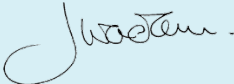


Complaints Procedure

“We aim for all our children to develop a love of learning that will last them a lifetime, caring for and respecting the world around them, valuing differences and broadening moral values”

The Solent Schools, Vision, Values and Aims

Responsibility for policy review	Local Governing Body
Date reviewed	24 May 2022; updated 4 October 2022
Review cycle	Three years. Next review Spring 2025
Linked Policies	
Signature: 	4 October 2022 Date
Chair of Governors	



Introduction

If you have a concern or complaint, please tell us about it as soon as possible so we can investigate and resolve it before it becomes an insurmountable problem. In our experience, most issues can be sorted out quickly and informally by speaking with a child's class teacher or staff in the school office.

Complaints will be dealt with in accordance with the following staged approach agreed by the local governing body of The Solent Schools, which is summarised by the flow chart in Appendix 1. A Complaints Form is included at Appendix 2. This is designed to assist complainants if submitting a written complaint at Stage 2 of the process.

Stage 1: The first contact

- 1.1 Parents and carers (or anybody else affected by the school's operations) are always welcome to discuss any concerns with the appropriate member of staff, who will clarify with them the nature of the concern and reassure them that the school wants to hear about it. The member of staff may explain to the complainant how the situation happened. It can be helpful at this point to identify what sort of outcome the complainant is looking for.
- 1.2 If the member of staff first contacted cannot deal with the matter immediately, they will make a clear note of the date, name and contact address or phone number so the matter can be addressed at a more appropriate time or by a more appropriate member of staff.
- 1.3 All members of staff will know how to refer matters, if necessary, to the person with responsibility for the particular issue raised by the complainant. They will check later to make sure the referral has been dealt with.
- 1.4 If the matter is brought to the attention of the Head of School, they may decide to deal with concerns directly at this stage; if the complaint is against the Head of School the complainant will be advised to contact the Executive Headteacher.
- 1.5 If the matter is escalated or brought to the attention of the Executive Headteacher, they may decide to deal with concerns directly at this stage; if the complaint is against the Executive Headteacher the complainant will be advised to contact the Chair of Governors.



- 1.6 The member of staff dealing with the concern will make sure the complainant is clear what action (if any) or monitoring of the situation has been agreed, putting it in writing if appropriate.
- 1.7 Where no satisfactory solution has been found within 10 working days, complainants will be advised that if they wish their concern to be considered further they should write to the Head of School. The Head of School may, at this point or any point during the proceedings, decide to escalate the matter to the Executive Headteacher.

Stage 2: Referral to the Head of School for investigation

At any point during the process below, the Head of School may refer and escalate the complaint to The Executive Headteacher.

- 2.1 The Head of School (or designated person) will acknowledge the complaint in writing within three working days of receiving the written complaint. The acknowledgement will give a brief explanation of the school's complaints procedure and a target date for providing a response to the complaint, which will normally be within 10 working days. If this proves impossible, a letter will be sent within 10 working days explaining the reason for the delay and giving a revised target date.
- 2.2 The Head of School will provide an opportunity for the complainant to meet them to supplement any information provided previously. It will be made clear to the complainant that if they wish to, they may be accompanied to any meeting by a friend, relative, representative, advocate or interpreter who can speak on their behalf.
- 2.3 If necessary the Head of School will interview witnesses and take statements from those involved. If the complaint centres on a pupil, the pupil should also be interviewed. Pupils should normally be interviewed with parents/guardians present, but if this would seriously delay the investigation of a serious/urgent complaint or if the pupil has specifically said that they would prefer that parents/guardians were not involved, another member of staff with whom the pupil feels comfortable should be present. If a member of staff is complained against, they must have the opportunity to present their case.
- 2.4 The Head of School will keep written records of all meetings, telephone conversations and other documentation.



