



Complaints Procedure Policy

19 October 2026

About This Document

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History

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1. Introduction

- 1.1. The Vine Christian School takes all complaints seriously, with the purpose of reassuring parents of pupils that:
 - i. Any complaint against the school will be dealt with in a fair, open and responsive way, with the aim of achieving a timely and satisfactory resolution.
 - ii. The school recognises that a willingness to listen to questions and criticism and to respond positively, can lead to improvements in school practices and provision for pupils.
- 1.2. This procedure has been drawn up in accordance with The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations, 2014, Schedule 1, Part 7, to ensure that the school deals effectively with complaints from parents of pupils.
- 1.3. This policy is available to all parents of pupils on our website or from the office.

2. Scope Of the Procedure

- 2.1. A complaint is defined as a clear statement of dissatisfaction about any specified aspect of the school's work. This statutory procedure applies to complaints from parents of current pupils about the management and/or operation of the school. The school may consider concerns from other people under an appropriate separate process. The following matters fall outside this procedure where a separate statutory or school procedure applies:
 - i. Matters subject to a separate statutory or school procedure, including certain admissions matters, statutory SEND decisions, and suspension or permanent exclusion where a separate procedure applies.
 - ii. Safeguarding allegations or concerns, staff grievances, disciplinary matters, criminal matters and other issues that must be handled under specific procedures. Safeguarding concerns will be dealt with in accordance with the Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy.
- 2.2. For the purposes of this procedure, the term 'parent' includes a person with parental responsibility for a current pupil. Informal complaints may be made by telephone, email, in person or in writing. Formal complaints must be made in writing, either by email or letter. Complaints from people who are not parents of current pupils may be considered by the school at its discretion but do not carry the statutory rights set out in this procedure.
- 2.3. Appropriate records of conversations and meetings relating to formal complaints will be kept. Where Governors and Trustees meet to consider a complaint, an appropriate written record will be made. Copies of formal complaint correspondence, outcomes and relevant notes will be retained securely in the school's complaints records, separately from individual pupil records where appropriate.
- 2.4. If at any stage in the procedure it becomes apparent that the complaint falls outside of this general complaint's procedure, the parent will be informed and directed to the appropriate procedure where applicable.
- 2.5. There may be rare occasions when, despite all the stages of the procedure having been followed, a parent remains dissatisfied. If the parent seeks to re-open the same issue without presenting materially

new information, the school may confirm in writing that the procedure has been exhausted and the matter is closed.

- 2.6. All correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under 'section 109 of the Education and Skills Act 2008 requests access to them, or where disclosure is otherwise required by law or necessary for safeguarding purposes.

3. Stage 1: Informal Stage

- 3.1. The Independent School Standards require the procedure to allow for a complaint to be made and considered initially on an informal basis.
- 3.2. On occasions, a parent may raise a concern directly with school staff without any formality. At this stage, it may be unclear whether the parent is making a complaint, seeking information or has misunderstood a situation. In any event, the school aims to resolve the concern at this point in a timely and effective way. An appropriate record will be kept where necessary. (See Appendix 1)
- 3.3. However, if the concern is not resolved immediately and a complaint is confirmed by the parent, the parent will be given the opportunity to discuss the matter with an appropriate member of staff will be given.
- 3.4. The member of staff will discuss the issue with the parent and those involved in school, with the aim of resolving the complaint as soon as possible. The parent will be informed of the outcome of the investigation and what action, if any, the school proposes to take. The matter should be dealt with within 7 school days of the verbal complaint.
- 3.5. If the informal process has been exhausted and no satisfactory solution has been found, the parent will be asked by the member of staff dealing with the complaint whether he/she wishes the complaint to be considered formally at stage two of this procedure.
- 3.6. If wishing to proceed with the complaint, the parent will be invited to put the complaint in writing to the Head Teacher. The letter should be sent to the Head Teacher within 7 school days.

4. Stage 2: Formal Written Complaint and Further Investigation

- 4.1. Where another staff member addressed the complaint at Stage 1, Stage 2 will normally be considered by the Principal/Headteacher. Where the Principal/Headteacher dealt with the complaint at Stage 1, or is the subject of the complaint, Stage 2 will be considered by the Chair of Governors/Trustees, another suitable Governor/Trustee, as appropriate. The person considering Stage 2 must not be the person whose conduct is the subject of the complaint. (See Appendix 2)
- 4.2. The person responsible for Stage 2 will acknowledge the written complaint within 5 school days of receipt and may provide an opportunity to meet the parent to discuss the complaint.
- 4.3. The person responsible for Stage 2 will investigate the complaint and a written response will normally be made within 10 school days of receipt of the complaint. If this is not possible, the parent will be informed of the reason for the delay and given a revised target date.

