Severn Vale School
An Academy

COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

Date of Policy	September 2026
Date of Next Review	September 2027
Staff Responsible	Headteacher
Responsibility (Governors or School)	Governors
Reference	Staff shared area/policies/RJ

1. Introduction

1.1. The aim of this policy is to resolve complaints or concerns about Severn Vale School or any individual connected with the school, in a fair, thorough and transparent way. The school takes complaints seriously and views them as a chance to learn and improve for the future.

1.2. Anyone can make a complaint, but a different process applies depending on whether the person raising the complaint is a parent /carer[1] of a current pupil at the school. Please refer to Part A below if you are a parent of a current pupil, otherwise please see Part B.

1.3. Please note that complaints about matters where an alternative complaints / appeal process exists will not be generally dealt with under this policy. These are set out below in Part C.

1.4. Requests for reasonable adjustments to the process set out below will be considered to ensure that complainants can access and complete the process.

1.5. The complaint procedures set out in this policy do not apply to and are not intended for use by pupils.

1.6. Those considering raising a complaint are reminded that the school's core purpose is to educate and safeguard pupils. As a publicly funded body it has a responsibility to allocate resources proportionately and fairly. Complainants are requested to cooperate with this process, and to be mindful of the length and volume of correspondence. This will also help in ensuring a prompt and effective resolution.

1.7. The national charity Parentkind has published Department for Education endorsed guides for parents and for schools in relation to resolving complaints on its website[2]. All complainants are encouraged to read the Parentkind guidance before raising a complaint under this procedure.

Part A – Complaints Procedure for parents / carers of current pupils[3]

2. Stage 1 – Informal Resolution

2.1. Any matter of concern or complaint must be raised, and attempted to be resolved, on an informal basis. It is expected that where the matter relates to a pupil it will have been raised with the pupil's form tutor or Head of Year or senior member of staff overseeing the year group, before a request is made to deal with it under the formal stages of this policy.

2.2. The concern or complaint should be raised with the school within 3 months of the incident or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within 3 months of the last of these incidents. Complaints made outside of this time frame may not be considered unless exceptional circumstances apply.

2.3. The school will seek to resolve matters at the informal stage within 15 school days[4] of the issue being raised by the parent.

2.4. Where the matter is not resolved at the informal stage, it may be elevated to the formal stage as set out below.

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[1] References to 'parents' in this policy include carers

[2] https://www.parentkind.org.uk/parent-guide-to-raising-concerns-with-your-childs-school

[3] Where the complaints process has been started (but not completed) whilst parents/carers have children at the school, but the children have since left, the procedure for current parents should continue to be used.

[4] School days in this policy refers to days when the school is open to pupils for teaching, and does not include INSET days.

3. Stage 2 – Formal Resolution : Investigation by a Nominated Individual

3.1. Stage 2 complaints must be set out in writing, using the form available at **Appendix 1**, within **10** school days of the Stage 1 response and addressed to the Headteacher. If the complaint relates to the Headteacher, please refer to the section headed '**Complaints against specific role-holders**' below. The complaint should set out briefly the grounds of the complaint, stating what it is that the parent considers should have been done or where the school has not met reasonable expectations, and confirming the outcome sought.

3.2. An investigation will be carried out by a nominated individual identified by the Headteacher / Chair of Governors as appropriate, who will acknowledge the complaint within **5** school days and may offer the parent a meeting. The investigator will speak to others involved. Whenever reasonably possible, any meeting with the parent will take place within **15** school days of the written complaint being received.

3.3. The investigator will put her/his findings in writing and will indicate what, if any, steps should be taken to resolve the matter. Whenever reasonably possible, this will be done within **15** school days of any meeting with the parent; if no meeting is arranged it will be within **25** school days of the written complaint being received.

3.4. Where the parent remains dissatisfied he or she may request the complaint is escalated to Stage 3.

4. Stage 3 – Formal Resolution: Complaints Panel Meeting

4.1. Stage 3 complaints must be set out in writing, stating where the parent remains dissatisfied and the outcome sought, and lodged with the Clerk to the Governors within **10** school days of the Stage 2 response.

