



Complaints Policy

Approved by: Full Governing Body

Last reviewed: June 2026

Next review due by: June 2027

1. AIMS

Dorchester Primary School aims to meet its statutory obligations when responding to complaints from parents, carers, pupils, former pupils and members of the public.

When responding to complaints, we aim to:

- Be impartial and non-adversarial.
- Facilitate a full and fair investigation.
- Address all points raised and provide an effective and timely response.
- Treat complainants with courtesy, dignity and respect.
- Keep complainants informed throughout the process.
- Ensure decisions are lawful, reasonable, proportionate and evidence-based.
- Learn from complaints and use them to improve practice where appropriate.

The school will seek to resolve concerns informally wherever possible. Where this is not possible, formal procedures will be followed.

Throughout the process, we will be sensitive to the needs of all parties and make reasonable adjustments where required. These may include providing assistance with completing complaint forms, arranging interpretation or translation services where reasonably practicable, and considering alternative methods of communication where necessary.

2. LEGISLATION AND GUIDANCE

This policy meets the requirements of Section 29 of the Education Act 2002 and is based on the Department for Education's guidance "Best Practice Advice for School Complaints Procedures".

3. DEFINITIONS AND SCOPE

A concern is an expression of worry or doubt for which reassurances are sought.

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about actions taken or a lack of action.

This procedure does not cover:

- Admissions.
 - Statutory SEND assessments, Education, Health and Care (EHC) needs assessments, the contents of an EHCP or the naming of a school.
 - Child protection and safeguarding matters (these are managed in accordance with the school's Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy and relevant statutory safeguarding procedures).
 - Suspension or permanent exclusion.
 - Staff grievances.
 - Staff disciplinary matters.
 - Whistleblowing.
 - School reorganisation proposals.
 - Curriculum content.
 - Collective worship.
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- Data protection matters.

Separate statutory or published procedures apply to these matters.

3A. PARALLEL OR EXTERNAL PROCESSES

There may be occasions where issues raised within a complaint are also being considered under another statutory or regulatory process. Examples include, but are not limited to:

- child protection or safeguarding enquiries;
- Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) procedures;
- Children's Services investigations;
- police investigations;
- employment or disciplinary processes;
- data protection complaints;
- Special Educational Needs or Education, Health and Care (EHCP) appeals; and
- investigations by external regulators or other statutory bodies.

Where this occurs, the school will consider whether all or part of the complaints procedure should continue alongside those processes or whether it is appropriate to pause, defer or limit aspects of the investigation until the relevant statutory process has concluded.

This is to ensure that:

- statutory investigations are not compromised;
- evidence is not prejudiced;
- confidential information relating to third parties is protected appropriately; and
- all relevant findings are available before the school reaches its conclusions where appropriate.

Where a complaint contains matters that fall both within and outside the scope of this policy, the school may separate those issues and deal with each under the appropriate procedure. The complainant will be informed, where reasonably practicable, which aspects are being considered under which process.

The existence of a parallel investigation does not prevent the school from taking any immediate action necessary to safeguard pupils or comply with its statutory duties.

4. GENERAL PRINCIPLES

The school will seek to establish:

- What happened.
- Who was involved.
- What outcome the complainant is seeking.
- Whether the matter can be resolved informally.

The school expects all parties involved in a complaint to behave respectfully throughout the process.

Complaints should normally be raised within three months of the incident or, where there is a series of incidents, within three months of the last incident.

The school may consider complaints outside this timeframe where there are exceptional circumstances.

5. ANONYMOUS COMPLAINTS

Anonymous complaints will not normally be investigated.

However, the Headteacher or Chair of Governors may decide to investigate where there is sufficient evidence, where safeguarding concerns are raised, or where the issues are considered sufficiently serious to warrant investigation. Anonymous safeguarding concerns will be considered in accordance with the school's Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy.

6. STAGE 1 – INFORMAL RESOLUTION

Most concerns can be resolved quickly by discussing them with the relevant member of staff.

Concerns should normally be raised with:

- The class teacher.
- The relevant member of staff.
- The Headteacher where appropriate.

The school will aim to acknowledge concerns within five school days and resolve them as quickly as possible.

Where the concern cannot be resolved informally, it may proceed to Stage 2.

7. STAGE 2 – FORMAL COMPLAINT

Formal complaints should normally be submitted in writing to the Headteacher. Where this is not reasonably practicable, the school will provide appropriate assistance to enable the complaint to be made.

