

SEVENOAKS SCHOOL

Policy reference	AC2
Policy Category	(A) Parent and Student Facing
Name of policy	Complaints Procedure for Parents and Carers
Purpose of policy	To ensure that parents understand the process for raising a complaint with the school.
Scope	Current and Prospective Parents
Regulatory or legal requirement addressed by policy	Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 (ISSR) National Minimum Standards for Boarding schools (DfE, 2022) Education and Skills Act 2008 Children Act 1989; Childcare Act 2006 Data Protection Act 2018 Equality Act 2010
Other policies referred to	Admissions Policy Behaviour Policy Financial Assistance with Fees Policy Privacy and Data Protection Statement The Parent Contract
Policy owned by	Senior Deputy Head. The policy and procedure will be reviewed, monitored and evaluated by the Headmaster, Senior Deputy Head and Governors.
Date effective from	22 September 2025
Published on website/external facing	Yes

SEVENOAKS SCHOOL

COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE FOR PARENTS AND CARERS¹

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Sevenoaks School (or “the School”) prides itself on the quality of the teaching and pastoral care provided to its students. However, if parents do have a complaint, they can expect it to be treated by the School with care and in accordance with this Complaints Procedure. The School welcomes feedback from parents, and takes seriously concerns or complaints which may arise, which can help strengthen the educational and pastoral provision.

2. The Aim of the Procedure

- 2.1 The aim of this procedure is to achieve a fair and effective resolution of a concern or complaint about either the education or welfare of individual students in the care of Sevenoaks School.
- 2.2 The procedure allows for informal resolution or a formal process if that is not achieved and to provide an effective response.
- 2.3 It allows the School to achieve its aims for an open, purposeful and equitable culture.
- 2.4 The process is also key to evaluating school provision and making changes where necessary.

3. Scope and Application

- 3.1 This procedure applies to all parents of current students (i.e. students for whom education is being provided at the School, or past students if the complaint was raised when the student was still registered).
- 3.2 A copy of this procedure is available on the School’s website and can also be obtained on request (and in large print, if required) from the School’s Main Office. The number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year is available on request from the Headmaster’s PA.
- 3.3 The School will be mindful of its obligations under the Equality Act 2010 in applying this procedure.
- 3.4 The School will not normally investigate anonymous complaints.
- 3.5 Complaints relating to the matters set out below should be addressed following the applicable policy and procedure, namely:
 - 3.5.1 Admissions: please see the Admission Policy
 - 3.5.2 Exclusions: please see the Behaviour Policy
 - 3.5.3 Fee Disputes: please see the Parent Contract and the Financial Assistance with Fees Policy.
 - 3.5.4 Subject Access requests: please see the Privacy and Data Protection Statement
 - 3.5.5 For safeguarding and welfare issues please refer to the School's safeguarding and child protection policy
 - 3.5.6 Summer Schools and Holiday Programmes: please see the separate procedures as applicable
- 3.6 The School has separate grievance and whistleblowing policies to cover concerns that a member of staff may have.

¹ The expression “parents” is used throughout the document for those with parental responsibility for the child.

- 3.7 All parents should be aware that regardless of the nature of a complaint and whether or not it is upheld, parents are not entitled to details of any related sanctions imposed on staff, students or parents for reasons of data protection and confidentiality.
- 3.8 There may be occasions when it is necessary or reasonable to deviate from this complaints procedure if this is reasonable and justified. Complainants will be notified of the changes.

4. Timing

- 4.1 Equitable and effective resolution of concerns usually requires that they are brought to the School's attention promptly, normally within three months of the relevant event(s). Complaints may be heard after this if the Head or Complaints Panel considers that the delay will not prejudice resolution and that the reasons for delay are valid. All complaints will be handled seriously and sensitively.
- 4.2 Timings for the various stages of the process are set out below and in a flow diagram in Appendix 1.
- 4.3 For the purposes of this procedure, working days refers to weekdays (Monday to Friday) during term time, excluding bank holidays and half term. During School holidays it may take longer to resolve a complaint although the School will do what is reasonably practicable to avoid undue delay. It may also take longer to resolve a complaint during periods of significant disruption to School life or as a consequence of unavoidable staff absence, however deviation from the normal timescale for resolving a complaint during term time will only occur on an exceptional basis, and the School will take all reasonable steps to limit any such delay. In the event of any delays, complainants will be kept fully informed.

5. What Constitutes a Concern or Complaint?

- 5.1 A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction by a parent about an action or lack of action by the School. Any complaint made about the School as a whole, about a specific department or about an individual member of staff, or any matter about which a parent is unhappy and seeks action by the School, is within the scope of this procedure. A complaint may arise if a parent believes that the School has done something wrong, failed to do something that it should have done, or has acted unfairly.