4.2. The Clerk to the Governors will acknowledge the Stage 3 complaint within **5** school days and will convene a Complaints Panel.

4.3. The Complaints Panel must comprise at least three people, which will include one person who is independent of the management and running of the school.

4.4. The Complaints Panel may include, but is not limited to, one or persons from the following categories:

(i) a member / members of the Governing Body;
(ii) a member of a Governing Body of another Academy;
(iii) a Trustee of another Academy Trust;
(iv) a person not connected with the school.

4.5. None of the members of the Complaints Panel will have been directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint.

4.6. The Clerk will invite the school to put in writing its response to the Stage 3 complaint within **15** school days of receiving the request. Whether or not the school has responded the Clerk will convene a meeting of the Complaints Panel. That meeting will be held on school premises as quickly as practicable, given the need to find a date that is reasonably convenient for the parent, the school and the members of the Complaints Panel. Whenever possible, the meeting will be held within **15** school days of the end of the school's response time. The meeting date, time and location will be confirmed to all parties at least **5** school days in advance.

4.7. The meeting is not a court case, it will be held in private, and will be as informal as circumstances allow. For this reason, electronic recordings of meetings or conversations are not permitted unless a parent's disability or special needs require it. Prior knowledge and consent of all parties attending must be sought before the recording of the meeting takes place. Consent will be recorded in any minutes taken. The parent will have the opportunity to put their reasons for dissatisfaction and to enlarge on them but may not introduce reasons that were not previously put in writing. The Complaints Panel will not normally accept, as evidence, recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded. The parent and the School will have the opportunity to put forward their respective version and views of events and each side, and the Complaints Panel members will be able to ask questions. The parent will have the opportunity to make final comments to the Complaints Panel.

4.8. The Complaints Panel may make findings and recommendations and a copy of those findings and recommendations will be:

(i) sent by electronic mail or otherwise provided in writing to the parent and, where relevant, the person complained about; and

(ii) available for inspection on the school premises by the Trust and the Headteacher.

4.9. The Complaints Panel will formulate its response as quickly as reasonably possible, aiming to do so within **10** school days, and the Clerk will notify all concerned.

4.10. At any meeting, the parent will be entitled to bring a companion along to provide support. Legal representation will only be permitted in exceptional circumstances.

4.11. If the parent fails to attend the Complaints Panel Meeting on the day without compelling reasons, the Complaints Panel will still proceed in their absence and the process will continue to its conclusion. Any further attempt to re-open the matter will be considered as falling under the "Serial or persistent complainants" section as set below.

5. Department for Education (DfE)

5.1. Once the complaints process is concluded (or a complaint has been terminated due to undue delay or failure to lodge a request for a Stage 3 Complaints Panel Meeting within the time stated in the policy) the matter is closed. If the Complainant is still not satisfied, then they may contact the DfE.

5.2. There is an online procedure at: https://www.gov.uk/complain-to-dfe or the Complainant may write to the DfE at:

Ministerial and Public Communication Division
Department for Education
2nd Floor, Piccadilly Gate
Manchester M1 2WD

6. Complaints against specific role-holders

6.1. Complaints against the Headteacher

Any complaint relating to the Headteacher of the school must be raised in the first instance with the Chair of Governors by writing to the Clerk to the Governors. If an informal resolution cannot be reached, the Chair of Governors will designate a Governor or an independent investigator to investigate the complaint as per **Stage 2**.

6.2. Complaints against individual Governors / the Governing Board

If the complaint is against a governor, then it should be raised with the Chair of Governors by writing to the Clerk to the Governors. In the case of a complaint against either the Chair or the Board of Governors as a whole, then it should be put in writing to the Clerk to the Governors who will refer it to the Members.

In such cases, the Chair of Governors / the Members will investigate the complaint or appoint an appropriate person to do so in the same way as in the first stage of the formal process at **Stage 2**.

