**, if appropriate.
- **An assurance** that the issue will not recur.
- **Details of actions taken** to prevent the issue from happening again.

The matter will be resolved if the complainant is satisfied with the response. No formal records will be kept at this stage unless the complainant wishes to escalate the matter further.

Timescales

Although the informal stage does not have strict timescales, the school will aim to resolve concerns within **ten working days** of them being raised.

Stage 2: Formal Complaint to the Head of School

If the complainant is unsatisfied with the informal resolution, they may submit a formal complaint to the Head of School in writing. The complaint should include:

- The name of the complainant and their relationship to the school.
- A clear complaint description, including relevant dates, times, and people involved.
- The steps taken to resolve the matter informally (if applicable).
- The desired outcome or resolution sought by the complainant.

Monitoring and Recording

The Head of School will record all complaints received at this stage, including the actions taken and the final resolution.

Investigation by the Head of School

Upon receiving a formal complaint, the Head of School will:

1. **Acknowledge receipt** of the complaint in writing within **24 hours (one working day)**.
2. **Investigate** the complaint, which may involve interviewing the complainant, staff members, or other relevant parties.
3. **Gather evidence** and review documentation as necessary to establish the facts.
4. **Prioritise the pupil's well-being** by meeting with the class teacher and other professionals working with the pupil to monitor their individual needs, including attendance, therapeutic support, and engagement while the complaint is resolved.

The Head of School will respond to the complaint in writing within **ten working days**. If the investigation is particularly complex and requires more time, an extension of **five additional working days** may be granted. In such cases, the complainant will be informed of the delay.

The response will include:

- Whether the complaint is **upheld, partially upheld, or not upheld**.
- The reasons for the decision.
- Details of any actions taken or proposed due to the complaint.
- Information on how to escalate the complaint if the complainant is dissatisfied with the response.

Stage 3: Appeal to the Executive Headteacher

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of the formal investigation, they may appeal to the Executive Headteacher. The appeal must be made in writing within ten working days of receiving the formal response and should clearly outline the aspects of the complaint that remain unresolved.

Appeal Investigation

The Executive Headteacher will review the complaint, the investigation carried out in Stage 2, and any additional information or evidence provided by the complainant. If appropriate, further interviews or investigations may be conducted. The complainant may also be invited to meet with the Executive Headteacher to discuss their concerns.

The Executive Headteacher will respond to the appeal in writing within ten working days, with a possible extension of five working days if necessary.

Stage 4: Appeal to the School Proprietor

If the complainant remains dissatisfied after the Stage 3 response, they may escalate the complaint to the School Proprietor. The appeal must be submitted in writing within ten working days of receiving the Stage 3 response.

School Proprietor's Investigation

The School Proprietor will review all aspects of the complaint, including the findings from the initial investigation and appeal. Where appropriate, the complainant may be invited to meet with the School Proprietor to provide additional information or evidence.

The School Proprietor will respond in writing within ten working days of receiving the appeal. This response will include any additional actions the school takes to address the complaint.

Stage 5: Independent Panel Hearing

If the complainant is not satisfied with the response provided by the School Proprietor, they have the right to request an Independent Panel Hearing. The request must be made in writing within ten working days of receiving the Stage 4 response.

Composition of the Panel

The independent panel will consist of at least three members, one of whom must be independent of the school's management and running. The panel will review the complaint, the investigation findings, and the responses provided by the school at previous stages.

Panel Hearing

The hearing will be scheduled within twenty working days of the request. The complainant will be invited to attend and may accompany a representative. The panel's findings and recommendations will be communicated in writing to the complainant within ten working days of the hearing.

Monitoring and Record Keeping

The Executive Headteacher maintains a comprehensive Complaints Register that records all formal complaints and their outcomes. The Executive Headteacher and School Proprietor will review the register annually to identify trends and areas for improvement.

Records of all complaints will be available to Ofsted, Cheshire West and Chester Council, and the Secretary of State for Education upon request. The Complaints Register will also indicate whether complaints were resolved informally or required formal investigation and escalation.

Escalation to External Bodies

If the complainant remains dissatisfied after completing the internal complaints procedure, they may escalate their concerns to external bodies such as:

- **Ofsted** ([Ofsted Complaints Page](#)): Ofsted will investigate complaints about the school's failure to meet regulatory requirements.
- **Department for Education (DfE)**: Complaints may be submitted to the DfE if there is evidence that the school has acted unlawfully or failed to adhere to statutory policies.

Appendix 1: Complaint Form

Complaints Form

	Complaint Reference Number
Date	
Full name	
Email address	
Address	
Contact Number	
AWOS School/Service	
Please write the details of your complaint. You can attach further sheets if required.	

