



## Complaints Policy

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**Where possible we offer translation or explanation of written communication. Please contact the school office if you require forms/paperwork in any other format.**

## **Introduction**

Silsoe VC Lower School endeavours to provide the best possible education for all of its pupils in an open and transparent environment. We welcome any feedback that we receive from parents, pupils and third parties, and we accept that not all of this will be positive. Where concerns are raised the school intends for these to be dealt with:

- Fairly
- Openly
- Promptly
- Without Prejudice

In order to do so, the Governing Board of Silsoe VC Lower School has approved the following procedure which explains what you should do if you wish to make a complaint about the school. All members of staff will be familiar with the procedure and will be able to assist you.

In accordance with prevailing equality legislation and guidance, we will consider making reasonable adjustments if required, to enable complainants to access and complete this complaints procedure. For instance, providing information in alternative formats, assisting complainants in raising a formal complaint or holding meetings in accessible locations.

Complainants should not approach individual governors to raise concerns or complaints. They have no power to act on an individual basis and it may also prevent them from considering complaints at Stage 2 of the procedure.

## **Complaints That Fall Outside Of This Procedure**

Complaints relating to the following issues are covered by a separate/specific policy.

- Pupil admissions; please see the school's Admissions Policy or contact Central Bedfordshire Council
- Pupil exclusions; please see the school's Suspension & Exclusion Policy
- Staff grievance, capability or disciplinary; these are covered by the school's grievance procedure.
- Where the complaint concerns a third party used by the school; please complain directly to the third party themselves
- Subject Access Requests and Freedom of Information Requests – please see the school's Data Protection and Freedom of Information policy

These policies are available on the school website or on request from the school.

## **Resolving Concerns Informally**

For the purpose of this procedure concerns are defined as having a worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought. The majority of concerns can be dealt with without resorting to the formal stages of the formal complaints procedure (see below). On most occasions, concerns can be resolved immediately by speaking to your child's Class Teacher. It may be necessary for you to make an appointment at a time which is convenient to you both.

Please let the Teacher know the nature of your concern when making an appointment so that they may investigate further on your behalf if necessary.

The purpose of the meeting should be to establish a solution or to agree a plan of action to resolve the concern. If the meeting fails to do so then you should make an appointment to see the Head Teacher.

The Head Teacher will normally make further investigations on your behalf and meet with you to suggest a workable solution. If you feel that the matter is not satisfactorily resolved, you may request a further meeting with the Head Teacher or consider making the matter the subject of a formal complaint.

It is important that due procedure is followed with a view to seeking resolution to a concern or complaint. A failure to follow the procedure may result in the procedure being terminated by the Governing Board.

The formal stages of the procedure should be followed when attempts to resolve concerns informally have proved unsuccessful, and in cases where individuals wish to raise their concern formally.

## **Complaints About The Head Teacher or The Governors**

Where a complaint is about the Head Teacher, the complainant should notify the Clerk to the Governors (see contact details at the end of the document). The stage one process (see the formal stages below) will then commence, but with the Chair of Governors as the individual responsible for the investigation, rather than the Head Teacher.

Where a complaint concerns a Governor the complainant should contact the Clerk to the Governing Board. The Clerk will then determine the most appropriate course of action, seeking advice as appropriate. This will depend upon the nature of the complaint.

## **The Timescale for Making a Complaint**

Notification of a complaint should be given as soon as possible after the issue that led to the complaint has occurred and after informal attempts to seek resolution have proved unsuccessful. Complaints that are submitted three months after the issue that led to the complaint occurred will not be considered under this procedure unless

there are exceptional circumstances. These may include (but are not limited to) subsequent information about the complaint coming to light and a valid explanation of why it was not possible to give notification of the complaint sooner. In such cases the Head Teacher/chair of the Governing Board/clerk to the Governing Board (as appropriate) will review the circumstances, seek advice and determine whether the complaint should be considered under the formal procedure.