Where the complaint moves to **Stage 3**, the Chair of Trustees/the Members (as applicable) will determine how the Complaint Panel is to be constituted, but will ensure that at least one person is independent of the management and running of the school.

Part B – Complaints raised by those who are not parents / carers of current pupils

7. Complaints made by those who are not parents of current pupils, which includes complaints made by parents of former pupils after they have left the school, will be dealt with as follows:

7.1. Complainants should first attempt to address their complaint to the school informally by raising the matter with a relevant member of staff or the Chair of Governors, within **3** months of the incident or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within **3** months of the last of these incidents. The school (depending on the nature of the complaint) will seek to resolve the matter informally within **15** school days.

7.2. If it is not possible to resolve the matter informally, the complaint may be submitted in writing, using the form available at **Appendix 1**, to the Headteacher, or where the complaint relates to the Headteacher, to the Chair of Governors.

7.3. The complaint will be acknowledged within **5** school days and a final written response will be issued within **15** school days.

7.4. The general provisions set out below in Part C below apply.

Part C General provisions

8. Complaints that will not be considered under this policy

8.1. Usually complaints relating to the matters set out in the table below will not be considered under this policy as they have their own appeal or complaint processes. Where necessary the school will exercise its discretion.

8.2. Complaints may be raised under this policy about staff conduct, however such complaints will be dealt with under the school's internal disciplinary procedures, if appropriate, and complainants will not be informed of any disciplinary action taken as a result.

Matter	Route for raising concern / complaining
Admissions	Admissions Appeal – see Admissions Policy and Statutory Admissions Appeal Code, or complaint to DfE
Exclusions	Statutory review process – see Suspension and Exclusions Policy
Statutory SEN assessments	SEND Tribunal (and see SEN Code of Practice)
Matters likely to require child protection investigation	Raise with Designated Safeguarding Lead or a direct referral can be made to the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) and/or Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) see Child Protection & Safeguarding Policy
Data protection / FOIA	Raise with Data Protection Officer (DPO) at schoolpro.uk in the first instance – see Data Protection Policy. Complaints may also be raised with the Information Commissioner's Office but we ask that you try to resolve these via the DPO first.
Staff Grievances and Disciplinary matters[5]	Staff Conduct Policy
Whistleblowing	Whistleblowing Policy
Third party contractors / suppliers	Third party complaints process

9. Complaints received outside of term time

The school will consider complaints made outside of term time to have been received on the first school day after the holiday period.

10. Withdrawal of a Complaint

If a Complainant wants to withdraw their complaint, they will be asked to confirm the withdrawal in writing.

11. Record keeping and confidentiality

11.1 A written record will be kept of all complaints that reach the formal stage, whether they are resolved following Stage 2, or proceed to a panel hearing (Stage 3) and any action taken by the school as a result (regardless of whether they are upheld). Complaint records will be maintained securely and in line with

[5] Note that where complaints relate to staff conduct, these may be dealt with under both this Complaints Policy and the Staff Conduct Policy. In such circumstances complainants will not be informed of the outcome of any Staff disciplinary investigation or processes.

the school's retention protocols by the Headteacher's PA, who will be responsible for complaint records. Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection requests access to them.

11.2 The Complainant should also keep all correspondence, statements and records relating to their complaint confidential, and should not disclose (by way of electronic communication, social media or otherwise) any information or documents relating to their complaint.

12. Anonymous complaints

Where an anonymous complaint is received, the school will use its reasonable endeavours to consider the complaint as best as it reasonably can. However the school will not be required to consider the complaint pursuant to any specific process and will handle anonymous complaints on a case by case basis.

13. Complaint Campaigns

13.1 Where the school receives a number of complaints all based on the same subject which in its reasonable opinion may be deemed a 'complaint campaign' it will deal with the complaints in the following way: individual responses will not be sent to complainants in such cases. Instead, either a template response will be sent to all complainants, or a single response will be published on the school's website at the discretion of the Headteacher/Chair of Governors.

