Windsor Academy Trust

Policy: Complaints Policy	
Responsible Committee:	People and Culture Committee
Date approved by the Board of Directors:	24 October 2024
Implementation date:	December 2024
Next review date:	December 2026

DOCUMENT CONTROL	
VERSION NUMBER:	V 1.0
POLICY STATUS:	STATUTORY POLICY
POLICY TYPE:	TRUST WIDE
REQUIRED TO PUBLISH:	YES
POLICY LEAD:	CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER

VERSION CONTROL		
VERSION	**DATE**	**CHANGES**
V 1.0	24.10.2024	SCHEDULED REVIEW
V 1.1	16.12.2025	REVIEW TO GIVE EFFECT TO CHANGES IN STATUTORY GUIDANCE REVIEW TO GIVE EFFECT TO CHANGES IN THE WAT SCHEME OF DELEGATION

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1. Roles and responsibilities

Complainant:. This is the person who has a concern or complaint about the school or Windsor Academy Trust (WAT).

Complaints Officer/Coordinator: This is the nominated person who helps with your complaint. They will keep you updated and let you know what's happening.

Investigator: This person looks into your complaint. They find out what happened and share the facts.

WAT Complaints Officer: Contact this person if your complaint is about the Headteacher, Executive Headteacher of the school, the trust, or if it's at stage three or four of the process.

WAT Head of Governance: Contact this person if your complaint is about the Chair of the school's Local Community Committee.

Complaints Panel Chair: This person leads the meeting if your complaint needs to be discussed. They make sure the meeting is comfortable, fair, and respectful for everyone.

2. Policy aims and principles

At Windsor Academy Trust (WAT), we are committed to listening to any concerns or complaints you have about WAT or our schools. This policy is for people who have concerns or complaints about WAT or our schools.

WAT takes all concerns and complaints seriously. We aim to put things right when they go wrong and to review our systems and procedures when we need to. No-one will be treated unfairly for making a complaint. If something can be improved, we'll look at how we can make things better.

If you have a concern, it is best to talk to the person you're dealing with as soon as possible. They will try to solve it right away. If they can learn something from your concern, they will tell the school's or WAT's senior team.

If you have a complaint, please let the school or WAT know as soon as you can. Talking about your complaint helps us solve things quickly. We will try to find fair solutions that work for everyone.

WAT is committed to handling all concerns and complaints from parents or carers about the facilities or services provided by WAT and our schools. Some complaints, like those about school admissions or exclusions, are dealt with under different policies. Otherwise, we will follow this policy.

If you have a disability, WAT will make reasonable adjustments to help you, following the Equality Act 2010 and the WAT Equality Policy, which is on our website.

This policy follows the same rules as other WAT policies and is based on current laws and guidance.

2.1 The difference between a concern and a complaint

It is best for everyone if concerns and complaints are solved as early as possible. Many issues can be sorted out informally, without needing to go through a formal process. WAT takes all concerns seriously and will try to fix any problems quickly.

- A concern is when someone feels worried or unsure about something important and wants reassurance.
- A complaint is when someone is unhappy about something that was or wasn't done, and they let us know.

2.2 How to raise a concern or make a complaint

You can make a complaint by talking to someone, writing to us, or calling on the phone. To make it easier, there is a complaint form at the end of this policy.

If you find it hard to talk to a certain staff member, we understand. In this case, the school's Complaints Officer will help you talk to someone else. If the member of staff directly involved feels unable to handle the concern, the Headteacher/Executive Headteacher will find another staff member who can. The member of staff may be more senior but does not have to be. What matters most is that they can look at the concern fairly.

- If you have a complaint about a staff member (not the Headteacher/Executive Headteacher), contact the school's Complaints Officer through the school office or by email (please see Para 1.7). Mark your complaint as Private and Confidential.
- If your complaint is about the Headteacher/Executive Headteacher, contact the WAT Complaints Officer through the trust office. Mark it as Private and Confidential.

- If your complaint is about the Chair of the Local Community Committee, a member of the Local Community Committee or the whole Local Community Committee, contact the WAT Head of Governance through the trust office. Mark it as Private and Confidential.
- Complaints about the central WAT team should be sent to the WAT Complaints Officer through the trust office. Mark it as Private and Confidential.
- Complaints about the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) or a WAT trustee should be sent to the Chair of the Board of Directors through the trust office. Mark it as Private and Confidential.

