Sir John Offley CE (VC) Primary School

Complaints Policy

'With God, all things are possible.'

Key Details

Headteacher: Mrs L Brown Headteacher

Chair of Governors: Mr O Warman

Date written/updated: November 2026
Date of next review: November 2028

This policy will be reviewed at least biennially. It will also be revised following updates to national and local guidance or procedures.

Sir John Offley CE (VC) Primary school is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people/vulnerable adults and expect all staff and volunteers to share this commitment.

Version Control			
Version	Date Approved	Page	Reason for Alterations
1	November 2026		Align with updated guidance and SCC best practice.

Headteacher: _____

Chair of Governors: _____

Definitions and aims

- A **concern** may be defined as "an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought"
- A **complaint** may be defined as "an expression or statement of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action"

In most cases, a concern can be resolved through informal means. A complaint will follow formal procedures.

This complaints policy is not limited to parents or carers of children that are registered at the school. Any person, including members of the public, may make a complaint to Sir John Offley CE (VC) Primary School about any provision of facilities or services that are provided.

Our school aims to meet its statutory obligations when responding to complaints from parents/carers of pupils at the school, and others.

When responding to complaints, we aim to:

- Be impartial and non-adversarial
- Facilitate a full and fair investigation, where necessary
- Address all the points at issue and provide an effective and prompt response
- Respect confidentiality, where necessary
- Treat complainants with respect and courtesy
- Make sure that decisions we make are lawful, rational, reasonable, fair and proportionate, in line with the principles of administrative law
- Keep complainants informed of the progress of the complaints process
- Consider how the complaint can feed into school improvement evaluation processes

The relationships we have with parents and carers are fundamental to our school community. Guided by our values of Love, Forgiveness and Aspiration, we aim to build respectful and trusting partnerships, resolving concerns informally wherever possible. Where this is not possible, the formal complaints procedure will be followed.

Legislation and Guidance

This policy has been developed in accordance with Section 29 of the Education Act 2002, which requires schools to have and publish procedures for dealing with complaints relating to the school and any services it provides. It also reflects Department for Education (DfE) guidance for schools on complaints procedures, including the management of serial and unreasonable complaints, and fulfils the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) statutory framework for handling complaints relating to EYFS provision.

Scope

This policy does not cover complaints procedures relating to:

- Admissions
- Statutory assessments of special educational needs (SEN)
- Safeguarding matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation
- Suspension and permanent exclusion
- Whistle-blowing
- Staff grievances
- Staff discipline and conduct
- School re-organisation proposals
- Collective worship

Please see our separate policies for procedures relating to these types of complaint.

Complaints about the school's delivery of the National Curriculum are within the scope of this policy, but complaints about the content of the National Curriculum should be sent to the DfE.

Informal Concerns

At Sir John Offley, we are committed to building positive relationships with families through our Christian values of Love, Forgiveness and Aspiration. We recognise that from time-to-time concerns may arise, and we encourage these to be raised and resolved informally wherever possible. By listening carefully, communicating openly and working together respectfully, we aim to find positive solutions that are in the best interests of our children.

Informal concerns should be raised as soon as possible with the relevant member of staff or the headteacher, either in person, by telephone, email or letter. Concerns may also be raised by a third party acting on behalf of the complainant, with their consent. If a complainant is unsure who to contact, they should contact the school office. The school will make reasonable adjustments for disabled complainants and provide support where English is not a complainant's first language.

The school will acknowledge informal concerns within 3 school days and explain how the matter will be taken forward, including expected timescales. Where appropriate, this stage may involve a meeting with the headteacher, deputy headteacher and/or the member of staff concerned. A written response will normally be provided within 10 school days of the meeting.

We approach concerns with a spirit of understanding and forgiveness, seeking to rebuild trust and maintain strong partnerships wherever possible. If the matter cannot be resolved informally, .it may progress to the formal complaints procedure.

Formal Complaints

Stages of Complaint (excluding complaints about the headteacher or governors)

The school operates a 2-stage complaints procedure:

- **Stage 1:** Formal Investigation
- **Stage 2:** Complaints Panel Hearing

Stage 1: Formal Investigation

Formal complaints should be submitted to the headteacher via the school office and may be made:

- By email or letter (preferred)
- By telephone
- In person
- Through a third party acting on the complainant's behalf, with their consent

Complainants should provide as much relevant information as possible, including dates, times, supporting evidence and the outcome they are seeking. Assistance with making a complaint is available through the school office.

The school will acknowledge receipt of the complaint within 3 school days. The headteacher will consider the complaint, clarify any outstanding concerns and, where appropriate, arrange a meeting to discuss the matter further. Complainants may be accompanied to any meeting and should notify the school in advance of the name of their companion.

The headteacher, or a suitably appointed member of the senior leadership team, will investigate the complaint and provide a written response within 10 school days of receiving the complaint. Where this timescale cannot be met, the complainant will be informed and given a revised timeframe.

The response will explain the findings, any actions taken and the reasons for the decision. If the complainant remains dissatisfied, they will be informed of how to request a Stage 2 Complaints Panel Hearing.

