LITTLE ACORNS MONTESSORI

Ascot | Bracknell | Crowthorne

COMPLAINTS POLICY

Document Control

Version	Date	Review Date	Author
1.0	June 2026	June 2027	Jonathan Duffy

Policy Statement

Little Acorns Montessori is committed to providing the highest quality of care and education for all children aged 0–5 at our settings in Ascot, Bracknell, and Crowthorne. We believe that children and families are entitled to courtesy, respect, and prompt, careful attention to their needs.

We regard any concern or complaint as a valuable opportunity to reflect on and improve our practice. We treat every complaint seriously, investigate it thoroughly, and communicate outcomes clearly and promptly.

We recognise that most concerns can be resolved informally through open, respectful dialogue. Where this is not possible, this policy provides a clear, fair, and transparent procedure for escalation.

In line with the Ofsted Early Years Inspection Toolkit (effective November 2025), Little Acorns Montessori regards the handling of complaints as an integral part of leadership and governance. Trends and outcomes from the Complaints Register are reviewed by the Nominated Individual at each setting on a termly basis.

Learning from complaints is used to inform staff development, risk assessment, and improvements to practice across all three settings.

Statutory Framework

This policy fulfils the legal duties placed on Little Acorns Montessori by the following legislation and guidance:

- EYFS Statutory Framework for Group and School-Based Providers (DfE, effective 1 September 2025), paragraphs 3.96–3.99 — complaints procedure, investigation, records, and Ofsted contact requirements.
- The Childcare Act 2006, Section 40 — places a duty on registered providers to comply with the EYFS Welfare Requirements.
- The Early Years Foundation Stage (Welfare Requirements) Regulations 2012 (SI 2012/938) — gives legal force to the safeguarding and welfare requirements.
- Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026 (HM Government, published 18 March 2026) — statutory multi-agency safeguarding framework.
- The Human Rights Act 1998 — right to a fair process.
- The Equality Act 2010 — all complainants must be treated equitably regardless of protected characteristics.
- UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018 — complaint records must be held securely and processed lawfully.

> **Note:** This policy does not override or replace the nursery's Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy. Where a complaint involves or discloses a safeguarding concern, the DSL must be notified immediately and the safeguarding policy takes precedence. Where the complaint may meet the LADO referral threshold (i.e. it involves an allegation against a member of staff or volunteer), the internal complaints investigation must be suspended immediately and must not resume until the LADO has been consulted and has given authorisation to proceed. Failure to pause an internal investigation in these circumstances can compromise any subsequent LADO, Ofsted, or police investigation.

Scope

This policy applies to:

- All children enrolled at Little Acorns Montessori (Ascot, Bracknell, and Crowthorne settings).
- All parents, carers, and guardians of enrolled children.
- All staff, volunteers, and students on placement.
- Any third party acting on behalf of a parent or carer with written consent.

Definitions

- Concern: An informal, verbal expression of worry or dissatisfaction that can typically be resolved on the day without formal investigation.
- Complaint: A formal, written or recorded expression of dissatisfaction that requires investigation and a written response.
- EYFS Complaint: A complaint that specifically relates to how Little Acorns Montessori is fulfilling the requirements of the EYFS Statutory Framework. Ofsted has a legal right to investigate such complaints.
- Anonymous Complaint: A concern or complaint received without the identity of the complainant being known. The Nursery Manager will use professional judgement to determine whether an anonymous complaint can be investigated and, if so, will proceed proportionately. Anonymous complaints cannot be formally responded to but must still be recorded in the Complaints Register where they relate to EYFS fulfilment, and must be escalated via the safeguarding policy if they raise child protection concerns.

Roles and Responsibilities

Role	Person(s)	Responsibility
Nursery Manager	As Below	Overall accountability for complaints; Stage 2 & 3 lead; records maintenance; Ofsted liaison.
Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL)	As Below	Manages complaints with a safeguarding element; refers to statutory agencies as required.
Deputy DSL	As Below	Acts in absence of the DSL; supports Stage 1 resolution.
All Staff	All practitioners	Receive complaints courteously; direct to appropriate person; do not discuss with other parents.
Parents / Carers	Complainant	Raise concerns promptly; engage with the procedure in good faith; provide written complaints at Stage 2 if requested.