If you need help filling out the complaint form, you can ask the school office, or contact a group like Citizens Advice, to assist you.

We follow equality laws and will make reasonable adjustments during the complaints process if needed. This could include offering the information in different formats or holding meetings in places that are easier to access.

2.3 Complaints that are unreasonable, persistent and anonymous

WAT and our schools do not usually look into complaints that are anonymous. However, the Headteacher, WAT Complaints Officer, or CEO will decide if an anonymous complaint needs to be investigated.

We know most complaints are valid and we take them seriously. But sometimes, people act in ways that make it hard for us to deal with their complaints. This is what we mean by unreasonable behaviour:

- Refusing to explain their complaint or what they want, even when we offer to help.
- Not cooperating with the complaint process.
- Not accepting that some things are outside the complaints process.
- Wanting the complaint handled in ways that don't follow the rules or good practice.
- Adding unimportant or unrelated details that don't matter to the complaint.
- Asking lots of small, unnecessary questions and demanding quick answers.
- Making unfair complaints about staff and trying to get them replaced.
- Changing their complaint while it's being investigated.
- Making the same complaint over and over, even after it's been dealt with.
- Refusing to accept the investigation results, even when the process was followed properly.
- Asking for something unrealistic.
- Taking up too much of the school's or trust's time with long, frequent contact.
- Using threats, rude, or discriminatory language.
- Providing false information.
- Posting unacceptable things on social media or other public places.

We will do our best to listen and help, and we'll tell you clearly where we stand and what your options are. We will always stay fair and follow the complaints process.

If a person continues to cause problems, we might have to manage how they contact us. We might:

- Give them just one email address to contact.
- Limit how many times they can contact us, for example, a set number of times each term.
- Ask them to get help from a group like Citizens Advice.
- Use other strategies if needed.

We may stop responding to the person if:

- We have done everything we can to help with their concerns.
- We have clearly told them our position and their options.
- They keep contacting us just to cause disruption.

If we stop responding, we will let you know, but we will still look at any new complaints you may have.

If someone is aggressive or violent, we will call the police and let them know our actions in writing. This may include banning individuals from trust locations.

2.4 Timescales for making a complaint

Any complaint must be made within three months of the incident. If there were several incidents, the complaint must be made within three months of the last one. We will not consider complaints made after this time unless there are special circumstances.

2.5 Complaints received outside of term time

If you make a complaint during the school holidays, WAT and its schools will treat it as received on the first school day after the holidays.

2.6 Scope: What does this policy cover?

This policy covers all complaints about WAT and our schools. However, some complaints are handled by different rules or policies, including:

- School admissions
- Special educational needs assessments
- Child protection and safeguarding
- Exclusions from school
- Whistleblowing (reporting serious problems)
- Staff grievances or complaints about staff behaviour
- Data Protection complaints
- Behaviour complaints

WAT cannot share details about any actions taken against a staff member because of a complaint (due to privacy and the law). But we will let you know that the issue is being dealt with.

For more information on who to contact for these types of complaints, see the table in appendix 2.

If other groups, like the Police or Local Authority, are investigating part of the complaint, this might delay our process or pause it until they finish their investigations.

If you take legal action against WAT or one of its schools, we might pause our complaints process until the legal case is over.

2.7 Resolving Complaints

At every stage of the process, WAT and our schools want to resolve the complaint. If we agree with all or part of your complaint, we might offer one or more of the following:

- An explanation
- An admission that things could have been handled differently or better
- A promise to try and make sure the problem doesn't happen again
- An explanation of what we're doing to stop it from happening again, and when those changes will be made
- A review of our school policies because of the complaint
- An apology

2.8 Withdrawal of a Complaint

If you want to withdraw your complaint, we will ask you to let us know in writing.

2.9 Complaints WAT, can not normally consider

WAT cannot usually look into complaints in the following cases:

If the complaint is made more than three months after the incident (see section 2.4).
If the complaint has already been made before and has been fully investigated or resolved.
If the complaint is anonymous. However, the Headteacher, WAT Complaints Officer, or CEO (if appropriate) may decide if it should be investigated.
If the complaint is unreasonable, persistent or anonymous (see section 2.3).
If someone else makes the complaint on behalf of a person without their permission.

