



SHERBORNE QATAR

Complaints Policy

Approved by: The Bursar

Last reviewed on: 4th June 2023

Next review due by: June 2026

Contents

1. Aims	3
2. Definitions and scope	3
3. Roles and responsibilities.....	4
4. Principles for investigation	5
5. Stages of complaint	6
6. The Outcome	8
7. Unreasonable persistent complaints.....	8
8. Duplicate complaints	9
9. Record keeping	9
10. Monitoring arrangements	10

1. Aims

The school (Defined as the Sherborne Qatar family of Schools) aims to meet its statutory obligations when responding to complaints from parents of pupils at the school, and others.

When responding to complaints, the school aims to:

- Be impartial and non-adversarial;
- Facilitate a full and fair investigation by an independent person or panel, where necessary;
- Address all the points at issue and provide an effective and prompt response;
- Respect complainants' desire for confidentiality;
- Treat complainants with respect and courtesy;
- Ensure that any decisions the school makes are lawful, rational, reasonable, fair and proportionate;
- Keep complainants informed of the progress of the complaints process;
- Consider how the complaint can feed into school improvement evaluation processes.

The school tries to resolve concerns or complaints by informal means wherever possible. Where this is not possible, formal procedures will be followed.

The school will aim to give the complainant the opportunity to complete the complaints procedure in full.

To support this, the school will ensure the existence of this policy is publicised and made available on the school website.

2. Definitions and scope

2.1 Definitions

Sherborne adopts the DfE explanation regarding the difference between a concern and a complaint:

- A **concern** is defined as "an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought". The school will resolve concerns through day-to-day communication as far as possible;
- A **complaint** is defined as "an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action";

2.2 Scope

The school intends to resolve complaints informally where possible, at the earliest possible stage.

There may be occasions when complainants would like to raise their concerns formally. This policy outlines the procedure relating to handling such complaints.

This policy does **not** cover complaints procedures relating to:

- Admissions
- Safeguarding matters
- Exclusion
- Staff grievances
- Staff discipline

Arrangements for handling complaints from parents of children with special educational needs (SEN) about the school's support are within the scope of this policy. Such complaints should first be made to the class teacher and/or the Director of Learning Support or Intervention; they will then be referred to this complaints policy.

3. Roles and responsibilities

3.1 The complainant

The complainant will get a more effective and timely response to their complaint if they:

- Follow these procedures;
- Co-operate with the school throughout the process, and respond to deadlines and communication promptly;
- Treat all those involved with respect;
- Not publish details about the complaint on social media.

3.2 The investigator

An individual will be appointed to look into the complaint and establish the facts. They will:

- Interview all relevant parties, keeping notes;
- Consider records and any written evidence and keep these securely;
- Prepare a comprehensive report to the Headteacher or Executive Committee which includes the facts and potential solutions.

3.3 Clerk to the Board of Governors

The Clerk will:

- Be the contact point for the complainant and the Headteacher or Executive Committee, including circulating the relevant papers and evidence before complaints committee meetings;
- Arrange the complaints hearing;

- Record and circulate the minutes and outcome of the hearing.

3.4 Committee chair

The committee chair (selected by the Executive Committee) will:

- Chair the meeting, ensuring that everyone is treated with respect throughout;
- Make sure all parties see the relevant information, understand the purpose of the committee, and are allowed to present their case.

4. Principles for investigation

When investigating a complaint, the school will try to clarify:

- What has happened;
- Who was involved;
- What the complainant feels would put things right.

4.1 Time scales

The complainant must raise the complaint within 2 months of the incident. If the complaint is about a series of related incidents, they must raise the complaint within 2 months of the last incident.

The school will consider exceptions to this time frame 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.

When complaints are made out of term time, the school will consider them to have been received on the next school day.

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

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

4.2 Complaints about our fulfilment of early years requirements

The school will investigate all written complaints relating to the fulfilment of the Early Years Foundation Stage requirements and notify the complainant of the outcome within 28 days of receiving the complaint. The school will keep a record of the complaint (see section 10).

5. Stages of complaint

5.1 Stage 1: informal

Parents are able to make a complaint either personally, in writing or by phone to any member of staff. It is hoped that most complaints and concerns will be resolved quickly and informally.

If parents have a complaint, in the first instance they should normally contact their child's form or class teacher or subject teacher. In many cases, the matter will be resolved straightaway.

If the form or class teacher or subject teacher cannot resolve the matter alone, it may be necessary for him/her to consult with the Deputy Head and in the last instance, the Headteacher who will also liaise with the Principal and Bursar.

Complaints made directly to the Headteacher will usually be referred to the relevant Deputy Head who will liaise with the form or class teacher or subject teacher.

The Deputy Head will make a written record of all concerns and complaints and the date on which they were received. If the complaint is not resolved informally, it will be escalated to a formal complaint.

5.2 Stage 2: formal

If the complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis, then the complainant can raise a formal complaint.

Formal complaint should be raised within five school days following the outcome of the informal process. By contacting the Clerk to the Board of Governors by email execsec@sherborneqatar.org.

The complainant should provide details such as relevant dates, times, and the names of witnesses of events, alongside copies of any relevant documents, and what they feel would resolve the complaint.

