



SHERBORNE SCHOOLS GROUP

Complaints Procedure for Parents of Current Pupils (including EYFS)

Approving body: Governance & Nominations Committee

Owner: Chief Operating Officer

Lead Author: Chief Operating Officer

Executive Summary

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction with a real or perceived problem. It may be made about the Sherborne Schools Group (the Group) as a whole, about a specific School or department, or about an individual member of staff. This policy applies to complaints from the parents of current pupils. The Group takes such matters very seriously and aims to resolve them as they arise. The Group operates a three-stage process and the procedures for each stage are detailed within this policy. This policy is intended to aid the resolution of complaints through an internal system. If, however, the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome they may contact the [Independent Schools Inspectorate](#) (ISI). This policy is available to parents on the School websites and on request.

Date of Review: Lent 2026

Date of Approval: 4 March 2026

Issue Number: 1

Review Due: Michaelmas 2027

Document Number: GRP_ACT_005

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What constitutes a complaint?

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction with a real or perceived problem. It may be made about the Sherborne Schools Group (the Group) as a whole, about a specific School¹ within the Group, a School department, or about an individual member of staff. Any matter about which a current parent is unhappy and seeks action by the School is within the scope of this procedure. A complaint is likely to arise if a parent believes that the Group or one of its constituent parts or members of staff has done something wrong, or failed to do something that it should have done, or acted unfairly. Parents can be assured that all concerns and complaints will be treated seriously and confidentially according to the procedure outlined below. The Group prioritises the wellbeing of its pupils and they will not be penalised for a complaint raised in good faith.

Separate procedures apply in the event of a child protection/ safeguarding issue (see SSG Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy).

What constitutes a parent of a current pupil?

Within this policy, the term ‘parent’ includes parents, guardians and carers. A parent of a current pupil is one whose child is a current registered pupil attending a School within the Group during the academic year 1 September to 31 August. Once a pupil has left the school they are no longer considered as a current pupil within the Group. This procedure does not apply to parents of prospective pupils.

Unless clearly stated within any withdrawal process for those who leave the relevant School at other times, for the purpose of this policy a pupil is no longer considered a current pupil:

- after 31 December, for a pupil who leaves during or at the end of the Michaelmas/ Autumn Term
- after 31 March, for a pupil who leaves during or at the end of the Lent/ Spring Term

¹ The Group includes Sherborne Boys, Sherborne Girls, Sherborne Prep (including EYFS), Hanford Prep, Sherborne International, and their trading subsidiaries.

- after 31 August, for a pupil who leaves during or at the end of the Trinity/ Summer Term.

A parent whose child has left the Group may escalate a complaint that they have already registered when the child to which the complaint relates was still registered at the School, but cannot initiate a new complaint. An appeal against a Head's decision to exclude a pupil may be dealt with under Stage 3 of this Complaints Procedure. The request for appeal should be submitted to the Clerk to Governors within ten working days² of the decision to exclude.

The Group operates a three-stage process for complaints:

Stage One (Informal Complaint)

Most complaints or concerns can usually be addressed informally, and entirely satisfactorily, through discussion and communication with the appropriate member of staff. An informal complaint can initially be made in writing, via the telephone or in person to the relevant responsibility holder (see [Appendix 2](#)).

Depending on the nature of the complaint, it may be suggested that another member of staff might be better placed to deal with it. If this is the case, it will be conveyed in the initial response. Whether the informal complaint is made in writing, in person or via the telephone, the relevant responsibility holder will usually acknowledge the complaint in writing within three working days of its receipt in term time (in holiday and half term periods, within ten working days).

On receipt of an informal complaint, the responsibility holder will log the issue and, if required, inform the relevant Senior Leader who line manages them to discuss the next steps. Where the complaint is made verbally, the relevant member of staff will provide a note of the contents of any discussions. The responsibility holder having duly considered the issue, and acted on it, may discuss the result of their investigation with the relevant Senior Leader. At their discretion, the responsibility holder will then notify the parent in writing, normally within twenty working days of receiving the complaint in term time, (and within twenty working days of the start of the next academic half term if it is a holiday period), confirming that the matter has been followed up and explaining what action has been taken in light of the complaint or simply resolving the complaint.

If the parent remains dissatisfied with the response provided to the informal complaint the next step is to pursue a formal complaint under Stage Two (see below).