### **Maintaining Records**

A confidential written record of all complaints that are made in accordance with this procedure will be kept by the school. The written record will include whether the complaint has been resolved following a formal procedure and whether it proceeded to a panel review meeting. It will also refer to any action taken by the school as a result of the complaint regardless of whether it has been upheld.

### **Maintaining Confidentiality**

Informal concerns and complaints will be dealt with confidentially at all stages and at the conclusion of the procedure. Confidentiality should be maintained all times by everyone involved. The Governing Board of Silsoe VC Lower School requests that complaints are not discussed publically, including via social media.

Actions taken in relation to school staff that arise as a result of the complaint will remain confidential to the school and the member of staff concerned.

Written records taken and used throughout the complaints process, including correspondence, notes of meetings, telephone calls etc., will be kept securely and in accordance with the principles of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and Data Protection Act 2018.

### **Safeguarding**

Wherever a concern indicates that a child's wellbeing or safety is at risk, the school is duty bound to report this immediately to the local authority. Any action taken will be in accordance with the school's safeguarding policy which can be found on the school's website or on request from the school.

### **Withdrawal of a Complaint**

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

## The Formal Stages of the Complaints Procedure

***The majority of concerns can be dealt with without resorting to the formal stages of the procedure.*** If you need to raise a concern then please do so with the relevant member of staff who will be happy to talk to you and seek to resolve it. There are **two** formal stages of the complaints procedure.

### Stage 1 – Formal investigation by Head Teacher or Chair of Governing Board

1. A request for a formal investigation of a complaint by the Head Teacher should be made in writing C/O the school, or by completing the formal complaints form that is included as Appendix 1 of this procedure.
2. A request for a formal investigation of a complaint by the chair of the Governing Board should be made in writing C/O the Clerk to the Governing Board, or by completing the formal complaints form that is included as Appendix 1 of this procedure
3. The Head Teacher (or chair of the Governing Board as appropriate) will acknowledge the request in writing no later than 10 working days (excluding those that fall in the school holidays) of receiving it. The written acknowledgment will, as far as possible, explain how the complaint will be investigated and the timescale for completing the investigation.
4. A log of all correspondence in relation to the complaint will be kept in accordance with the Data Protection Principles.
5. The Head Teacher will consider all relevant evidence. This **may** include, but is not limited to:
  - obtaining statements from the complainant and all those involved with the complaint
  - meeting with the complainant and those involved in the complaint
  - reviewing correspondence and other documents relating to the complaint
6. After considering the available evidence, the Head Teacher can decide to:
  - uphold the complaint and direct that certain action be taken to resolve it
  - uphold the complaint in part (in other words find an aspect or aspects of the complaint to be valid, but not the whole complaint) direct for certain action to be taken, or
  - dismiss the complaint entirely
7. The Head Teacher will inform the complainant of their decision in writing, the grounds on which it was made and any actions taken as a result of the

complaint. This will be within 20 working days (excluding those that fall in the school holidays) of having issued written acknowledgement of receipt of the complaint (see 2 above). The written notification shall also advise the complainant of their right to escalate the complaint to stage 2 of the formal complaints procedure if they are not satisfied with the outcome at stage 1, including the contact details of the Clerk to the Governing Board (see page 9).

### Stage 2 – Review by a panel of the Governing Board

The complainant is entitled to request a further review of the complaint where it is dissatisfied with the decision and actions taken at stage 1. The review is carried out by a panel of the Governing Board at a meeting convened by the Clerk to the Governing Board.

Requests for a review of the decision taken at stage 1 should be made in writing to the Clerk (see contact details below) no later than 4 weeks after written notification of the decision taken has been received. The request should include a brief summary of the complaint, why the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of stage 1 and the outcome they are seeking. The summary should only include details of the original complaint and should not present any new information.