The clerk will need the details of the complaint as set out above, as well as details from the complainant on how they feel the previous stage of the procedure has not addressed their complaint sufficiently, and what they feel would resolve the complaint. The school will –

- Try to ensure that the nature of the complaint is clearly understood. If it is not obvious, then time will be given to the complainant to explain.
- Take each complaint seriously and ensure that the parents feel that their views matter.
- Consider the facts carefully. The school will not rush into a decision and hopes that the complainant will appreciate that the school's response will be "considered".
- Provide a detailed response to the complainant, including an indication of when the school believes it will be able to respond more fully. This will normally be not more than 14 school days after the date of the formal complaint.

If the complainant wishes to proceed to the next stage of the procedure (following failure to reach an earlier resolution), they should inform the Clerk to the Governors by email execsec@sherborneqatar.org within 5 school days of the formal outcome. Requests received outside of this time frame will be considered in exceptional circumstances. The Clerk will acknowledge receipt of the request within 3 school days.

5.3 Stage 3: submit the complaint to the review panel

Convening the panel

The review panel consists of at least 3 people who do not have direct knowledge of the complaint, one of whom is independent of the management and running of the school.

These individuals can be selected from the Executive Committee but at least 1 member should be independent of the of the management and running of the school. The panel will have access to the existing record of the complaint's progress (see section 10). The panel will select a panel Chair from amongst themselves.

The complainant must have reasonable notice of the date of the review panel; however, the review panel reserves the right to convene at their convenience rather than that of the complainant. The Clerk will aim to find a date within 10 school days of the request, where possible.

If the complainant rejects the offer of 2 proposed dates without good reason, the Clerk will set a date. The hearing will go ahead using written submissions from both parties.

Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least 5 school days before the date of the meeting.

At the meeting

At the review panel meeting, the complainant and representatives from the school, as appropriate, will be present. Each will have an opportunity to set out written or oral submissions prior to the meeting.

The complainant must be allowed to attend the panel hearing and be accompanied by a suitable companion if they wish.

At the meeting, each individual will have the opportunity to give statements and present their evidence, and witnesses will be called as appropriate to present their evidence.

The panel, the complainant and the school representative will be given the chance to ask and reply to questions. Once the complainant and school representatives have completed presenting their cases, they will be asked to leave and evidence will then be considered.

The panel will then put together its findings and recommendations from the case. The panel will also provide copies of the minutes of the hearing and the findings and recommendations to the complainant and, where relevant, the subject of the complaint, and make a copy of the findings and recommendations available for inspection by the Headteacher.

6. 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, the committee 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 school will inform those involved as well as the Ministry of Education and Higher Education of the decision in writing within 5 school days.

7. Unreasonable persistent complaints

Most complaints raised will be valid, and therefore the school will treat them seriously. However, a complaint may become unreasonable if the person:

- Has made the same complaint before, and it's already been resolved by following the school's complaints procedure;
- Makes a complaint that is obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific, defamatory or repetitive;
- Knowingly provides false information;
- Insists on pursuing a complaint that is unfounded, or out of scope of the complaint's procedure;
- Pursues a valid complaint, but in an unreasonable manner e.g. refuses to articulate the complaint, refused to co-operate with this complaint's procedure, or insists that the complaint is dealt with in ways that are incompatible with this procedure and the time frames it sets out;
- Changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation goes on;
- Makes a complaint designed to cause disruption, annoyance or excessive demands on school time;
- Seeks unrealistic outcomes, or a solution that lacks any serious purpose or value.

Steps the school will take

The school will take every reasonable step to address the complainant's concerns, and provide a clear statement of the school's position and their options. The school will maintain its role as an objective arbiter throughout the process, including when the panel

meets with individuals. The school will follow the complaints procedure as normal (as outlined above) wherever possible.

If the complainant continues to contact the school in a disruptive way, communications strategies may need to be put in place. The school 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;
- The school may include barring an individual from our school site;
- Put any other strategy in place as necessary;
- Advise the Ministry of Education and Higher Education.

8. Duplicate complaints

If the school has resolved a complaint under this procedure and receives a duplicate complaint on the same subject from a partner, family member or other individual, the school will assess whether there are aspects that had not previously considered, or any new information that needs to take into account.

If the school is satisfied that there are no new aspects, the school will:

- Tell the new complainant that it has already investigated and responded to this issue, and the local process is complete;
- Direct them to the Ministry of Education and Higher Education if they are dissatisfied with the school's original handling of the complaint;

If there are new aspects, the school will follow this procedure again.

9. Record keeping

The school will record the progress of all complaints, including information about actions taken at all stages, the stage at which the complaint was resolved, and the final outcome. The records will also include copies of letters and emails, and notes relating to meetings and phone calls.

This material will be treated as confidential and held centrally, and will be viewed only by those involved in investigating the complaint or on the review panel.

This is except where the Ministry of Education and Higher Education requests access to records of a complaint.

Records of complaints will be kept securely, only for as long as necessary and in line with data protection law, our privacy notices.

10. Monitoring arrangements

The Board of Governors will monitor the effectiveness of the complaints procedure in ensuring that complaints are handled properly. The Board of Governors will track the number and nature of complaints.

The complaints records are logged and managed by the Clerk to the Board of Governors.

This policy will be reviewed by the Principal and Bursar at least once every 3 years.