13.2 Where the complaint campaign involves complainants who are parents, they will be entitled to escalate the complaint to a panel hearing if they are dissatisfied with the school's response. The school will consider how best to manage panel hearings in such circumstances.

14. Artificial intelligence (AI)

14.1 In line with the Parentkind parent guide to school complaints, complainants are urged to exercise caution in the use of AI in complaint processes as it can introduce an unnecessarily legalistic and contentious approach that is not conducive to resolving the issue in a human way. AI can also introduce inaccurate information, including misstating law, and make a complaint more complex than necessary.

14.2 Complainants are reminded that publicly available AI platforms and chatbots are not confidential. Complaints, and in particular those containing the personal data of pupils, staff and other individuals therefore should not be uploaded to or processed via platforms such as ChatGPT.

15. Serial or persistent complainants

If at any level a Complainant or connected party attempts to reopen an issue or a closely related issue that has already been dealt with under this complaints procedure, the Chair of Governors may write to the Complainant to inform them that the procedure has been exhausted, the matter is closed and that the school will therefore not respond to any further correspondence on this issue or a closely related issue.

16. Vexatious complaints

16.1 Complaints with the following characteristics may be deemed to be vexatious:

- obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific, repetitious;
- insistence upon pursuing unmeritorious complaints and/or unrealistic outcomes beyond all reason;
- insistence upon pursuing meritorious complaints in an unreasonable manner;
- complaints which are designed to cause disruption or annoyance;
- demands for redress that lack any serious purpose or value.
- failure to maintain confidentiality in line with this policy.

16.2 In such cases, the Chair of Governors may write to the Complainant to inform them that the complaint is deemed to be vexatious and that the school will not respond to any further correspondence on this issue or a closely related issue.

16.3 The DfE Best Practice Guidance for Academy Complaints Procedures will be taken into account in reaching any decision to stop responding. Specifically, the following criteria will usually be met:

- the school will have taken every reasonable step to address the complainant's concerns;
- the complainant will have been given a clear statement of the school's position and their options; and
- the complainant contacts the school repeatedly, making substantially the same points each time.

The case to stop responding will be stronger if one or more of the following applies:

- the complainant's letters, emails, or telephone calls are often or always abusive or aggressive;
- the complainant makes insulting personal comments about or threats towards staff;
- the school has reason to believe the individual is contacting them with the intention of causing disruption or inconvenience.

17. Complainants are also referred to the Parentkind parent guide to school complaints which emphasises the importance of trying to work with the school to resolve the issue and explains steps that schools may take where complainants act unreasonably including pausing the complaint, issuing a warning and, in cases of persistent or extreme abusive behaviour, banning the complainant from the school site.

18. Legal Proceedings

If a Complainant threatens or commences legal action against the school (including the issuing of a letter before claim) in relation to their complaint, we will consider whether to suspend the complaints procedure in relation to their complaint until those legal proceedings have concluded.

Appendix 1 –Severn Vale School Complaints Form

This form should be used to raise a formal complaint only after a matter has been raised informally under either Part A or Part B of the Complaints Policy and you are not satisfied with the response. Please refer to the Complaints Policy when completing this form.

Your details	
Name	
Email	
Address	
Name of pupil, year group and your relationship to them ***(if applicable)***	
Complaint details	
Grounds of complaint	
What steps have been taken to resolve the complaint informally ***(including details of who the matter was raised with, when and what solution was offered)***	
Why have the steps taken so far failed to resolve the complaint? ***(including what you consider should have been done / where the*** **school** ***has not met***	

reasonable expectations in its response)	
Outcome sought	
What action would you like taken to resolve the matter?	

Signed ……. Date ……

Please send completed forms to lwoodrow@severnvaleschool.com or hand in to the school office in a sealed envelope marked for the attention of the Headteacher's PA (*please refer to the Complaints Policy and in particular paragraph 6, complaints about specific role-holders, for further information).*