Stage Two (Formal Complaint)

If the parent remains dissatisfied following Stage One of the process, they should next approach either the Head of the school to which the complaint refers, or the Chief Operating Officer (COO) as appropriate and formalise the complaint. The Group would expect a parent to make this approach within ten working days of receiving communication concluding the informal stage ([see above](#)).

A formal complaint to the Head or the COO should commence with the parent briefly setting out in writing the concern together with a statement as to why it is believed that the investigation and/or action taken at the previous stage was unsatisfactory. The division is as follows:

² For the purposes of this policy, a working day is considered to be Monday to Friday, excluding bank holidays and half term.

- Head: all matters to do with pupils' education including discipline, co-curricular and pastoral care.
- COO: financial matters; buildings, grounds, equipment and domestic matters; health and safety matters; technology and electronic systems matters

The Head or the COO will respond within three working days to acknowledge receipt (in holiday and half term periods within ten working days). The Head or COO may delegate responsibility for a further investigation into the matter to be conducted by a senior member of staff, independently of conclusions arrived at during the Informal Stage. After due consideration, the outcome of a Stage Two investigation will be communicated to parents in writing by the Head or COO usually within 20 working days of the matter coming to their attention in term time (and within 20 working days of the start of the next academic half term if it is a holiday period). They will also communicate the rationale behind their decision and action.

This communication may also involve a face-to-face meeting, but this will not be the case on every occasion. Although the Group endeavours to manage complaints openly, it may not be possible or appropriate to share all materials with parents due to legal, confidentiality or data protection constraints.

If the complaint is against the Head, Director of External Affairs or COO, the Chair of Governors should be contacted via the Clerk to the Governors³ (clerk@sherborneschools.group). The Chair will nominate a governor to determine the complaint. If the complaint is against the Chair, the Senior Independent Governor should be contacted via the Clerk to the Governors. The nominated governor will call for a full report from the Head, Director of External Affairs or COO and for all the relevant documents. The nominated governor may also call for a briefing from members of staff and will, in most cases, speak to or meet with the parent to discuss the matter further. Once the nominated governor is satisfied that, so far as is practicable, all of the relevant facts have been established, the parent will be informed in writing of the outcome of the Stage Two investigation. This will usually be within 20 working days of the matter coming to their attention in term time (and within 20 working days of the start of the next academic half term if it is a holiday period) and include the rationale behind their decision and action.

If the parent remains dissatisfied with the outcome of the Stage Two investigation, they should proceed to Stage Three (see below).

Stage Three (Formal Complaint to a panel appointed by the Board of Governors)

If the parent remains dissatisfied following Stage Two of this complaints procedure, they should bring their concern to the attention of the Chair of Governors. The Group would expect this to be done within ten working days of receiving communication concluding the Stage Two Complaint. Access to the Chair of Governors is through the Clerk to Governors (clerk@sherborneschools.group) and the written correspondence should include details of all the grounds of the complaint and the outcome desired, and full contact details.

The Clerk to the Governors (the Clerk) will inform the Chair of Governors that a complaint has been raised. The Clerk will acknowledge receipt of the complaint within five working days (in

³ Correspondence to governors via clerk@sherborneschools.group is managed confidentially by the Executive Assistant to the COO.

holiday and half term periods within 15 working days). The Clerk will communicate the final decision of the investigation or panel hearing to the various parties.

A complaints panel (the panel) will be formed to review the decisions taken at Stage Two by the Head, PSL or nominated governor. The panel will not consider any new areas of complaint which have not been previously raised as part of the complaints procedure. The role of the panel is to establish the facts surrounding the complaints that have been made by considering:

- the documents provided by both parties and
- any representation made by the parents and the Head or COO.

and to reach a decision, on the balance of probabilities, as to whether each complaint is upheld in whole or in part. It is not within the powers of the panel to make any financial award, nor to impose sanctions on the staff, pupils or parents. The panel may make recommendations on these matters or any other issues to the Head, COO and/ or the Board of Governors as appropriate.

The Chair of Governors, or their chosen representative, will ordinarily appoint three members to the panel to review and resolve the complaint. Panel members appointed would have had no direct involvement in the matters detailed in the complaint. One of the three panel members shall be independent of the management and the running of the Group; as per DfE guidelines this person will be someone who has held a position of responsibility and is used to scrutinising evidence and putting forward balanced arguments. The panel hearing will allow for the complainant / parent to attend part or all of the hearing, and be accompanied if they wish, though not by a lawyer or legal representative as the panel hearing is not legal proceedings and this is an internal complaints procedure.