The Complaints Procedure

6. Stage 1: Informal Resolution

- 6.1 It is hoped that most complaints will be resolved quickly and informally. If parents have a concern or complaint, they are encouraged to contact the Tutor or Boarding Housemaster/mistress in the first instance. The Tutor or Boarding Housemaster/mistress will acknowledge the complaint promptly (and within 5 working days) and aim to resolve the complaint with the student or parents.
- 6.2 In the majority of cases the matter will be resolved by this means to the parents' satisfaction. If the Tutor cannot resolve the matter alone, it may be necessary for him/her to consult with other staff in the School. (If the complaint is about the Tutor, parents should contact their child's Divisional Head.)
- 6.3 A written record of all complaints and the date received will be kept. A response will be provided to the parent in person, by telephone or email to indicate any action that will be taken and the timescales involved.
- 6.4 If the complaint is about the Head, the parents should send the complaint, in writing, to the Chair of Governors, via the Clerk to the Governors at clerk@sevenoaksschool.org.

- 6.5 If the matter is not resolved within 10 working days, parents may proceed to Stage 2 of the Complaints Procedure.

7. Stage 2: Formal Resolution

- 7.1 If the complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis, parents should put their complaint in writing to the Head. A complaint will generally not be considered as formal unless direct communication with the Head has been received. The Head will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action to take.
- 7.2 The Head, or a senior member of staff, normally the Senior Deputy Head, or a Deputy Head, will acknowledge receipt of the formal complaint as soon as possible (and within 5 working days).
- 7.3 The Head, or a nominated member of the senior staff will investigate. This may include requesting further information from the parent and/or a meeting with the parent and others to ascertain relevant details. A written record of the investigation will be held, in accordance with data protection principles.
- 7.4 A response will be made to the parents concerned, as soon as feasible and normally within 10 working days of the written acknowledgement. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage.
- 7.5 If the complaint is about the Head, and it has not been resolved informally, the parents should send the complaint, in writing, to the Chair of Governors, via the Clerk to the Governors at clerk@sevenoaksschool.org. The Chair of Governors will acknowledge the complaint as soon as possible (and within 5 working days) and will follow the steps listed above. The parent will usually receive a response to the complaint within 10 working days of the Chair's acknowledgement. If this is not possible due to the investigation needed, then the Chair will outline the timescale required. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage.
- 7.6 The School will keep a written record of the complaint, the School's response and any action taken by the School.
- 7.7 If parents are not satisfied with the outcome of Stage 2 of the Complaints Procedure, they may proceed to Stage 3 of the Complaints Procedure.

8. Stage 3: Appeals Procedure

- 8.1 If parents wish to proceed to Stage 3 of the Complaints Procedure, they should give notice in writing to the Clerk (clerk@sevenoaksschool.org) within 10 working days of the Stage 2 decision, outlining their grounds of appeal and providing any evidence. Requests for extensions must be submitted in writing with justification prior to the deadline. New complaints will not be considered at this stage nor will evidence unrelated to the initial complaint be considered. New complaints must be dealt with from Stage 1 of the Complaints Procedure.
- 8.2 The Clerk will acknowledge the written notice within 5 working days and will refer the complaint to the Chair of Governors, who will appoint the members of the Complaints Panel. The Clerk will act as secretary to the Complaints Panel. The Clerk will report to the Chair and the Head to confirm that consideration of the complaint is proceeding in accordance with this procedure but not in respect of the substance of the panel's consideration.