- 2.5 Once all the relevant facts have been established as far as possible, the Head of School will then produce a written response to the complainant, including a full explanation of the decision and the reasons for it. Where appropriate, this will include what action the school will take to resolve the complaint. If the complainant does not believe that the complaint has been resolved, they will be invited to meet with The Executive Headteacher (if not involved at an earlier stage), who will review the process and action taken, discuss and agree with the complainant any further action that the school could take.
- 2.6 The complainant will be advised that should they wish to take the complaint further they should notify the Chair of Governors with five weeks of receiving the letter or five weeks from the date of the meeting with the Executive Headteacher where appropriate.
- 2.7 If the complaint is against the Head of School or Executive Headteacher, or if the Head of School or Executive Headteacher have been closely involved at Stage 1, the Chair of Governors will carry out all the Stage 2 procedures.

Stage 3: Review by the Governing Body

- 3.1 The Chair of Governors will write to the complainant to acknowledge receipt of the written request for the governing body to review the complaint. The acknowledgement will inform the complainant that three members of the school's governing body will hear the complaint within 20 working days of receiving the complaint. The letter will also explain that the complainant has the right to submit any further documents relevant to the complaint. These must be received in time for the documents to be sent to the three members.
- 3.2 A meeting of the Governors' Complaints Panel will be convened. No governors with prior involvement must be included on the panel and it may be necessary to use reserves (previously agreed by the governing body) to ensure the Panel can meet within the set time. If they have not previously been involved the Chair of Governors should chair the Panel; otherwise the Vice Chair should do so. It is not appropriate for the Head of School or Executive Headteacher to sit on the Panel.
- 3.3 The Chair/Vice Chair will ensure the Panel hears the complaint within 20 working days of receiving the letter. All relevant correspondence relating to the complaint will be given to each Panel member as soon as the composition of the panel is



confirmed. If the correspondence is extensive, the Chair may prepare a thorough summary for sending to Panel members.

- 3.4 The Chair or Clerk will write and inform the complainant, Head of School or Executive Headteacher, any relevant witnesses and members of the Panel at least five working days in advance of the date, time and place of the meeting. The notification will also inform the complainant of their right to be accompanied to the meeting by a friend/advocate/interpreter and explain how the meeting will be conducted and the complainant's right to submit further written evidence to the Panel.
- 3.5 The Head of School or Executive Headteacher will be invited to attend the Panel meeting and will be asked to prepare a written report for the Panel in response to the complaint. All concerned should receive any relevant documents including the Head of School or Executive Headteacher's report, including the complainant, at least five working days prior to the meeting. The Headteacher may also invite members of staff directly involved in matters raised by the complainant to respond in writing or in person, subject to the discretion of the chair of the Panel.
- 3.6 The meeting should allow for:
- The complainant to explain their complaint and the Head of School or Executive Headteacher to explain the school's response.
 - The Head of School or Executive Headteacher to question the complainant about the complaint and the complainant to question the Head of School or Executive Headteacher and/or other members of staff about the school's response.
 - Panel members to have an opportunity to question both the complainant and the Head of School or Executive Headteacher.
 - Any party to have the right to call witnesses (subject to approval of the chair of the Panel) and all parties having the right to question all witnesses.
 - Final statements by both the complainant and the Head of School or Executive Headteacher.

It is the responsibility of the chair of the Panel to ensure that proper minutes are kept.

- 3.7 The Chair of the Panel will explain to the complainant and the Head of School or Executive Headteacher that the Panel will consider its decision and that a written decision will be sent to both parties within 15 working days. The complainant, Head of School or Executive Headteacher, other members of staff and witnesses will then leave.