The complaint should include:

- Details of the complaint.
- Relevant dates and times.
- Names of any witnesses.
- Copies of relevant documentation.
- The outcome sought.

The Headteacher will:

- Acknowledge receipt within three school days.
- Clarify the issues complained of and, where necessary, the outcome sought before commencing the investigation.
- Conduct an investigation.
- Provide a written response within twenty school days.

Where this timescale cannot reasonably be met, the complainant will be informed of the reasons for the delay and provided with a revised timescale.

If the complainant remains dissatisfied, they may request a review by the Governing Board Complaints Panel within ten school days of receiving the outcome.

The school may decline to investigate issues that are currently the subject of ongoing police investigations, statutory safeguarding enquiries or legal proceedings where doing so could prejudice those processes. The complainant will be informed where this applies.

8. STAGE 3 – GOVERNING BOARD COMPLAINTS PANEL

The complainant should write to the Clerk to Governors requesting a review.

The panel will normally consist of at least three governors who:

- Have had no prior involvement in the complaint.
- Have no conflict of interest.
- Can act impartially.

Where sufficient impartial governors are not available, the school may appoint suitably independent individuals from another school, the local authority or another appropriate source.

The complainant will receive reasonable notice of the hearing date.

The complainant may attend and may be accompanied by a friend, relative or advocate.

Legal representation is not normally appropriate but may be permitted in exceptional circumstances.

The panel will consider:

- The complaint.
- The evidence gathered.
- Whether the complaint was handled appropriately.
- Whether any further action is required.

The panel may:

- Uphold the complaint in whole or part.
- Dismiss the complaint in whole or part.
- Recommend actions to resolve the complaint.
- Recommend changes to school procedures.

The panel's decision will be provided in writing within seven school days of the hearing.

The decision of the panel is final in relation to the school's complaints procedure. This does not prevent a complainant from referring the matter to the Department for Education or another appropriate body where applicable.

9. COMPLAINTS AGAINST THE HEADTEACHER OR GOVERNORS

Complaints about the Headteacher should be addressed to the Chair of Governors via the Clerk to Governors.

Complaints about a governor or the governing board should be addressed to the Clerk to Governors.

Appropriate alternative arrangements will be made to ensure impartiality throughout the process.

10. REFERRAL TO THE DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION

If the complainant believes the school has failed to follow its complaints procedure correctly or has failed to meet its statutory obligations, they may refer the matter to the Department for Education once the school's complaints procedure has been completed.

The Department for Education will not normally reinvestigate the substance of a complaint or overturn decisions made by schools.

Further information is available at: <https://www.gov.uk/complain-about-school>

11. COMPLAINTS INVOLVING MULTIPLE ISSUES

Where a complaint raises several distinct issues that fall under different statutory or organisational procedures, the school may consider each issue under the appropriate process rather than through a single investigation. The complainant will be informed where this approach is taken.

12. PERSISTENT OR UNREASONABLE COMPLAINTS

The school recognises that the vast majority of complaints are genuine and will be handled respectfully.

However, a complaint may be considered unreasonable where a complainant:

- Repeatedly raises substantially the same issue.
- Refuses to accept the outcome of a completed procedure.
- Uses abusive, offensive or threatening language.
- Makes excessive demands on school time and resources.
- Pursues unrealistic outcomes.

The school may:

- Restrict communication to a single point of contact.
- Limit the frequency of correspondence.
- Require communication in writing.
- Refuse to consider matters already fully investigated.

Any restrictions will be proportionate, reasonable and communicated in writing.

13. RECORD KEEPING

The school will maintain confidential records of all formal complaints including:

- Correspondence.
- Notes of meetings.
- Investigation records.
- Decisions and outcomes.

Records will be stored securely and retained in accordance with the school's records retention schedule and data protection obligations.

Where the school is aware that records may be relevant to an ongoing complaint, statutory enquiry, regulatory investigation or legal proceedings, it will take appropriate steps to preserve relevant records in accordance with its legal and statutory obligations.

14. LEARNING FROM COMPLAINTS

The Governing Board will review anonymised complaint themes periodically to identify opportunities for improvement.

15. MONITORING AND REVIEW

The Governing Board will monitor the effectiveness of this policy.

The policy will be reviewed annually and approved by the Full Governing Board.

15. RELATED POLICIES

- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy.
- Admissions Policy.
- Behaviour Policy.
- Suspension and Exclusion Policy.
- SEND Policy and Information Report.
- Staff Grievance Procedure.
- Staff Disciplinary Procedure.
- Whistleblowing Policy.
- Data Protection Policies.