- 8.3 The Complaints Panel will consist of three members, two of whom will be Governors and one of whom will be independent of the management and running of the School.² None of the members will have been directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint.
- 8.4 A Hearing will be scheduled to take place as soon as practical, normally within six weeks of receipt of the parents' letter. If this timeframe is not practical, the Clerk will write to parents within the six weeks and agree, with them, an alternative timeframe.
- 8.5 The parents should supply relevant documentation to the Clerk, including copies of their previous written complaint to the Head and any other documentation they may wish to rely on, not more than 7 working days after the date of notification of the Hearing. Documentation must be relevant to those matters set out in the complaint.
- 8.6 The Clerk will collate all relevant papers and provide a copy of the full complaint file to the parents not less than 10 working days before the hearing. The papers will also be provided to each member of the Complaints Panel and the Head. The relevant papers will include the complaint in writing made by the parents and any relevant documents provided by them, and the response by the School and members of staff, setting out clearly the School's investigations, conclusions and actions to date.
- 8.7 The Complaints Panel will determine the terms of reference for the Hearing and the steps to be taken leading up to and during the Hearing. It will seek to establish if there are gaps in information, and it may request further facts, evidence or analysis ahead of the hearing.
- 8.8 The parent(s) may attend the Hearing and be accompanied by one other person if they wish. This could be a relative or friend. The hearing is an internal proceeding, not legal proceedings, therefore it is not possible for legal representatives to attend and the companion should not be a lawyer. The identity of any companion should be confirmed to the Clerk as soon as possible and no later than 2 working days before the Hearing.
- 8.9 The Hearing will proceed even if parents choose not to attend, unless they indicate that they are now satisfied and do not wish to proceed.
- 8.10 The Stage 2 decision-taker may attend the Hearing and the Panel will decide whether it would be helpful for witnesses to attend.
- 8.11 After due consideration of all facts presented at the Hearing which it considers relevant, the Complaints Panel will make findings, on the balance of probabilities, as to whether the Stage 2 decision was a reasonable one and decide whether to uphold the Complaint, in whole or in part, and/or make any recommendations.
- 8.12 The Clerk will send a copy of the decision and the reasons for it to the parents, the Chair of Governors, the Head and other members of staff involved within 5 working days of the Hearing. The decision of the Complaints Panel will be final.
- 8.13 The decision will be available for inspection at the School by the Head, Governing Body or the Independent Schools Inspectorate.
- 8.14 The full Board of Governors or their delegated sub-committee shall consider all Complaints Panel decisions and recommendations and determine what further action should be implemented by the School.

² DfE guidance: people who have held a position of responsibility, used to scrutinising evidence and putting forward balanced arguments e.g. serving or retired business people, civil servants, heads or members of staff at other schools, people with a legal background and retired members of the Police Force.

9. Mediation

- 9.1 At any stage of the process, it may be helpful to consider mediation, or a facilitated discussion by an experienced mediator, to address difficult or sensitive issues as constructively as possible.

10. Record Keeping

- 10.1 A log of all complaints will be kept by the Senior Deputy Head and monitored by the Head.

In addition,

- 10.2 The School will keep a full written record of Stage 2 or 3 complaints in accordance with its retention schedule, including:

- Date when the issue was raised
- Name of parent
- Name of student
- Description of the issue
- Records and a chronology of all the investigations (if appropriate)
- Witness statements (if appropriate)
- Name of member (s) of staff handling the issue at each stage
- Copies of all correspondence on the issue (including emails and records of phone conversations)
- Any action taken by the school as a result of the complaint (regardless of whether the complaints was upheld).
- Complaints about boarding will be identified as such.

- 10.3 Records of complaints which proceed to Stage 3 will be kept by the Clerk. The record will show the action taken, and whether or not the complaint is upheld.

- 10.4 Sevenoaks School will make available to parents of students and provide, on request, to the Chief Inspector, the Secretary of State or an independent inspectorate, details of the Complaints Procedure and the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year.

11. Confidentiality

- 11.1 All concerns will be treated confidentially. Papers generated by, or for the purposes of, the Complaints Procedure will be kept confidential to the parents, the members of staff involved, the members of the complaints panel in Stage 3, the Head, Clerk, Chair of Governors, and staff relevant to the processing of the complaint, except where disclosure is required in the course of the School's inspection or where dictated by any other legal or regulatory obligation.

- 11.2 Information relating to the complaint will be dealt with in accordance with the School's responsibilities under data protection legislation. (For further information, see the School's Privacy and Data Protection Statement.) Information may be disclosed where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the Education Act 2008 requests access to information, and in so far as it is required of the School by any other legal or regulatory obligation.

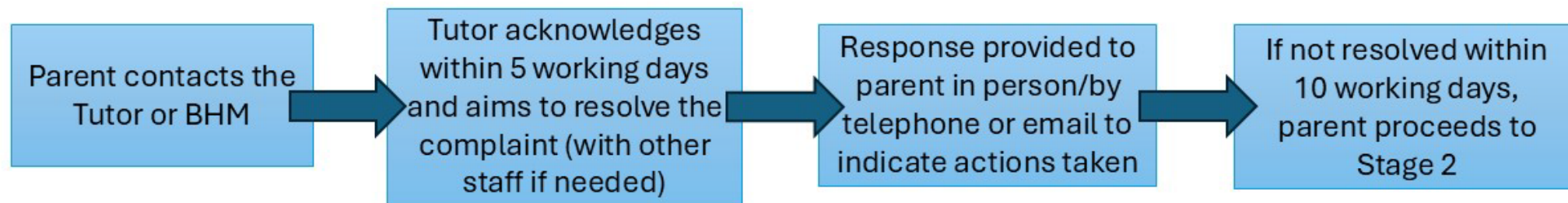
12. Professional Judgement

- 12.1 Where the judgement of a member of the School's staff is the subject of a complaint, the Complaints Panel will determine whether the judgment was exercised equitably and reasonably according to the School's standards. There may be more than one equitable and reasonable response to a situation. If a complaint is upheld, the Complaints Panel will usually make recommendations to be acted upon by the School's Senior Leadership Team.