If the complaint is about exam results (this is subject to latest exam guidance).
If the complaint is about a student's education, health and care plan (EHCP).
If the matter is part of a legal case.
If the complaint is about a service provided to us by a third-party. These complaints should go to the service provider.*
If the complaint is about something outside of this policy (see sections 2.6 and 4 for details on where to direct these complaints).*

**Even though we can't formally investigate these complaints, you should still tell the school/trust. We may be able to help resolve the issue or give you more information or support.*

3. Making a complaint

As stated in paragraph 2.2, you can make a complaint by talking to someone, writing to us, or calling on the phone. To make it easier, there is a complaint form at the end of this policy.

3.1 Who should I contact to make a complaint?

School Designated Complaints Officer Stages 1 and 2:	**Name:**
Contact Details (including telephone number and email address):	**Tel:** **Email:**
Headteacher/Executive Headteacher:	**Name:**
Contact details (including telephone number and email address):	**Tel:** **Email:**
WAT Complaints Officer (for stage 3 and 4 complaints, as well as complaints about WAT / Headteacher / Executive Headteacher):	**Windsor Academy Trust Complaints Officer**

Contact details (including telephone number and email address):	**Tel:** 0121 602 7594 **Email:** info@windosracademytrust.org.uk

3.2 Records

Every complaint given to a staff member must be written down, along with the actions taken. These records are kept in a complaint file that includes all the evidence. The file stays private, unless someone like the Secretary of State or an inspection group (under Section 109 of the 2008 Act) asks to see it.

Any requests to see parts of the file will be handled carefully on a case-by-case basis and will follow data protection rules. WAT will keep complaint records for at least 12 months after the final communication or action.

All complaints will be added to a log that shows when the complaint was made, what stage it reached, if it was resolved, and what actions were taken. WAT does this to spot any patterns and to decide if staff need more training.

3.3 Complaints procedure

Complaints usually follow the steps listed below. WAT uses a four-stage process to handle complaints. Each step is followed until the complaint is resolved. If the complaint is solved informally at stage one, for example, then stage two won't start, and the issue will be considered closed.

Stage:	How to make a complaint:	Where to address complaint to: (See section 3.1)
1. Informal	In person, telephone, writing (Section 3.4.1) - complaint form attached at appendix 1	School Designated Complaints Officer
2. Formal	In writing (Section 3.4.2) - complaint form attached at appendix 1	School Designated Complaints Officer
3. Review	In writing (Section 3.4.3)	WAT Complaints Officer
4. Panel	In writing (Section 3.4.4)	WAT Complaints Officer

If a complaint needs to move to a later stage without following the usual steps, you will be told what to expect by letter or email within five working days. The decision to change the process will be made based on the situation and will be recorded in the complaint file.

If other groups, like the Police or Local Authority, are investigating part of the complaint, this may affect our timing or pause the process until they finish. If this happens, we will let you know as soon as possible and give a new timeline.

A flow chart showing the stages of the trust's complaints process can be found at appendix 3.

3.4 Complaints about a WAT school

Complaints regarding a school should be made to the designated Complaints Officer at the school (see para 3.1) via the school office.

3.4.1 Stage one – Informal

Most concerns can be solved informally by talking to a staff member. Often, they can sort out your concerns right away.

3.4.2 Stage two – Formal

All complaints at this stage must be made in writing within three months of the incident (see section 2.4).

- A suitable person chosen by the Headteacher/Executive Headteacher will investigate the complaint.
- If the complaint is about the Headteacher/ Executive Headteacher, it will be reviewed by a member of the trust's Executive Team, and it may move to stage three.
- The decision on who will investigate will be made within five working days, and you will receive a letter acknowledging the complaint.
- This letter will explain how the complaint will be investigated and how long it will take.
- The investigator can ask another staff member to gather information but not to decide what action to take.

The school or WAT Complaints Officer will usually respond to the complaint in writing within four working weeks from the date of the acknowledgement letter for stage two. If there's a delay, you will be informed as soon as possible, with a new response date.