Role	Name	Campus
Designated Officer / Nominated Individual	Jonathan Duffy	All Campuses
Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL)	Elaine Eastham(Manager)	Ascot Campus
Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL)	Agata Payne (Manager)	Bracknell Campus
Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL)	Emma Gray (Manager)	Crowthorne Campus
Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead (DDSL)	Jessica McGrath/Katy Cooley (Deputy Manager)	Ascot Campus
Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead (DDSL)	Joanne Broughton (Deputy Manager)	Bracknell Campus
Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead (DDSL)	Martine Loveridge (Deputy Manager)	Crowthorne Campus
Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead (DDSL)	Kira King	Crowthorne Campus (in the absence of Emma and Martine)
Manager on Duty	As rostered	All Campuses

Complaints Procedure

Little Acorns Montessori operates a five-stage complaints procedure. Parents and carers are strongly encouraged to attempt resolution at the earliest stage possible.

Stage 1: Informal Resolution (Verbal)

- A parent or carer raises a concern verbally with any member of staff at the setting.
- The member of staff must listen attentively, acknowledge the concern, and, where possible, resolve it immediately.
- If the concern cannot be resolved on the spot, the member of staff must refer it to the Nursery Manager or Deputy DSL within one working day.
- The Manager or Deputy DSL must speak with the parent within two working days of the concern being raised.
- If the concern is resolved at this stage, a brief note must be made in the Concerns Log, including the date, nature of the concern, and the outcome.
- If the parent remains dissatisfied, they must be advised of Stage 2 and provided with the nursery's Complaints Form.

Stage 2: Formal Written Complaint

- The parent or carer submits a written complaint to the Nursery Manager using the nursery's Complaints Form, by letter, or by email to the setting's official email address.

- The Nursery Manager must send written acknowledgement of receipt within five working days.
- The Manager must conduct a thorough investigation, which may include: reviewing documentation and records; speaking individually with relevant staff members; reviewing CCTV footage where applicable and legally permissible; considering witness accounts.
- The Manager must notify the complainant in writing of the outcome of the completed investigation within 28 days of receiving the written complaint. Where an investigation is particularly complex, the complainant must be kept informed of progress and given a revised timescale; however, the 28-day period remains the target and must not routinely be extended.
- The written response must include: a summary of the investigation; findings of fact; any action taken or to be taken; and information about the right to escalate to Stage 3 if dissatisfied.
- A record of the complaint and outcome must be entered in the Complaints Register (see Section 8).

Stage 3: Meeting with Management

- If the parent remains dissatisfied with the Stage 2 outcome, they may request a formal meeting with the Nursery Manager in writing within 10 working days of receiving the Stage 2 response.
- The meeting must be arranged within 10 working days of the request.
- Both the parent and the nursery may bring a friend, representative, or support person to the meeting.
- A written record of the meeting, including all points discussed and any agreed actions, must be made by the Nursery Manager.
- All parties present at the meeting must sign the record and receive a copy.
- Where agreement is reached at this stage, the signed record signifies the conclusion of the procedure.
- If no resolution is reached, the complainant must be informed of Stage 4.

Stage 4: External Mediation

- Where Stage 3 has not resolved the complaint, the nursery will invite an independent, external mediator to assist.
- The mediator must be acceptable to both parties and may include staff or volunteers from an appropriate external organisation such as the Early Years Alliance.
- The mediator has no legal powers but may: hold separate meetings with each party; listen to both sides; define the problem more clearly; review the actions taken so far; and suggest further ways in which the complaint might be resolved.
- The mediator must keep all discussions confidential and must maintain an agreed written record of any meetings and advice given.
- The mediator's role is to facilitate agreement — they do not adjudicate.

Stage 5: Final Review Meeting
• Within 28 days of the mediator concluding their investigation, a final meeting must be convened between the parent, the Nursery Manager, and the owner or management committee Chair.
• The purpose of this meeting is to reach a final decision on the action to be taken.
• The mediator's advice and written record will be used to inform the decision.
• The mediator may attend if all parties agree this would help reach a conclusion.
• A formal written record of this meeting, including the final decision and any actions to be taken, must be made.
• All parties must sign the record and receive a copy.
• This signed record signifies that the nursery's internal complaints procedure has concluded.

Escalation to Ofsted

Parents and carers may approach Ofsted at any stage of this complaints procedure — they do not need to exhaust the nursery's internal procedure first.

In accordance with the EYFS statutory framework:

- Little Acorns Montessori will ensure that details of how to contact Ofsted are available to all parents and carers, displayed on the notice board at each setting and included in the parent welcome pack.
- If the nursery becomes aware of a forthcoming Ofsted inspection, parents and carers at the relevant setting will be notified promptly.
- Following any Ofsted inspection, the Nursery Manager will ensure that a copy of the inspection report is provided to parents and carers of all children attending the setting on a regular basis.

Parents must contact Ofsted directly where:

- They believe the nursery is not meeting its EYFS requirements and internal resolution has not been achieved.
- There is a possible breach of the nursery's registration requirements.
- The complaint relates to the welfare, health, or safety of a child.

Organisation	Contact Details
Ofsted	Ofsted — Complaints about registered childcare providers should be submitted via: www.gov.uk/complain-ofsted-registered-childcare. Telephone: 0300 123 1231 (subject to change — verify at each review). Ofsted, Piccadilly Gate, Store Street, Manchester, M1 2WD. Parents and carers should always check the current Ofsted website for the most up-to-date contact method.
Local Safeguarding Children Partnership (LSCP)	Berkshire LSCP: www.berkshirelscb.org.ukBracknell Forest LSCP: www.bracknell-forest.gov.ukFor safeguarding concerns — contact the local authority children's services department.

These contact details are displayed on the nursery notice board at each setting and are included in our parent welcome pack.

> **Note:** Ofsted will notify the provider of the outcome of their investigation into an EYFS complaint within 28 days of receiving the complaint.

Recording Complaints

In accordance with EYFS paragraph 3.98, Little Acorns Montessori must maintain a Complaints Register at each setting.

What must be recorded

- The date the complaint was received.
- The name of the complainant (held confidentially).
- The nature of the complaint, including which EYFS requirements it relates to (if applicable).
- The stage(s) reached in the procedure.
- The outcome of the investigation.
- Any action taken as a result.
- The date the complainant was notified of the outcome.
- Whether the complainant was satisfied with the outcome.
- Where applicable, the specific EYFS requirement(s) or welfare requirement(s) to which the complaint relates (e.g. "Safeguarding and Welfare Requirements — child absence monitoring, paragraph 3.X").

Storage and retention

- Complaints records must be kept securely, separate from children's personal files.
- Records must be retained for a minimum of three years from the date of the complaint.
- Records must be held in accordance with the nursery's Data Protection Policy and UK GDPR.
- The Complaints Register must be made available to Ofsted or its representatives on request, in accordance with EYFS paragraph 3.98.

Concerns Log (Stage 1 only)

- Informal concerns resolved at Stage 1 must be recorded in a separate Concerns Log.
- The Concerns Log is an internal document and does not form part of the formal Complaints Register.
- It must, however, be available to Ofsted on request.

Confidentiality

- All complaints must be handled with the utmost confidentiality.
- Staff must not discuss complaints with other parents, carers, or external parties.
- The identity of the complainant must be protected wherever possible.
- Where a complaint involves allegations about a named member of staff, that staff member must be informed of the allegation and given the opportunity to respond. They must also be treated fairly and with respect throughout the process.
- Records are processed in accordance with UK GDPR. Complainants have the right to access their own complaint records under UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018. Subject Access Requests must be responded to within one calendar month of receipt. Any request should be directed to the manager and handled in accordance with the nursery's Data Protection Policy.
- Where a complaint discloses or raises a safeguarding concern, the duty of confidentiality does not prevent the sharing of relevant information with the DSL, statutory agencies, or safeguarding partners. The Data Protection Act 2018 and UK GDPR do not override the need to share information promptly to keep children safe. In such cases the DSL will determine what information must be shared, with whom, and when, in accordance with the nursery's Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy and Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026.

Unreasonable or Vexatious Complaints

Little Acorns Montessori is committed to investigating all genuine complaints. However, the nursery reserves the right to consider a complaint as vexatious or unreasonable where:

- The same issue has been investigated and a response provided, and there is no new information.
- The complainant is abusive, threatening, or harassing towards staff.
- The complaint is clearly without foundation or made in bad faith.

In such cases, the Nursery Manager must document the decision in writing and inform the complainant. The complainant retains the right to contact Ofsted directly.

Staff Complaints and Whistleblowing

This policy relates to complaints from parents and carers. Staff concerns about practice or conduct are managed under the nursery's separate Whistleblowing Policy and Staff Grievance Procedure.

In accordance with the EYFS 2025 framework, all staff must be aware of the nursery's whistleblowing procedures and must feel confident to raise concerns about poor or unsafe practice. Such concerns will be taken seriously by the senior leadership team.

Policy Review

This policy must be reviewed:

- Annually as a minimum.
- Following any significant change in legislation, statutory guidance, or Ofsted inspection framework.
- Following any complaint that reveals a gap in procedure or practice.
- Following an Ofsted inspection that raises concerns about the complaints process.

The Nursery Manager is responsible for ensuring this policy is reviewed, updated, and communicated to all staff and made available to parents.

Sign-off

Role	Name	Date
Owner/Director	Jonathan Duffy	June 2026