As soon as reasonably practicable, and in any event at least ten working days before the hearing, the Clerk will send written notification to each party of the date, time and place of the panel hearing. The following details should be sent to the Clerk, to be received at least five working days prior to the hearing:

- copies of any additional documents parents wish the panel to consider
- a list of any documents which parents believe to be in the Group's possession and with the panel to see
- confirmation of whether or not the parents will be accompanied to the hearing, and by whom.

The Clerk will circulate a copy of the bundle of documents to be considered by the panel at least three working days prior to the hearing.

The panel hearing should proceed even if the parent subsequently decides not to attend yet has not withdrawn the complaint. In this case the panel should consider the parent's complaint in their absence and issue findings on the substance of the complaint, thereby bringing the matter to a conclusion. The panel should seek to accommodate parental availability for dates and consider their comments concerning panel composition, but the Chair of Governors or their chosen representative has the final say on the composition of the panel, the venue and the date of the hearing, which would normally be within 20 working days of the start date of the Stage Three Complaint.

All those present at the hearing shall have the opportunity to ask questions and make comments in an appropriate manner. The hearing is not a legal proceeding and the panel shall be under no obligation to hear oral evidence from witnesses but may do so and/ or may take written statements into account. All statements made at the hearing will be unsworn, all present will be entitled, should they wish, to write their own notes for reference purposes. A clerk appointed by the panel will ensure that written minutes of the proceedings are made.

During the hearing, the panel may hear from a number of different people and at different times. It may therefore be the case that there are some occasions where someone speaking to the panel may be sharing confidential or compromised information that is helpful to the panel in reaching a conclusion but it is not necessarily appropriate for all parties to have full access to this information. As such, the complainant is not entitled to a full transcript of every conversation.

All those attending the hearing are expected to show courtesy, restraint and good manners or, after due warning, the hearing may be adjourned or terminated at the discretion of the panel Chair. If terminated, the original decision will stand. Any person who is dissatisfied with any aspect of the way the hearing is conducted must say so before the proceedings go any further and their comment will be recorded.

The panel Chair may at their discretion, adjourn the hearing for further investigation of any relevant issue. This may include an adjournment to take legal advice.

A hearing before the complaints panel is a private proceeding. No notes or other records or oral statements about any matter discussed in or arising from the proceeding shall be made available directly or indirectly to the press or other media.

If possible, the panel will resolve the complaint without the need for further investigation. Where further investigation is required, the panel will decide how it should be carried out and the scheduled date for the hearing may be extended.

After due consideration of the merits of the complaint and all facts they consider relevant, the panel will make findings as to whether or not the Stage 2 decision was a reasonable one and decide whether to:

- Dismiss the complaint(s) in whole or in part
- Uphold the complaint(s) in whole or in part
- Make recommendations for the Group to consider.

The decision will be communicated in writing to the parent, usually within ten working days of the completion of the hearing. This will usually be via email, but if the parents do not wish to receive the decision via email, they should inform the Clerk of this so that a copy may be given or posted to them. Where possible within the bounds of confidentiality and privacy, a copy of the findings will be provided to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about. A copy of the findings will be available for inspection on the relevant Group premises by the Governors and the Head.

The decision of the panel will be final in that there will be no further right to appeal or further hearing within the Group's procedure.

Early Years Foundation Stage

Parents of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) should follow the three stages of this Complaints Procedure. Written complaints about the fulfilment of the EYFS requirements will be investigated using the process outlined in this policy, The Group will notify parents about the outcome of the investigation into their complaint within 28 days from the date the complaint was received.

The Group will provide the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) and/or Ofsted, on request, with a written record of all complaints made during any specified period, and the action which was taken as a result of each complaint. The record of any such complaints will be kept in accordance with the Group's Privacy Notices and policy regarding retention of records.

External Agencies

Where the Group's internal procedures have been followed and a parent remains dissatisfied, ISI may be contacted. ISI inspects all aspects of independent school education and its contact information is as follows: telephone 020 7600 0100 or email concerns@isi.net. ISI will usually expect parents to have followed and exhausted the School's formal complaints procedure before contacting them.