If you are not happy with the school's final response or don't get a response within six working weeks, you can ask for the complaint to move to stage three.

3.4.3 Stage three – WAT Review

For a complaint to move to stage three, it must have already been looked at in stages one and two. The complaint must then be sent in writing to Windsor Academy Trust's Complaints Officer within four weeks of the stage two response.

Once WAT receives the complaint, the Complaints Officer will send an acknowledgment within five school working days. WAT may need more information from you or the school at this stage.

WAT's investigating officer will review all the information and write a report with recommendations to help resolve the complaint. You will receive a written response within four school working weeks after all the information has been received. If there's a delay, WAT will let you know as soon as possible.

If you are still unhappy with the outcome, you can move the complaint to stage four.

3.4.4 Stage four – Complaints Panel

Stage four is the final step in the complaints process, where you can ask for a complaints panel to review your case. You need to contact WAT's Complaints Officer within three weeks of getting the stage three outcome letter and explain why you are not satisfied with the decision.

The panel will be arranged at a time and place that works for everyone, usually within three school weeks. If there are any delays, WAT will let you know in writing as soon as possible.

The panel will have three or five people, including at least one person who is independent (not involved in the running of the school or trust). The panel will include:

- A Director from Windsor Academy Trust's Board of Directors
- A senior executive from WAT
- An independent panel member

The panel is fair and unbiased, and no-one on it will have been involved in the complaint before. The panel will be led by a trust Director or an independent member, with a clerk present to take notes.

The panel meeting will be private. Its goal is to solve the complaint and bring the academy and complainant together, but if that's not possible, it will focus on finding out the facts and making recommendations.

You may bring a relative or friend to the meeting, but you must let WAT know in advance. If you reject the offer of three meeting dates without a good reason, the meeting will happen without you, using written information from both sides.

The panel will only look at the original complaint, not new complaints. If you have a new complaint, it will start at stage one of the complaint's process.

The panel can:

- Dismiss the complaint (in whole or in part), or;
- Uphold the complaint (in whole or in part).

If the complaint is upheld, the panel will decide what action to take and recommend changes to prevent the problem from happening again.

The outcome will be sent to you and anyone involved by email or letter within five school days. The outcome will also be kept on record at the trust. The complaints log will be updated.

The letter will include information on how to contact the Department for Education (as of March 2025) if you are not happy with how your complaint was handled.

3.5 Complaints about Windsor Academy Trust

All complaints at this stage must be made in writing within three months of the incident (see section 2.4).

Sometimes, a complaint might be about WAT itself or a WAT central team staff member. In these cases, the process for handling the complaint is different from the one for schools.

The process for complaining about WAT follows four stages.

3.5.1 Stage one – Informal

You can share informal concerns by phone, email, or post. Concerns should be raised directly with the staff member involved. If your concern cannot be resolved with them, you should follow the steps in stage two.

3.5.2 Stage two – Formal

A complaint should be made in writing to WAT's Complaints Officer. If it is a minor complaint, it will be handled by the line manager of the person involved or WAT's Complaints Officer. If the complaint can't be resolved right away, you will get a full response within five working days.

If the complaint is about the CEO, it should be addressed to the WAT Head of Governance. The Chair of the Board of Directors will review the complaint, and it may be moved to stage three.

3.5.3 Stage three – Review

Stage 3 is when a Senior Trust Leader reviews the complaint, unless the complaint is about the CEO. It is up to the person making the complaint to ask for a stage 3 review.

To request a review, you should write to WAT's Complaints Officer within four weeks of getting the stage two response. Explain why you are still unhappy. You will receive an acknowledgment within five school working days, and the Complaints Officer will pass it on for review. They will be your main contact during this stage.

Another staff member may collect the information, but the final decision will be made by the Senior Leader. You will receive a full response in writing within four school working weeks after the complaint is given to the Senior Leader. If there are delays, you will be informed in writing.

3.5.4 Stage four – Complaints Panel

Stage four is the final step in the complaints process, where you can ask for a complaints panel. You should contact WAT's Complaints Officer within three weeks of getting the stage three outcome letter. You need to explain why you are not satisfied with the result.