Stage 2: Panel Hearing

The complaints panel will normally consist of 3 impartial governors with no prior involvement in the complaint. A chair will be appointed from amongst the panel members. Where this is not possible, suitably skilled and independent panel members may be sourced from another school, the local authority or the diocese.

The complainant will be given reasonable notice of the hearing date. If alternative dates offered are declined without good reason, the panel may proceed based on written submissions.

The clerk will:

- Arrange the hearing and notify all parties of the date, time and venue
- Ensure the process is accessible
- Request and circulate relevant documents in advance
- Record the proceedings and outcome

The Hearing

Panel hearings are held in private. The complainant and school representatives will have the opportunity to present their case, submit evidence and respond to questions. The complainant may be accompanied by a suitable companion.

The panel will consider only the matters raised at Stage 1 and will not normally accept new complaints, unrelated evidence or covert recordings.

After hearing from both parties, the panel will consider the evidence and reach a decision in private. The outcome will be communicated in writing following the hearing.

The panel will then put together its findings and recommendations from the case. The panel will provide its findings and recommendations in writing to the complainant and, where appropriate, the subject of the complaint, and make a copy of the findings and recommendations available for inspection by the headteacher.

The Outcome

The panel can:

- Uphold the complaint, in whole or in part
- Dismiss the complaint, in whole or in part

If the complaint is upheld, in whole or in part, the panel will:

- Decide the appropriate action to resolve the complaint
- Where appropriate, recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future

The panel will inform those involved of the decision in writing within 5 school days. Where appropriate, this correspondence will include details of the actions that the school will take to resolve the complaint.

If the complainant believes the school did not handle their complaint in accordance with the published complaints policy or they acted unlawfully or unreasonably in the exercise of their duties under education law, they can contact the DfE after they have completed stage 2.

The DfE will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by Sir John Offley. The DfE will consider whether Sir John Offley has adhered to education legislation and any statutory policies connected with the complaint.

Timescales

The complainant must raise the complaint within 3 months of the incident. If the complaint is about a series of related incidents, they must raise the complaint within 3 months of the last incident.

We will consider exceptions to this timeframe in circumstances where there were valid reasons for not making a complaint at that time, and the complaint can still be investigated in a fair manner for all involved, however, this would be on a case-by-case basis.

When complaints are made outside of term time, they will be deemed to have been received on the first school day after the holiday period.

If at any point we cannot meet the timescales we have set out in this policy, we will:

- Set new time limits
- Send the complainant details of the new deadline and explain the delay

If a complainant commences legal action against Sir John Offley CE (VC) Primary School in relation to their complaint, then we will consider whether to suspend the complaints procedures in relation to their complaint until those legal proceedings have concluded.

Withdrawing a complaint

If a complainant wants to withdraw their complaint at any point, we will ask them to confirm this in writing.

Complaints about our fulfilment of early years requirements

We will investigate all written complaints relating to our school's fulfilment of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) requirements and notify the complainant of the outcome within 28 days of receiving the complaint. The school will keep a record of the complaint and make this available to Ofsted on request.

How to escalate a complaint

If the complainant wishes to proceed to the next stage of the procedures, they should inform the clerk/ governance professional to the governing board via the school office within 10 school days. Requests received outside of this timeframe will be considered in exceptional circumstances.

Complainants can do this:

- By letter or email (this is preferred)
- Over the phone
- In person
- Via a third party acting on behalf of the complainant, if they have the complainant's consent to do so

The complainant should provide details of how they feel the previous stage of the procedures has not addressed their complaint sufficiently, and what they feel would resolve the complaint.

The clerk/governance professional will acknowledge receipt of the request within 10 school days.

Complaints against the headteacher, a governor or the governing board

Complaints can be raised:

- By letter or email (this is preferred)
- Over the phone
- In person
- Via a third party acting on behalf of the complainant, if they have the complainant's consent to do so

Complaints that involve or are about the headteacher should be addressed to the Chair of Governors via the school office, marked private and confidential (if made in writing).

Complaints that involve or are about the Chair of Governors should be addressed to the Governing body via the school office, marked private and confidential (if made in writing).

Complaints about the headteacher will be investigated by the Chair of Governors or an appropriately appointed governor. Complaints about the Chair of Governors, individual governors or the governing board will be investigated by an independent investigator or suitably appointed governor with no prior involvement.

If the complainant believes the school did not handle their complaint in accordance with this complaints policy, or acted unlawfully or unreasonably, they can contact the DfE.

The DfE will not normally re-investigate the matter of the complaint or overturn any decisions made by Sir John Offley. The DfE will consider whether the school adhered to:

- Its complaints policy
- Any other relevant statutory policies
- Education legislation

The DfE will intervene where a school has:

- Failed to act in line with its duties under education legislation and any statutory policies connected with the complaint
- Acted (or is proposing to act) unreasonably when exercising its functions

If the complaints policy is found to not meet regulations, the school will be asked to correct its procedures accordingly.