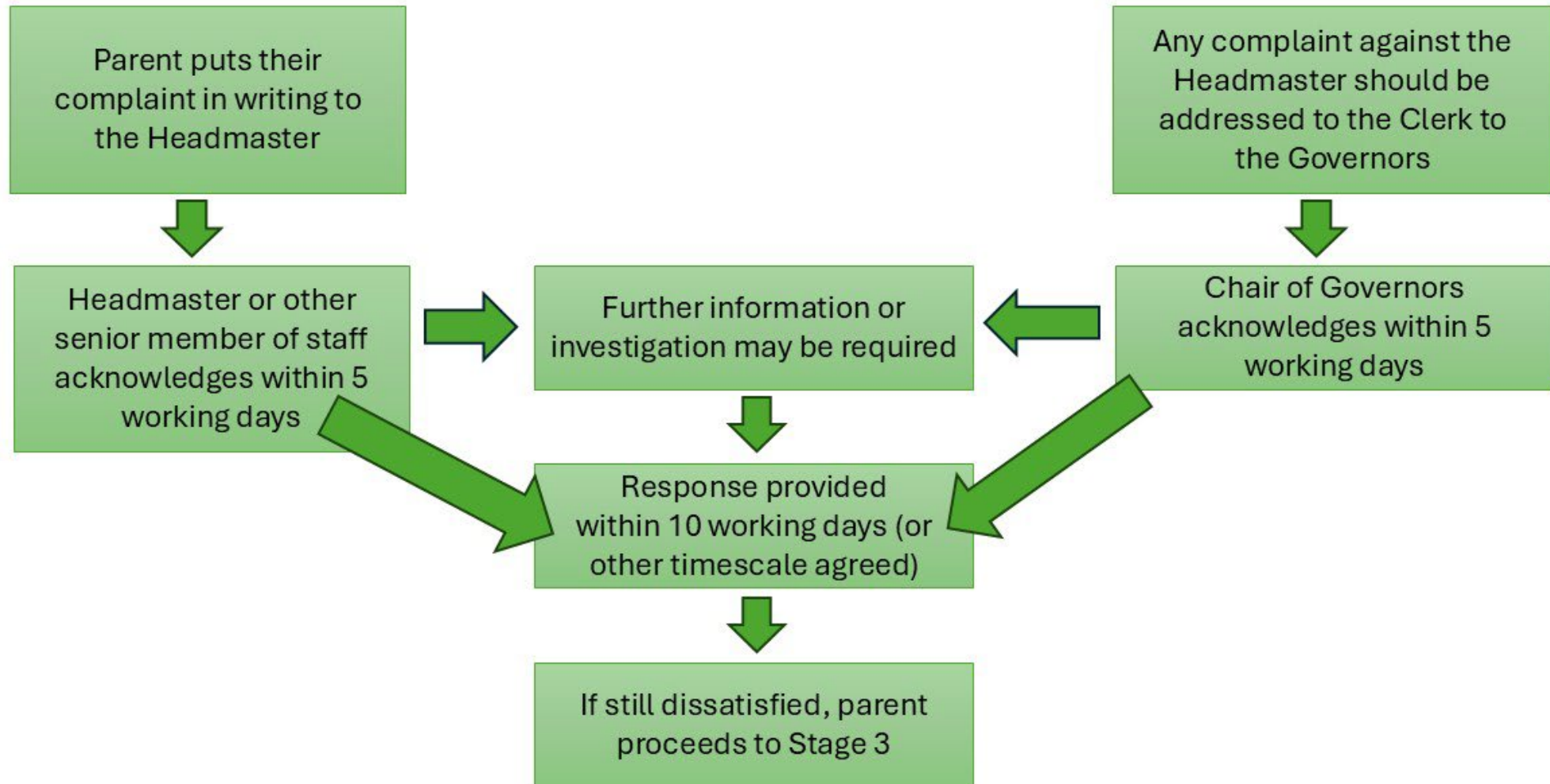
13. Persistent correspondence

- 13.1 Where repeated attempts are made by a parent to raise the same complaint after it has been considered at all three stages, this may be regarded by the School as vexatious and outside the scope of this procedure.

A parent/carer has a complaint
Stage 1: Informal resolution



A parent/carer has a complaint
Stage 2: Formal resolution



A parent/carer has a complaint
Stage 3: Appeals procedure