The Complaints Officer will arrange the panel meeting at a time and place that works for everyone. The meeting will usually happen within three school weeks of the request. If there are any delays, WAT will let you know in writing as soon as possible.

The panel's setup and procedures will follow the same rules as explained in paragraph 3.4.4.

4. Next Steps

If you believe WAT did not follow its Complaints Policy, acted unlawfully, or was unreasonable under education law, you can contact the Department for Education (DfE) after completing all stages of the complaints process.

The DfE will not normally investigate the details of the complaint or change any decisions made by WAT. They will check if WAT followed education laws and policies and Part 7 of the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

You can contact the DfE online at:

https://form.education.gov.uk/service/Contact_the_Department_for_Education

By phone at 0370 000 2288, or by writing to:

Ministerial and Public Communications Division
Department for Education

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester M1 2WD

5. Other routes of complaint

If you are not happy with the outcome of your complaint under this policy, or if you want to complain about something we can't investigate, you can contact the following organisations, depending on the type of complaint.

Complaint Type	**Who to Contact**
Examination results or curriculum content	Ofqual and the awarding body
Undue delay or the school/trust doesn't follow the complaints policy A breach of the school/trust funding agreement The school/trust fails to meet any other legal obligation	DFE
Safeguarding or child protection matters	Local Safeguarding Children's Board
Discrimination	Equality Advisory and Support Service
A child or young person's Statement of Special Education Need	SEN and Disability Tribunal
Employment matters	Employment Tribunal
~~Data protection or freedom of information matters~~	~~Information Commissioner's Office~~

For complaints that affect the whole school (i.e. problems with the quality of education or leadership and management)	Ofsted

6. How WAT will monitor and review this policy

This policy will be reviewed every two years, or sooner if needed, such as:

- If there are changes in laws or government guidance
- After any big changes or events
- If the policy is found not to be effective

If you have urgent concerns about this policy, please tell the Headteacher/Executive Headteacher first. They will decide if the policy needs to be reviewed before the scheduled date. If your concerns are about WAT Central staff, contact a member of the Executive Team.

Appendix 1

Complaint Form

Windsor Academy Trust

Please complete this form and return it to: WAT Complaints Officer at info@windsoracademytrust.org.uk

Your name:			
Name of student:			
Your relationship to the student:			
Address:			
Daytime phone number:		**Evening phone Number:**	
Email address:			
Preferred contact method:			
Please give details of your complaint. **(please use a separate sheet if required)**			
What action, if any, have you already taken to try and resolve your complaint? **(Who did you speak to and what was the response?)**			
What action do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?			

Signature:	
Date:	

For School/WAT internal use

Date acknowledgement sent:
By who:
Complaint referred to:
Action taken:
Date:

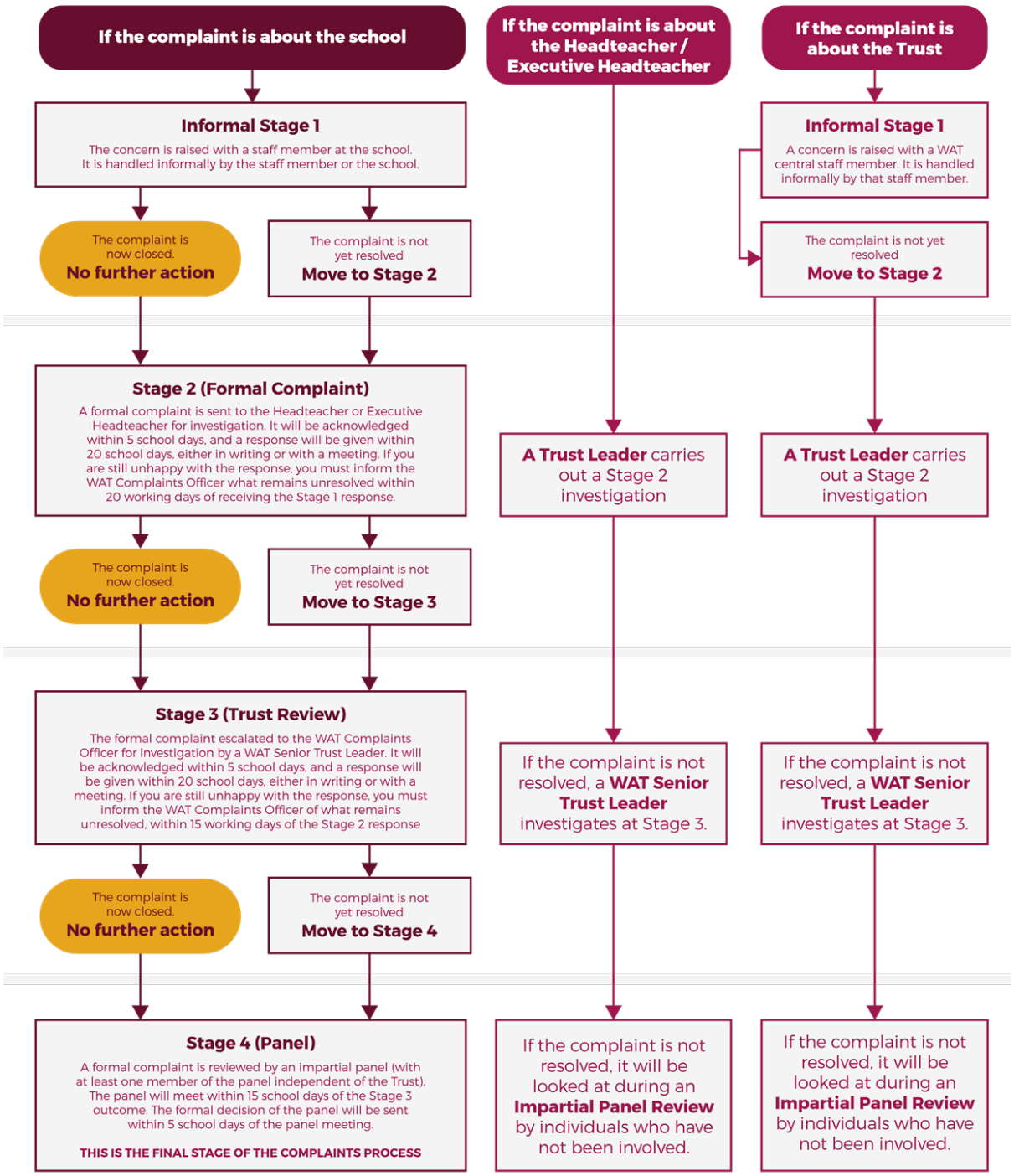
Appendix 2

Complaints Policy and Procedure: Exceptions Contact Details

Here are the contact details for organisations that handle complaints covered by other rules or WAT policies (not included in this policy), such as those listed below.

Exceptions	Who to Contact
Admissions to schools **Statutory assessments of special educational needs**	**Concerns about admissions or statutory assessments of special educational needs should be raised with the Local Authority that the school is located within.** ● **Dudley Council -** Windsor High School & Sixth Form, Kingswinford Academy, Colley Lane Primary Academy, Tenterfields Primary Academy and Manor Way Primary Academy ● **Staffordshire County Council -** Cheslyn Hay Academy, Great Wyrley Academy, Clayton Hall Academy, Newcastle Academy, Sir Thomas Boughey Academy ● **Walsall Council -** Goldsmith Primary Academy and Rivers Primary Academy ● **Stoke-on-Trent City Council -** Milton Primary Academy and Greenways Primary Academy ● **Sandwell Council** - Windsor Olympus Academy
Matters relating to child protection and safeguarding	**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).**
Exclusions	**Matters relating to a child's exclusion are handled under the Exclusion Policy and Procedure. Further information can be found at: www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions.**
Whistleblowing	**WAT has an internal Confidential Reporting/Whistleblowing Policy and Procedure for all our employees, including temporary staff and contractors.**
Staff grievances	**Complaints from staff will be dealt with under WAT's internal grievance procedures.**

Staff conduct	**Complaints about staff will be dealt with under WAT's internal disciplinary procedures, if appropriate.** **WAT cannot share details about any actions taken against a staff member because of a complaint (due to privacy and the law). But we will let you know that the issue is being dealt with.**

Appendix 3

Complaints Policy Flowchart