



COMPLAINTS POLICY (Non-school Alternative Provision)

Policy title	Complaints Policy (Non-school Alternative Provision)
Applies to	All pupils, parents/carers and staff
Policy owner	Directors
Approved on	October 2025
Next Review	October 2026

PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to outline a procedure to deal with complaints from students, parents/carers and referrers to Applewood Learning Ltd. As a non-school AP, Applewood Learning Ltd adopts DfE school complaints best practice and the Non-school AP voluntary standards (2025) as benchmarks. This procedure covers complaints from students, parents/carers and commissioning schools/LAs and interfaces with safeguarding where relevant.

SCOPE

This policy applies to Applewood Learning Ltd; this includes all employees who work within Applewood Learning Ltd as well as contractors, volunteers and visitors. Learners, parents/carers and commissioning schools/LAs may raise complaints under this policy.

SAFEGUARDING COMMITMENT

As an organisation that prioritises the safeguarding of children and all vulnerable people, Applewood Learning Ltd is committed to providing a safe environment across all we do by actively adopting strategies that embed a culture of zero tolerance for abuse of any kind. Where a complaint includes a safeguarding concern (including allegations about staff), the safeguarding/Managing Allegations process takes precedence. The complaints process may be paused to avoid prejudicing any investigation; outcomes are then signposted back to the complainant.

RESPONSIBILITIES

This section outlines the roles and responsibilities of all parties involved in the complaints process, ensuring that complaints are handled fairly, promptly, and effectively in accordance with the school's policy and regulatory requirements.

1. The Provision Lead/Directors

- **Policy Approval and Oversight:** To approve and regularly review the Complaints Policy, ensuring it aligns with DfE school complaints best practice and is accessible to learners, parents/carers and commissioners.
- **Final Stage Review (Panel Hearing):** To appoint the independent panel for the final stage of the complaints' procedure (Stage 3). The ELT ensures that the panel consists of at least three individuals who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint, one of whom is independent of the management and running of the provision. The independent member must be external to Applewood Learning Ltd and have had no prior involvement.



- **Decision Implementation:** To ensure that any recommendations arising from a panel hearing are fully considered and, where appropriate, implemented within a reasonable timeframe.
- **Monitoring:** To monitor the number and nature of complaints, ensuring that trends are identified and used to inform improvement. Termly anonymised summaries may be shared with commissioners on request.

2. The Provision Lead

- **Initial Complaint Resolution (Stage 1):** To be the primary recipient and first point of contact for formal complaints, aiming to resolve them informally or formally at the earliest possible stage. Acknowledge within 5 working days and seek resolution; escalate where policy timescales or complexity require.
- **Policy Implementation:** To ensure the Complaints Policy is effectively communicated to all staff, parents, and pupils, and that all staff are aware of their roles in the process.
- **Staff Training:** To ensure that relevant staff receive appropriate training on handling complaints effectively and sensitively.
- **Record Keeping:** To ensure accurate and confidential records of all complaints, and their resolutions, are maintained as required by regulation.
- **Liaison with Staff:** To support staff involved in a complaint, providing guidance and ensuring their well-being throughout the process.

3. Staff Members (Teaching, Support, and Administrative)

- **Informal Resolution:** To attempt to resolve minor concerns or complaints informally at the earliest opportunity, where appropriate and within their scope of responsibility.
- **Referral:** To promptly refer any formal complaints, or concerns that cannot be resolved informally, to the Provision lead.
- **Cooperation:** To cooperate fully and professionally with any investigation or process related to a complaint, providing accurate information when requested.
- **Confidentiality:** To maintain strict confidentiality regarding all aspects of a complaint. Staff must not promise confidentiality to a complainant where safeguarding may be engaged; they will explain next steps and support.

4. Parents/Guardians

- **Familiarisation with Policy:** To familiarise themselves with the provision's Complaints Policy and follow the outlined procedure when raising a complaint.
- **Clear Communication:** To articulate their complaint clearly and concisely, providing all relevant information and documentation.
- **Respectful Engagement:** To engage with the complaints process respectfully and constructively, aiming for a fair resolution.
- **Timeliness:** To adhere to the specified timescales for submitting complaints at each stage of the process. Where a complaint indicates immediate risk of harm, contact police (999) and inform the DSL.

DEFINITIONS

This section clarifies key terms used within this Complaints Policy to ensure a consistent understanding for all stakeholders. A **complaint** is defined as an expression of dissatisfaction



about the provision, its staff, or its delivery, which requires a formal response. Concerns may be raised informally first; where unresolved or serious, they progress as formal complaints under this policy. It typically goes beyond a routine enquiry or a request for information. The **Complainant** is the individual (usually a parent or guardian) who is making the complaint. The **Provision Lead/Directors** refers to the representatives of Applewood Learning Ltd responsible for the overall governance and management of the provision. A **formal complaint** is one that has been submitted in writing and requires progression through the stages of this policy. An **independent panel member** (at Stage 3) is an individual appointed to the complaints panel who has no direct involvement in the management or running of the provision, ensuring impartiality and an objective review of the complaint.