The Clerk will fulfil the role of organising the time and date of the review meeting, inviting all the attendees, collating all the relevant documentation and distributing this 5 days in advance of the meeting. Minutes of the review meeting will be taken by the Clerk and provided with the written notification of the decision taken at stage 2 (see 9 below).

The aim of the meeting should be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant.

The following steps are taken at stage 2:

1. The Clerk will acknowledge the written request for the complaint to be reviewed no later than ten working days (not including the school holidays) after receiving it.
2. The Clerk will convene a panel of three school governors to review the original complaint. All three panel members will have no prior knowledge of the content of the complaint.
3. The review meeting will take place within 20 working days (excluding those which fall in the school holidays) of receipt of the written acknowledgement from the clerk (see 1 above).
4. The panel **may** decide to invite the following to attend the review meeting:

- the complainant
  - the Head Teacher (or chair of the Governing Board as appropriate) who investigated the complaint and made the decision at stage 1
  - relevant persons involved in the complaint
  - persons whom, in the view of the panel, can provide relevant advice and information relating to the subject of the complaint and the review process at stage 2.
5. Where the complainant, Head Teacher and/or relevant person involved in the complaint have been invited to attend the review meeting, they are entitled to be accompanied by a family member/friend/representative as appropriate. However, legal representatives are not permitted to attend the review meeting.
  6. Where the relevant persons involved in the complaint include pupils at the school, and their attendance at the review meeting has been requested by the panel, parental permission must be sought if they are under the age of 18. Extra care will be taken to consider the vulnerability of children where they are present at a complaints hearing.
  7. Where the complaint is about a Governor/Governing Board the complainant may request that the review meeting is held by an independent panel. This is at the discretion of the Governing Board who will notify the Clerk of their decision. Where an entirely independent panel is required, timescales may be affected while the school source appropriate individuals for the review.
  8. After considering the complaint afresh and reviewing the available evidence, the panel reviewing the complaint can decide to:
    - uphold the complaint and direct that certain action be taken to resolve it;
    - uphold the complaint in part (in other words find an aspect or aspects of the complaint to be valid, but not the whole complaint) and direct for certain action to be taken, or
    - dismiss the complaint entirely.

Irrespective of the decision taken, the panel may also recommend steps that the complainant and the school should take to move forward from the presenting issues in the best interests of all concerned. The panel may also recommend steps to be taken that reduce the likelihood of a similar complaint being made in the future.

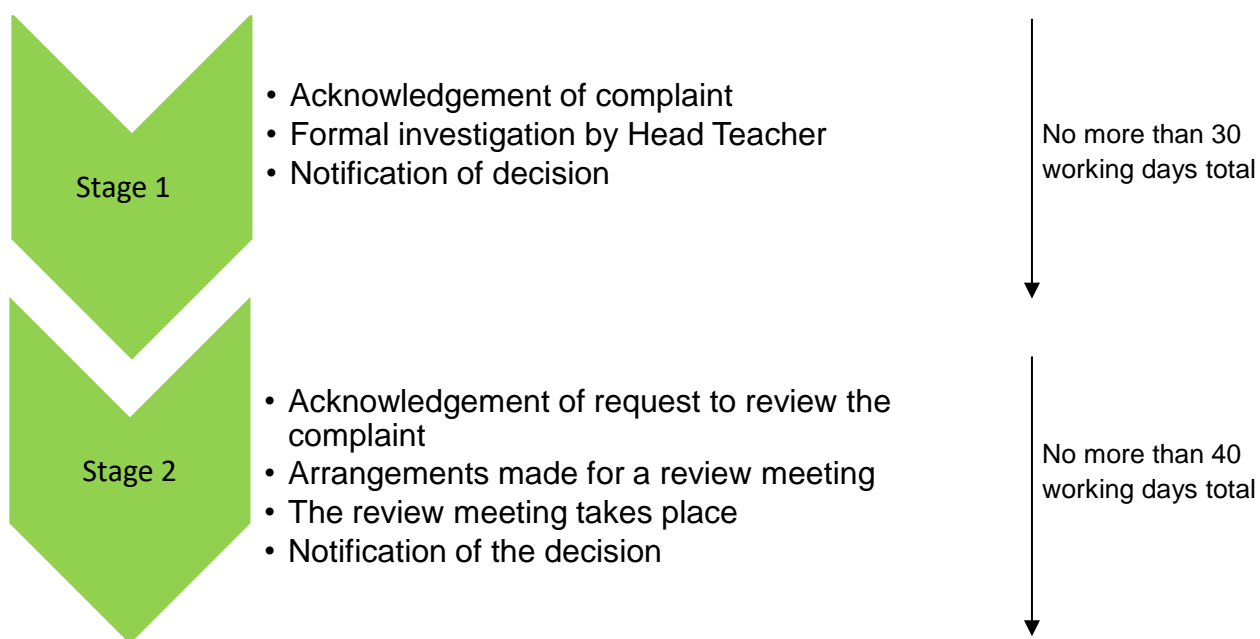
9. The complainant, the Head Teacher (or chair of the Governing Board as appropriate) who investigated the complaint and made the decision at stage 1, and, where relevant, the person complained about will be informed in writing of the outcome of the review meeting no later than 10 working days (excluding those which fall in the school holidays) after the review meeting has taken place.