For more information, or to refer a complaint, see the following webpage: www.gov.uk/complain-about-school

Unreasonable or vexatious complaints

We recognise that most complaints are raised genuinely and will be treated seriously. However, a complaint may be considered unreasonable if a person:

- Refuses to engage with the complaints process or accept its scope;

- Repeatedly raises the same issue after it has been fully investigated and responded to;
- Seeks outcomes that are unrealistic or unreasonable;
- Makes excessive demands on staff time through repeated contact;
- Uses abusive, offensive, threatening or discriminatory language or behaviour;
- Provides false information or publishes misleading information about the complaint.

This list is not exhaustive, and decisions will be made on a case-by-case basis.

To help ensure complaints are dealt with efficiently, complainants are encouraged to limit contact with the school while an investigation is ongoing, as repeated correspondence may delay the process.

Steps We Will Take

We will take every reasonable step to address the complainant's comments and give them a clear statement of our position and their options. We will maintain our role as an objective arbiter throughout the process, including when we meet with individuals. We will follow our complaints policy as normal (as outlined above), wherever possible.

Whenever possible, the headteacher or chair of governors will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying an 'unreasonable' marking. If the behaviour continues, the headteacher will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable, refer them to this policy and remind them to act in accordance with it. For complainants who excessively contact the school causing a significant level of disruption, we may:

- Give the complainant a single point of contact via an email address
- Limit the number of times the complainant can make contact, such as a fixed number per term
- Ask the complainant to engage a third party to act on their behalf, such as Citizens Advice
- Put any other strategy in place as necessary

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 school premises and ensuring appropriate measures of support are provided to staff where they are the subject of aggression and/or violence.

Serial/persistent complaints

Where a complainant continues to raise substantially the same issues after the complaint's procedure has been completed, the complaint may be considered serial or persistent. In such cases, the school may decide not to respond to further correspondence where:

- All reasonable steps have been taken to address the complaint;
- The complainant has received a clear response and explanation of the school's position; and

- Further contact raises no new issues or relevant information.

The school will not refuse to accept new complaints from any individual. Any decision to limit responses will relate to the specific complaint, not the complainant. Where this applies, the school will write to explain its decision and confirm that any new, materially different concerns will be considered through the appropriate procedure.

Duplicate complaints

If we have resolved a complaint under this policy and receive a duplicate complaint on the same subject from a partner, family member or other individual, we will assess whether there are aspects that we hadn't previously considered, or any new information we need to take into account.

If we are satisfied that there are no new aspects, we will:

- Tell the new complainant that we have already investigated and responded to this issue, and that the local process is complete
- Direct them to the DfE if they are dissatisfied with our original handling of the complaint

Complaint campaigns

Where the school receives a large volume of complaints about the same topic or subject, especially if these come from complainants unconnected with the school, we may respond to these complaints by:

- Publishing a single response on the school website
- Sending a template response to all of the complainants

If complainants are not satisfied with our handling of the situation, they can contact the DfE

Record keeping and confidentiality

The school will keep a confidential record of all complaints, including actions taken and outcomes reached. Records will be stored securely and accessed only by those involved in handling the complaint.

Information will be retained in line with data protection legislation and the school's records retention procedures. Records may be shared where required by law, including with Ofsted, the Department for Education, or in response to a valid request under data protection or freedom of information legislation.

Complaint details will not normally be shared with the full governing body to preserve impartiality should a panel hearing be required. Where appropriate, an independent panel may be arranged, particularly where there is a risk or perception of bias.

Monitoring

The governing body will monitor the effectiveness of the complaints procedure and review any themes or issues arising from complaints to identify opportunities for improvement. This will be done while maintaining appropriate confidentiality.

This policy will be reviewed by the headteacher and governing body every two years, or sooner if legislation or guidance changes.

The Complainant

To help achieve a timely and effective resolution, complainants are expected to:

- Follow the complaints procedure
- Clearly explain their concern and the outcome sought
- Respond promptly to requests for information or meetings
- Treat all those involved with respect
- Respect confidentiality
- Avoid contacting individual governors directly about the complaint
- Refrain from discussing complaints on social media

The Investigator

The investigator is responsible for establishing the facts and will:

- Gather and consider relevant evidence and records
- Meet with relevant individuals as appropriate
- Conduct the investigation fairly, objectively and within agreed timescales
- Keep accurate records of discussions and findings
- Produce a report outlining the findings and any recommendations

The Complaints Co-ordinator

The complaints co-ordinator (usually the headteacher, complaints governor or administrative support officer) will:

- Oversee the administration of the complaints process
- Keep the complainant informed of progress
- Liaise with relevant staff, governors and external agencies where necessary

Clerk to the Governing Board

The clerk/governance professional will:

- Arrange and administer complaints panel hearings
- Distribute relevant documentation to all parties
- Advise on procedural requirements and legal responsibilities
- Record the panel's decision and communicate the outcome
- Maintain accurate records of the process

Chair of the Complaints Panel

The panel chair will:

- Ensure the hearing is conducted fairly, respectfully and without bias
- Ensure all parties have an opportunity to present their views
- Keep discussions focused on the complaint and evidence presented
- Ensure panel members act independently and have no conflict of interest
- Work with the clerk to ensure the process is properly managed and recorded