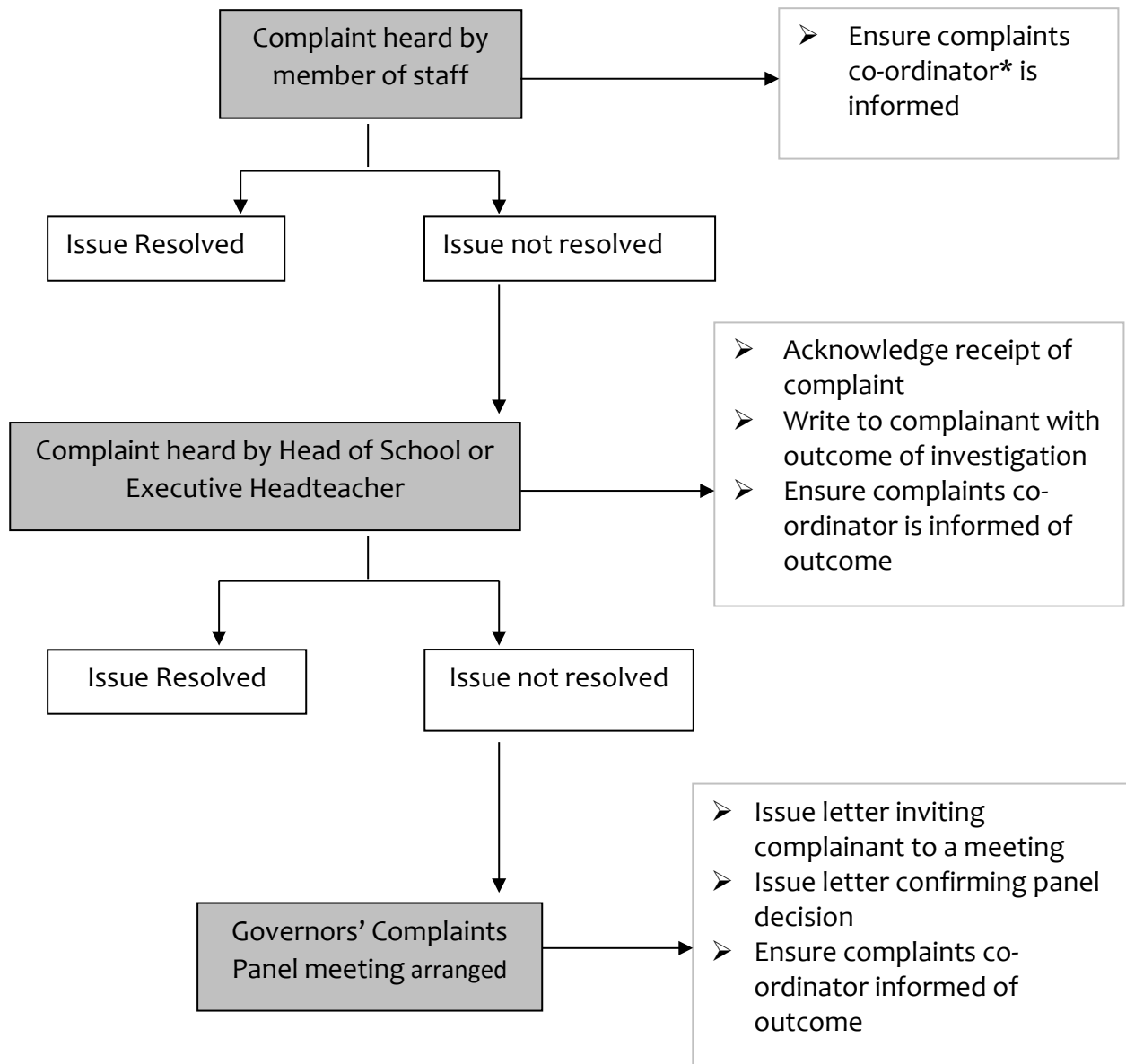


- 3.8 The Panel will then consider the complaint and all the evidence presented and:
- Reach a unanimous, or at least a majority decision on the complaint;
 - Decide upon the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint; and
 - Where appropriate, recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not happen again.
- 3.9 A written statement outlining the decision of the Panel must be sent to the complainant and Head of School or Executive Headteacher. The letter to the complainant should also explain whether a further appeal can be made, and if so, to whom.
- 3.10 The school should ensure that a copy of all correspondence and notes are kept on file in the school's records. These records should be kept separately from the pupil's personal records.



Appendix 1

Flowchart of Complaints



Note: * The complaints co-ordinator will usually be the Head of School or Executive Headteacher.



Appendix 2 – Solent Infant School Complaints Form

Please complete this form and return it to the Head of School who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.			
Your Name			
Pupil's Name			
Your relationship to the Pupil			
Address			
Postcode			
Email			
Daytime Tel Number			
Evening Tel Number			
Please give details of your complaint here (please continue on a separate sheet as appropriate):			
What actions, if any have you taken to try and resolve your complaint (Who did you speak to and what was the response)?			
What actions do you feel might resolve the problem?			
Are you attaching any additional paperwork?			
Signature:		Date:	
<i>For office use only</i>			
Date acknowledgement sent:		By whom:	
Complaint referred to:		Date:	



Appendix 3 – Procedure for Managing Serial and Unreasonable Complaints

The De Curci Trust is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, and to providing a high-quality service to those who complain. We will not normally limit the contact complainants have with the Trust/our schools. However, we do not expect our staff/volunteers to tolerate unacceptable behaviour and will take action to protect staff/volunteers from that behaviour, including that which is abusive, offensive or threatening. The Trust defines unreasonable behaviour as that which hinders our consideration of complaints because of the frequency or nature of the complainant's contact with the Trust/school, such as, if the complainant:

- refuses to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcomes sought by raising the complaint, despite offers of assistance
- refuses to co-operate with the complaints investigation process
- refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of the complaints procedure
- insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the complaints procedure or with good practice
- introduces trivial or irrelevant information which they expect to be taken into account and commented on
- raises large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions, and insists they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales
- makes unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues, and seeks to have them replaced
- changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds
- repeatedly makes the same complaint (despite previous investigations or responses concluding that the complaint is groundless or has been addressed)
- refuses to accept the findings of the investigation into that complaint where the school's complaint procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed including referral to the Department for Education
- seeks an unrealistic outcome
- makes excessive demands on school time by frequent, lengthy and complicated contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with
- uses threats to intimidate





- uses abusive, offensive or discriminatory language or violence
- knowingly provides falsified information
- publishes unacceptable information/content on social media or other public forums.

Complainants should try to limit their communication with the school that relates to their complaint, while the complaint is being progressed. It is not helpful if repeated correspondence is sent (either by letter, phone, email or text), as it could delay the outcome being reached.

Whenever possible, the Headteacher (or appropriate Governor/Trustee) will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying an 'unreasonable' marking. If the behaviour continues, the Headteacher (or appropriate Governor/Trustee) will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and ask them to change it.

For complainants who excessively contact the Trust/a school causing a significant level of disruption, we may specify methods of communication and limit the number of contacts in a communication plan. This will be reviewed after six months.

In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, we will immediately inform the police and communicate our actions in writing. This may include barring an individual from a specified school site(s).

Concerns Raised Against Schools on Social Networking Sites

Any complainant should raise their concern(s) as specified in the Trust's/School's complaints procedure.

Comments or concerns cited on social networking sites bypass the complaints procedures and the Trust/school will, therefore, not respond to them other than in exceptional circumstances.

The appearance of comments on social networking sites that make allegations about the Trust, schools or individual members of staff can be intimidating to the workforce; sometimes the content of posts can cause anxiety and demotivate staff.





The Trust will act to support its employees and volunteers in this context.

The Trust reserves the right to:

- require parents and pupils not to post inappropriate comments pertaining to the school and its community as part of each school's home school agreement
- contact persons directly to ask that any offending posts or pages are removed from a social networking site
- report offending content or pages to the social networking site administrators
- take legal advice and issue formal warnings that malicious allegations or similar could result in legal action
- pursue legal action against persons where the circumstances warrant it
- involve other agencies e.g. the police, LADO should the safeguarding of pupils or others be compromised by posts on social networking sites