This is the **final stage** at which the school will consider the complaint. If the complainant remains dissatisfied and wishes to escalate the complaint further they should refer to the following:

- If the complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome of the complaints procedure they may contact the local authority – Central Bedfordshire Council.
- If the complainant feels that the Governing Board acted ‘unreasonably’ in the handling of the complaint, they can complain to the Department for Education after the complaints procedure has been exhausted. Please note that ‘unreasonable’ is used in a legal sense and means acting in a way in which no reasonable school or authority would act in the same circumstances. <https://www.gov.uk/complain-about-school>



## Timescale for Completing the Formal Stages of the Procedure



Silsoe VC Lower School will endeavour to complete the formal stages of its complaints procedure in a timely manner and within the timescale for each stage that is referred to above. However, if it becomes clear that for any reason Silsoe VC Lower School is unable to meet the timescale for completing a stage of the procedure, the complainant will be advised of this immediately, along with the reason for the delay and the revised timescale.

### **Serial, Persistent and Unreasonable Complaints**

For the purpose of this procedure a complaint may be viewed as serial and/or persistent if it relates to the same issue that was the subject of a previous complaint (made by the same complainant) which has already been through a formal complaints procedure in which the complainant has been notified of the outcome. In such cases it is likely that the complainant will be informed that the matter is now closed and that Silsoe VC Lower School will provide no further response.

For the purpose of this procedure a complaint may be viewed as unreasonable if it contains threatening, abusive or offensive language and conveys unrealistic outcomes beyond all reason. In such cases the Head Teacher/chair of the Governing Board/clerk to the Governing Board (as appropriate) will consult with relevant parties and may decide that the complaint is not considered under this procedure. The complainant will be notified in writing that this is the case and that Silsoe VC Lower School will provide no further response.

Queries regarding any aspect of the complaints procedure should be directed to the Clerk to the Governing Board at the following address [skeely@silsoelower.co.uk](mailto:skeely@silsoelower.co.uk).

**Appendix 1**  
**Silsoe VC Lower School Formal Complaints Form**

Complaintive Name	
Name of pupil	
Year group	
Your relationship to them (where applicable)	
Contact address	
Contact telephone day	
Contact telephone mobile	
Contact email address	
Details of the complaint	

Action taken so far (including staff member who has dealt with it so far) or solutions offered

The reason that this was not a satisfactory resolution for you

What action would you like to be taken to resolve the problem?

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Dated: \_\_\_\_\_

*Official use*

Date received:

Signed: