Complaints Procedure

Applicable to:	✓	Seaton Valley High School
	✓	Seaton Sluice Middle School
	✓	Whytrig Middle School
Approval body:	Full Governing Body	

Status:

Statutory policy or document	Yes
Review frequency	Governing Body to determine
Approval by	Governing Body to determine

Publication:

Statutory requirement to publish on school website	Yes
Agreed to publish on school website	Yes

Review:

Frequency	**Next Review Due**
Annually	Autumn 2027

Version Control:

Author	Creation Date	Version	Status
Clerk to Governing Body (LJ) Business Manager (SH)	19 March 2015	1.0	Final approved version
Changed by	**Revision Date**		
Business Manager (BW)	28 September 2017	1.1	To reflect updated DfE requirements (June 2017) re: complaints from parents/carers of children with special educational needs
Business Manager (BW)	11 April 2018	1.2	Revised to incorporate changes to NCC model complaints against schools procedure
Business Manager (BW)	4 May 2018	2.0	Final approved version for publication
Business Manager (BW)	19 July 2019	2.1	Minor changes to formatting and expansion of final section to clarify escalation process
Business Manager (BW)	23 September 2021	2.2	Revised to incorporate the Serial and Persistent Complainants Policy in one document and amend the review frequency to annual in line with DfE guidance
Business Manager (BW)	6 October 2021	3.0	Final approved version for publication
Business Director (BW)	8 October 2022	3.1	Annual review; no changes
Business Director (BW)	27 October 2022	4.0	Final approved version for publication
Business Director (BW)	14 December 2023	4.1	Updated in line with NCC model policy (April 2023); addition of SVF expectations of behaviour towards staff at Appendix B
Business Director (BW)	8 January 2024	5.0	Final approved version for publication
Business Director (BW)	17 February 2025	5.1	Annual review; addition of Section 8 re: unacceptable behaviour from parents/carers
Business Director (BW)	17 March 2025	6.0	Final approved version for publication
Business Director (BW)	31 July 2025	6.1	Annual review; replaced references to ACHS with SVHS
Business Director (BW)	27 August 2025	7.0	Final approved version for publication

Author	Revision Date	Version	Status
Business Director (BW)	5 February 2026	7.1	Updated throughout including serial complainants section in line with NCC model policy (January 2026)
Business Director (BW)	3 August 2026	7.2	Annual review; no changes
Business Director (BW)	24 August 2026	8.0	Final approved version for publication
Business Director (BW)	5 November 2026	8.1	Updated sections 8/9 and deleted section 10 and Appendix C to remove information duplicated in the new Code of Conduct for Parents/Carers and Visitors
Business Director (BW)	16 November 2026	9.0	Final approved version for publication

1 Scope

1.1 This procedure is for use for complaints against the school or federation, a member of staff or the governing body. The complainant must raise the complaint within three months of the incident (or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within three months of the last of these incidents). The federation will only consider complaints out of this time frame if exceptional circumstances apply. The federation will consider complaints made outside of term time to have been received on the first school day after the holiday period.

1.2 Complainants should not approach individual governors to raise concerns or complaints. They have no power to act on an individual basis and having prior knowledge of a complaint will prevent the governor from being able to sit on a panel at a later stage of the complaints process. Complainants will always be advised to follow the process laid out in this policy.

1.3 There are separate arrangements laid down by law to cover the following:

- appeals against admissions to schools
- appeals about statutory assessments and against Educational Health Care Plans (EHCPs)
- school reorganisation proposals
- matters likely to require a Child Protection investigation
- appeals against the exclusion of children from school
- whistleblowing
- staff grievance and disciplinary procedures
- staff conduct complaints
- services provided by other providers who may use the school premises or facilities
- complaints about the content of the national curriculum, which should instead be sent to the DfE using their contact form

1.4 Complaints about staff conduct will not generally be handled under this Complaints Procedure. Complainants will be advised that any staff conduct complaints will be considered under staff disciplinary procedures, if appropriate, but outcomes will not be shared with them.

1.5 In addition:

- Anonymous complaints will not be investigated unless deemed serious enough by the Executive Headteacher or Chair of Governors.
- Complaints that are being investigated by other bodies such as the Police will be suspended until those public bodies have completed their investigations.
- If a complainant commences legal action against the school or federation in relation to their complaint, the school/federation will consider whether to suspend the Complaints Procedure in relation to the complaint until those legal proceedings have concluded.

1.6 Complaints should be submitted via email to clerk@svf.org.uk, marked as Private and Confidential and addressed as follows:

- Complaints against federation staff (except the Executive Headteacher) should be addressed to the Executive Headteacher.
- Complaints that involve or are about the Executive Headteacher should be addressed to the Chair of Governors.

- Complaints about the Chair of Governors, any individual governor or the whole governing body should be addressed to the Clerk to the Governing Body.

2 Stage One - informal stage (complaint heard by staff member, the Executive Headteacher or Chair of Governors)

2.1 In the first instance the complaint should be discussed between the person making the complaint and the member of staff involved. If a complainant indicates that they would have difficulty discussing a complaint with that particular member of staff they should be referred to another staff member.

2.2 Similarly, if a member of staff, the Executive Headteacher or Chair of Governors feels too compromised to deal with a complaint it should be referred to another member of staff or another governor. The ability to consider the complaint objectively and impartially is crucial and it is also important to give an indication of timescale if it is found that the complaint requires further investigation.

2.3 If a complainant first approaches a governor, they should be referred, via the Executive Headteacher, to the appropriate person i.e. the member of staff concerned or the Chair of Governors.

2.4 Whoever has heard the complaint at Stage One will advise the complainant on how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome. At this stage the complainant will be asked to submit the complaint in writing if they have not done so already. This may be done by a third party acting on behalf of a complainant, if they have appropriate consent to do so. Reasonable adjustments will also be made if required. For ease of use, a template complaint form is included at Appendix B at the end of this procedure. If you require help in completing the form, please contact clerk@svf.org.uk. You can also ask third party organisations like Citizens Advice to help you.

3 Stage Two - formal consideration of complaint

3.1 If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage One or the way the complaint has been handled at Stage One and wishes to pursue their initial complaint further, the Executive Headteacher, Chair of Governors or Nominated Officer may delegate the task of formally investigating the complaint to another staff member or another governor once the complaints form has been received.

3.2 The Executive Headteacher, Chair of Governors or Nominated Officer may also, in exceptional circumstances, commission an investigating officer report to be undertaken by an external professional. Within this stage, the appointed person will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, ask what remains unresolved and what outcome the complainant would like to see.

3.3 The person making the complaint will be informed that an investigation is underway and that they will receive a response within 25 school days, or a letter explaining the reason for any subsequent delay.

3.4 Once the relevant facts have been established and conclusions drawn, the Executive Headteacher, Chair of Governors or Nominated Officer should relay the decision, and the reason for the decision, in writing to the complainant

3.5 In addition, they may offer one or more of the following:

- an explanation
- an admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better
- an assurance that we will try to ensure the event complained of will not reoccur
- an explanation of the steps that have been or will be taken to help ensure that it will not happen again and an indication of the timescales within which any changes will be made
- an undertaking to review school/federation policies in light of the complaint
- an apology

4 Mediation (optional stage after Stage One or Stage Two)

4.1 The federation may offer the option of mediation following Stage One or Stage Two of the complaint consideration. This is not instead of Stage Two or Stage Three, but rather as an additional way of reaching agreement and securing a way forward. Complainants do not have to accept mediation and nor does the federation have to offer this step if it is felt to be inappropriate.

5 Stage Three - complaint heard by governing body complaints committee

5.1 If the complainant is still dissatisfied with the outcome, they should contact the Executive Headteacher, Chair of Governors or Nominated Officer giving details of the complaint within ten school days of receipt of the Stage Two decision letter.

5.2 At least seven school days before the meeting, the Clerk to the Governing Body will:

- confirm and notify the complainant of the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that, if the complainant is invited, the dates are convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible
- request copies of any further written material to be submitted to the committee at least three school days before the meeting

5.3 Any written material will be circulated to all parties before the date of the meeting. The committee will not normally accept, as evidence, recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.

5.4 The committee will also not review any new complaints at this stage or consider evidence unrelated to the initial complaint to be included. New complaints must be dealt with from Stage One of the procedure.

5.5 If the complainant rejects the offer of three proposed dates, without good reason, the Governance Professional will decide when to hold the meeting. It will then proceed in the complainant's absence on the basis of written submissions from both parties.