Where a parent remains dissatisfied and their complaint is about the School's fulfilment of the Early Years Foundations Stage (EYFS) requirements, then ISI may be contacted via the details above or Ofsted may be contacted via their website contact.ofsted.gov.uk/contact-us or: telephone 0300 123 1231 or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

If the complaint relates to the way a safeguarding or child protection matter a parent raised was handled and the parent remains concerned that it may constitute a potential failure of our Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy, this complaint should be referred to the local safeguarding panel (Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership) via 01305 228 866.

Parents may also wish to contact the NSPCC Helpline on 0808 800 5000 or email help@NSPCC.org.uk.

Complaint Record Keeping

All concerns and complaints will be treated seriously and confidentially. The Group will keep a confidential, written record of all complaints, the stage at which they are resolved and any action taken as a result of the complaint, as required by regulation. This record will be kept in accordance with the Group's Privacy Notices and Data Protection Policy. When dealing with complaints, the Group may process a range of information which is likely to include the following:

- Date when the issue was raised
- Name of parent
- Name of pupil
- Description of the issue
- Records of all the investigations (if appropriate)
- Witness statements (if appropriate)
- Name and contact details of members of staff handling the issue at each stage
- Copies of all correspondence on the issue (including emails and records of phone conversations)
- Notes and minutes of the hearing, and
- The panel's written decision (if appropriate).

This may include 'special category personal data' (as further detailed in the SSG Data Protection Policy and Privacy Notices, but potentially including for instance, information relating to physical or mental health) where this is necessary owing to the nature of the complaint. This data will be processed in accordance with the Group's Privacy Notices. The records of formal complaints (Stage Two and Three) will be retained for at least seven years from the date of the complaint, unless there is a safeguarding angle in which case the records will be preserved at least until the accused has reached normal pension age (or for 10 years from the date of the allegation, whichever is longer).

All staff should be aware of the Group's policy on Complaint Record Keeping and note that if a complaint is raised via telephone / in person regarding a School-related issue, the member of staff receiving the concern must follow the procedure set out under Stage 1 above. A record of

all formal complaints (i.e. Stages 2 and 3) and the stage at which they are resolved will be kept by the Head's Office. All correspondence regarding Stage 3 complaints must be copied to the Clerk to the Governors when received or sent, at the email address above. Records of formal complaints are available to the Board of Governors at any stage.

The Group will identify complaints relating to boarding provision within its complaints record, will record withdrawn complaints, and will review patterns from complaints to address systemic issues.

Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be held with these records but kept confidential except to the extent required under paragraph 33(k) of Part 7, Schedule 1 to the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2014 by the Secretary of State or where disclosure is required by the ISI under Section 109 of the Education and Skills Act 2008 (as amended), or under other legal authority. In addition, there may be other circumstances where disclosure of the substance of a complaint or particular confidential records relating to it is required, for example, where there is a legal, regulatory, safeguarding or data protection obligation (e.g. a subject access request) which prevails over the requirement to maintain the records as confidential.

Parents should be aware that the Group has a duty of care to pupils and staff, including specific safeguarding and data protection legal responsibilities. Complaints about other pupils or staff will be investigated and actioned where appropriate, but the Group will never disclose the details of those actions to third parties, including to parents who made the original complaint.

The number of formal stage two and three complaints for the preceding academic year is recorded in [Appendix 4](#)).

Appendix 1: Summary of Changes

- This is the first issue of this policy for the Sherborne Schools Group and supersedes the relevant individual pre-existing policies.