POLICY

Applewood Learning Ltd feel that our students and their parents/carers and referrers have the right to receive a high standard of service. The Complaints Procedure is in operation to enable our service users to be listened to and to ensure that any complaints are dealt with fairly, quickly and confidentially.

For further details about confidentiality contact the Provision Lead who will talk you through the appropriate policy. See the Data Protection Policy and Safeguarding/Managing Allegations policy for how information is handled and shared lawfully.

We view complaints positively as they give us the opportunity to improve the quality of our services. Our aim is that complaints can be resolved before they reach the formal stage. If this is not possible, it is important that fair, accessible action is taken.

You may wish for a staff member or another organisation to support you in your complaint.

An **informal complaint** would be delivered verbally to your Applewood Learning Ltd teacher, key worker or the Provision Lead. This complaint will be listened to and addressed by talking to relevant people and producing a solution which is agreeable by all parties (where possible). Applewood Learning Ltd staff will seek to resolve an informal complaint quickly and where possible, this will take place on the same day that the complaint is raised. If not resolved promptly or where the matter is serious, it should be escalated to formal Stage 1.

A **formal complaint** would be in writing, addressed to the most appropriate person/s below. Be as detailed as possible about the complaint, giving dates/times of incident, any other persons involved and how you would like to see this complaint being resolved. These issues will be investigated in full and responded to in writing outlining our response to the complaint acknowledged within 5 working days and responded to within 20 working days (or a new deadline agreed where investigation requires longer), with reasons provided.

Stage 1: Provision Lead/Director of Education — Louise Venables

Stage 2: Director of Education (or nominee) — via carol.brooks@applewoodlearning.co.uk

Stage 3: Independent Complaints Panel (via directors) —
carol.brooks@applewoodlearning.co.uk

(Current post-holders and contact details are published locally; personal or third-party emails are not used for complaints handling.)



If you have completed this procedure, but believe your complaint has still not been dealt with, your complaint can be reviewed by a Panel of 3 or more people, appointed by the Director of Education, who have not been directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint and containing at least one member who is independent of the management and running of the [provider name].

Panel Procedures

Parents/Carers would be welcome to attend the Panel Hearing(s), arranged at a time suitable for them to attend. The Panel Hearing should take place as soon as possible after it is requested and should normally be held within 20 working days (or as soon as reasonably practicable) following the Stage 3 request. Parents/Carers may be accompanied if they wish.

The Panel is expected to make findings and recommendations available within 5 working days. Copies. The Panel will issue written findings/recommendations **normally within 10 working days** of the hearing.

of these written findings and recommendations will be sent by electronic mail or otherwise given to the complainant and where relevant, the person complained about. They will also be retained securely by Applewood Learning Ltd; provided to the complainant, relevant staff, and available to commissioners/regulators where lawfully required.

Records

Written records of all formal complaints, responses, meetings, and action taken regardless of whether they are upheld or resolved at the formal stage or proceed to a Panel Hearing, will be kept by Applewood Learning Ltd. Documents will be kept confidential and handled in line with UK GDPR/Data Protection Act 2018. Records may be shared where legally required (e.g., safeguarding partners, regulators, court orders) and with commissioners where relevant to their duties. An annual summary of formal complaints (numbers/themes) is available on request; personal data is not disclosed. A further record of the number of 'formal complaints' received in the preceding school year will be available on request.

Lessons Learnt

All formal complaints, whether or not they are upheld will be subject to a 'lessons learnt' process. This process will use details of a complaint to look at reducing future complaints and improving the work of the provision. This process will be led by the Provision Lead. The Directors review themes and actions termly and shares learning with commissioners where appropriate.

Further support and advice is also available from:

Citizens Advice Bureau

Burgess Well House, Coval Lane, Chelmsford. CM1 1FW

Tel: 0808 278 7952



POLICY CONTEXT

AP context (non-provision): Applewood Learning Ltd operates as a non-provision Alternative Provision (AP). Commissioning provisions/LAs (“commissioners”) retain statutory responsibilities for admissions, attendance registers/coding, exclusions and Children Missing Education (CME). Applewood Learning Ltd maintains a complaints procedure for learners, parents/carers and commissioners and provides same-day safeguarding information to commissioners where a complaint raises welfare concerns.

This policy relates to the following legislative requirements, standards and internal documents:

Legislation/Standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Applewood Learning Ltd is a non-school AP; this policy aligns with DfE school complaints guidance and the Non-school AP voluntary standards (2025) as benchmarks, alongside the Education Act 2002 (general principles), Equality Act 2010 and UK GDPR/DPA 2018. Education Act 2002 (General Principles)• Equality Act 2010• Data Protection Act 2018/UK GDPR
Related Forms & Documents	

VERSION CONTROL

We will review our documentation regularly and we reserve the right to amend our policies and procedures at any time.