- 4.4. The written response will include reasons for the conclusions reached and what action, if any, the school proposes to take as a result of the complaint.
- 4.5. If the parent remains dissatisfied, they will be advised that, to progress the complaint to Stage 3, they should notify the Governors and Trustees in writing within 10 school days of the Stage 2 response, setting out the reasons why they remain dissatisfied.
- 4.6. The Governors/Trustees will then arrange for the complaint to be considered by a Complaints Panel at Stage 3 of this Procedure
- 4.7. The Governors/Trustees will then ensure that the parent is offered the opportunity of taking the complaint to a Complaints Panel at Stage 3 of this Procedure.

5. Stage 3: Review by The Governors and Trustees Complaints Panel

- 5.1. Complaints only rarely reach this level. However, when the need arises, the Complaints Panel (established according to Appendix 3) will consider the complaint. If the complaint is not resolved after Stages 1 and 2, a panel of at least three people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint will be appointed by or on behalf of the Chair of Governors and Trustees. At least one panel member must be independent of the management and running of the school.
- 5.2. A written acknowledgement of the request for a Stage 3 panel hearing will be sent to the parent within 5 school days.
- 5.3. The letter will inform the parent that the complaint will normally be heard by the Complaints Panel within 20 school days of receiving the Stage 3 request. It will explain the arrangements for submitting further documents and witnesses, subject to the Chair's directions, and confirm the parent's right to attend and be accompanied at the panel hearing if they wish.
- 5.4. The Complaints Panel will ensure that relevant parties receive the necessary papers and may request a written response to the complaint within a reasonable timescale. Any proposed witnesses will be subject to the approval and directions of the Chair.
- 5.5. The Complaints Panel may review the papers in advance but will not reach findings or recommendations until it has considered the complaint fairly at the hearing.
- 5.6. The Complaints Panel will convene a meeting, having consulted with the parties where reasonably practicable. The date, time and venue or remote-access arrangements will normally be confirmed at least 5 school days in advance.
- 5.7. The names of the parties and approved witnesses, together with the relevant documents to be considered at the hearing, will be provided to the parent, the school representative and each panel member as soon as reasonably practicable and normally at least 5 school days before the hearing.
- 5.8. The meeting will be held following the procedures for hearing a complaint detailed in Appendix 4.
- 5.9. The panel's written findings and recommendations will normally be sent within 5 school days of the hearing to the parent and, where relevant, the person complained about. The panel's decision concludes the school's internal complaints procedure. If a parent believes that the school is failing to meet the Independent School Standards, they may raise the matter with the Department for Education, which acts as the regulator of independent schools and does not normally reinvestigate the merits of an individual complaint.

- 5.10. The panel's findings and recommendations will be confirmed in writing to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about, and will be made available for inspection on the school premises by the Chair of Governors and the Principal/Headteacher.
- 5.11. A written record will be kept of all complaints made under the formal Stage 2 procedure, whether they are resolved following the formal procedure or proceed to a panel hearing, and of any action taken by the school as a result, regardless of whether the complaint is upheld. Records will be retained securely in accordance with the school's records retention schedule and data protection arrangements. Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the Education and Skills Act 2008 requests access to them, or where disclosure is otherwise required by law or necessary for safeguarding purposes.

Appendix 1

Information regarding Informal School Complaint Stage 1

To be filled out by the school staff member receiving the informal complaint:

Name of person completing form:	
Child's name (to whom issue relates):	
Class Supervisor:	
Parent/Guardian:	
Contact details (including mobile number if appropriate):	
Details of complaint: (Please be as specific as possible for example, dates, who was involved etc.) Please attach any emails, text messages etc, that you have received:	
What was done to resolve the complaint and bring the matter to an acceptable closure for the parents and school?	
Signed and dated: Staff Member:	

Appendix 2

Form to notify School of Formal Complaint Stage 2 and/or Stage 3

Child's name (to whom issue relates):	
Class Supervisor:	
Parent/Guardian:	
Contact details (including mobile number if appropriate):	
Details of Complaint: (Please be as specific as possible for example dates, who was involved etc.) Please attach continuation sheet/additional information if you wish:	
What would you like to see done to resolve your complaint and bring the matter to an acceptable closure for yourself and the school?	
Signed and dated: Parent/Guardian	

Please return the completed form to the Headteacher at the school. Records will be kept on file in the 'Complaints' folder at the school.

Appendix 3

Composition of the Governors and Trustees Complaints Panel

The Complaints Panel must consist of at least three people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint. At least one member must be independent of the management and running of the school. A Chair of the Complaints Panel should be appointed.

The Governors/Trustees may identify suitable panel members and reserves in advance so that a compliant panel can be convened within the published timescales.

No member of the Complaints Panel should have been directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint. As the Chair of the Governors/Trustees may have been involved at an earlier stage in the procedure, particularly where the complaint is about the Principal/Headteacher, the Chair should not sit on the panel where this would create a conflict of interest or prior involvement.

The Principal/Headteacher should not be a panel member where they were directly involved in the matters complained about. They may attend the hearing to give evidence and may request that relevant staff attend, subject to the approval of the Chair of the Complaints Panel.

Appendix 4

Governors and Trustees Complaints Panel Procedures for Hearing the Complaint

Introduction

The aim of the meeting is to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the parent. The Chair of the Complaints Panel will ensure that the meeting is properly minuted.

Although the meeting will follow the structured order below, given potential sensitivities and anxieties, the Chair will endeavour to ensure that the proceedings are as informal as possible and that all parties are put at their ease. The introduction of new information or witnesses, previously not notified to all parties, would be reason to adjourn the meeting so that everyone has time to consider and respond to the new information.

Order of Meeting

- The Chair welcomes the parent and their companion and introduces the Complaints Panel.
- The Chair explains the purpose of the meeting, the procedure, and that all written evidence has been made available to all parties.
- The parent/companion explains the complaint, calling in witnesses if appropriate.
- The Complaints Panel may question the parent/companion and witnesses.
- The parent and companion retire from the meeting.
- The Chair welcomes the Headteacher, or other staff members (where the complaint has been addressed by any of these persons at stage 2).
- The Chair explains the purpose of the meeting, the procedure, and that all written evidence has been made available to all parties.

- The Headteacher, or other staff members presents a response to the complaint, including action taken to address the complaint at stage 1 and 2 of the procedure and calling witnesses, if appropriate.
- The Complaints Panel may question the Headteacher, or other staff members.
- The Headteacher, or other staff members retire from the meeting.
- The parent, together with their companion, is invited back into the room to make a final statement, and then retires.
- The Headteacher, or other staff members where applicable, are invited back into the room to make a final statement and then retire.
- The Complaints Panel considers the complaint, and all evidence presented, reaches a unanimous or majority decision, makes findings and recommendations, and decides what action, if any, to recommend. Where appropriate, the panel may recommend changes to reduce the risk of similar complaints arising in future.
- When a decision has been made, the Chair may recall the parent and the school representative to explain the outcome, subject to the written findings and recommendations that will follow.
- The findings and recommendations are confirmed in writing to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about; and made available for inspection on the school premises by the proprietor and the Headteacher.
- A written record will be kept of all formal complaints, whether they are resolved following the formal procedure or proceed to a panel hearing, and of any action taken by the school as a result, regardless of whether the complaint is upheld.
- All correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 162A of the 2002 Act requests access to them.

Appendix 5

Summary of the Complaints Procedure

The following summary of the Complaints Procedure could be included in the Parent Handbook.

- 5.12. **Informal** - Informal complaints may be made by telephone, e-mail, in person or in writing to the Principal/Head Teacher or another appropriate member of staff via the school office. Complaints about the Principal/Headteacher should be directed to the Chair of Governors/Trustees.
- 5.13. The school will normally respond within 10 school days of receiving the complaint.
- 5.14. **Formal** - If the complaint is not successfully resolved after Stage 1, the complaint should be made in writing to the Principal/Head Teacher, or, where appropriate, the Chair of Governors/Trustees.
- 5.15. The written complaint will be acknowledged within **5 school days**.
- 5.16. A written Stage 2 response will normally be provided within 10 school days of receiving the written complaint.
- 5.17. **Panel** - If the complaint is still not resolved after Stages 1 and 2, the Governors/Trustees should be contacted in writing within 10 school days of the Stage 2 response.
- 5.18. A panel of at least three people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint will be appointed by or on behalf of the proprietor. At least one member will be independent of the management and running of the school.
- 5.19. The complaint will normally be heard by the Complaints Panel within 20 school days of receiving the Stage 3 request.
- 5.20. Parents may attend the panel hearing and may be accompanied if they wish.
- 5.21. The panel's written findings and recommendations will normally be issued within 5 school days of the hearing.
- 5.22. The panel will put its findings and recommendations in writing.
- 5.23. A copy will be provided to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about.
- 5.24. Records of formal complaints, outcomes and action taken will be retained securely in accordance with the school's records retention schedule and data protection arrangements.
- 5.25. Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential, subject to the exceptions stated in this procedure.