Appendix 2: Responsibility Holders for Stage 1

If your complaint is related to:	Please contact:			
	 SHERBORNE BOYS	 SHERBORNE GIRLS	 SHERBORNE PREP	 HANFORD PREP
Your child's academic/ social wellbeing – this is the first point of contact for the majority of concerns	Housemaster of your child's house	Housemaster/ Housemistress (HM) of your child's house	Form Teacher of your child	Pastoral Tutor of your child
Your child's Housemaster/ Housemistress, the School's disciplinary arrangements or the pastoral support of the School	Deputy Head Pastoral Allister.Sheffield@sherborne.org	Senior Deputy Head SeniorDeputySG@sherbornegirls.group	Deputy Head Pastoral Alastair.Bowden@sherborneprep.group	Assistant Head Pastoral Helen.Beal@hanfordprep.group
The pastoral support of a tutor or the arrangements in house	Housemaster of your child's house	Head of Year for your child's year group	Deputy Head Pastoral Alastair.Bowden@sherborneprep.group	Assistant Head Pastoral Helen.Beal@hanfordprep.group
The teaching in an academic department	Relevant Head of Academic Department	Relevant Head of Academic Department	Senior Deputy Head Briony.Harris@sherborneprep.group	Assistant Head Curriculum and Planning Sara.Northey@hanfordprep.group
The Head of an Academic Department or the School's Academic Policy	Deputy Head Academic Tim.Filtness@sherborne.org	Deputy Head Academic DeputyAcademic@sherbornegirls.group	Senior Deputy Head Briony.Harris@sherborneprep.group	Head Head@hanfordprep.group
Sport Provision	Assistant Head Sports, Activities & Leadership Rob.LePoidevin@sherborne.org	Director of Sport Emma.Turner@sherbornegirls.group	Deputy Head Co-Curricular Alastair.Poulain@sherborneprep.group	Head of PE/ Games Steph.McMillan@hanfordprep.group
Music Provision	Director of Music Alexander.Eadon@sherborne.org	Director of Music Mark.Cracknell@sherbornegirls.group	Deputy Head Co-Curricular Alastair.Poulain@sherborneprep.group	Music Teacher

If your complaint is related to:	Please contact:			
	 SHERBORNE BOYS	 SHERBORNE GIRLS	 SHERBORNE PREP	 HANFORD PREP
Drama Provision	Deputy Head Academic Tim.Fitness@sherborne.org	Director of Drama Katy.Scott@sherbornegirls.group	Deputy Head Co-Curricular Alastair.Poulain@sherborneprep.group	Assistant Head, Curriculum and Planning Sara.Northey@hanfordprep.group
The Directors of co-curricular Sport/ Music/ Drama or any issues relating to the School's co-curricular provision	Assistant Head Sports, Activities & Leadership Robert.LePoidevin@sherborne.org	Deputy Head (Co-Curricular & Operations) DeputyOperations@sherbornegirls.group	Deputy Head Co-Curricular Alastair.Poulain@sherborneprep.group	Head Head@hanfordprep.group
Other co-curricular activities (clubs, societies etc.)	Assistant Head Sports, Activities & Leadership Robert.LePoidevin@sherborne.org	Deputy Head (Co-Curricular & Operations) DeputyOperations@sherbornegirls.group	Deputy Head Co-Curricular Alastair.Poulain@sherborneprep.group	Head Head@hanfordprep.group
A Deputy Head or any other member of SLT	Head Headmaster@sherborne.org	Head Head@sherbornegirls.group	Head Annie.Gent@sherborneprep.group	Head Head@hanfordprep.group
Head, Chief Operating Officer or Director of External Affairs	Chair of Governors (via the Clerk ⁴) clerk@sherborneschools.group			
Financial matters	Finance Director Susie.Reynell@sherborneschools.group		Bursar Allison.evans@sherborneprep.group	Operations Manager Opsmanager@hanfordprep.group
Buildings, Grounds and Equipment	Operations Bursar Lucy.Mackenzie@sherborne.com	Operations Bursar Kathleen.Cook@sherbornegirls.group	Bursar Allison.evans@sherborneprep.group	Operations Manager Opsmanager@hanfordprep.group
Health & Safety	Operations Bursar Lucy.Mackenzie@sherborne.com	Health & Safety Manager Janine.Tuck@sherbornegirls.group	Bursar Allison.evans@sherborneprep.group	Operations Manager Opsmanager@hanfordprep.group

⁴ Correspondence to governors via clerk@sherborneschools.group is managed by the Executive Assistant to the COO.

Appendix 3: Contacts for Stage 2



Mr Simon Heard:

Headmaster@sherborne.org



Dr Ruth Sullivan:

Head@sherbornegirls.group



Mrs Annie Gent:

Annie.Gent@sherborneprep.group



Mrs Sophie Blewitt:

Head@hanfordprep.group



Chief Operating Officer (COO)

Simon.Worthy@sherborneschools.group

Appendix 4: Record of Complaints

In the academic year 2024/25:

- Sherborne Boys received four formal complaints which were resolved at Stage Two and none which progressed to Stage Three.
- Sherborne Girls received no formal complaints.
- Sherborne Prep received no formal complaints.
- Hanford Prep received one formal complaint which was resolved at Stage Two and none which progressed to Stage Three.