5.6 When convened, the committee will consist of a minimum of three governors with delegated powers. The chair of the committee will be appointed when they meet. The complaints committee will take a decision as to any action to be taken in response to the complaint. For example, they may choose to:

- convene a hearing at which the complainant will be invited to put forward their case - this should be held within 20 working days of the decision to hold a hearing
- dismiss the complaint in whole or in part
- uphold the complaint in whole or in part

- recommend changes to the school/federations's systems or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not recur

5.7 In reaching a decision the committee may take the advice of such bodies as they see fit, in particular the local authority. Guidance on preparing for and holding the hearing will be provided by the Clerk to the Governing Body.

5.8 It should be noted that these complaints committees are not a form of legal proceeding and therefore it is inappropriate for either the federation or the complainant to bring legal representation. The exception to this would be if a member of staff, as a witness, wished to bring individual union or legal representation.

6 Further considerations

6.1 Making a complaint to the Department for Education should only happen once all other routes have been followed. The exception to this may be where there is a child protection concern, or where a child is missing education. If the complainant believes the school/federation did not handle their complaint in accordance with the published Complaints Procedure or they acted unlawfully or unreasonably in the exercise of their duties under education law, they can contact the Department for Education after they have completed Stage Three.

6.2 The Department for Education will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by the school. They will consider whether the school has adhered to education legislation and any statutory policies connected with the complaint.

6.3 If a complaint has been made by a number of parents/carers and it is about whole school issues, they may, at any stage of the procedure, ask the Chief Inspector of Schools to investigate their complaint. The Chief Inspector may or may not require the federation's Complaints Procedure to be exhausted before they decide whether or not to investigate.

6.4 However, should the school become the focus of a complaint campaign, receiving a large volume of connected complaints all based on the same subject or from complainants unconnected with the school or federation, then the federation reserves the right to deal with these complaints by means of either a template response or a general response posted on the federation's website.

7 Serial and persistent complainants

7.1 The federation will do its best to be helpful to people who contact our schools with a complaint or concern or a request for information. However, in cases where we are contacted repeatedly by an individual making the same points, or who asks us to reconsider our position after a decision is made, the federation would need to take the appropriate actions.

7.2 Once the federation has done everything it can in response to a complaint then any complainant will need to be informed by the Chair of Governors that the procedure has been completed and the matter now closed. Should a complainant contact the federation again on the same issue, then the correspondence may be viewed as serial or persistent and the federation may choose not to respond. The federation will always ensure that the complainant has exhausted the Complaints Procedure before such a decision is taken.

8 Unacceptable conduct by complainants

8.1 The federation is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly, impartially, and in accordance with the timescales set out in this procedure. However, school leaders and staff are not expected to tolerate behaviour that hinders the consideration of complaints because of the frequency, volume, or nature of contact.

8.2 Unreasonable behaviour is defined as that which hinders the federation's consideration of complaints because of the frequency or nature of the complainant's contact with the school, including:

- refusal to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcomes sought by raising the complaint, despite offers of assistance
- refusal to cooperate with the complaints investigation process
- refusal to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of the federation's Complaints Procedure
- insisting on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the federation's Complaints Procedure or with good practice
- introduction of trivial or irrelevant information which the complainant expects to be taken into account and commented on
- raising of large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions and insisting they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales
- unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues, and seeking to have them replaced
- changing the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds
- repeatedly making the same complaint (despite previous investigations or responses concluding that the complaint is groundless or has been addressed)
- refusing to accept the findings of the investigation into a complaint where the federation's Complaints Procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed including referral to the Department for Education
- seeking an unrealistic or unachievable outcome
- making excessive demands on school time by frequent, lengthy, complicated and stressful contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with
- posting confidential complaint details and investigation material on public forums or social media

8.3 Whenever possible, the Executive Headteacher or Chair of Governors will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying an 'unreasonable' marking.

8.4 The federation will only take the decision to cease correspondence on an issue when all of the following apply:

- The school/federation has taken every reasonable step to address the complainant's needs.
- The complainant has been given a clear statement of the school/federation's position and their options (if any).
- The complainant contacts the school/federation repeatedly, making substantially the same points each time.

8.5 Additional weight is added if any of the following also apply:

- The school/federation has reason to believe the individual is contacting them

with the intention of causing disruption or inconvenience.
- The communications are often or always abusive or aggressive.
- The individual makes insulting, personal comments about or threats towards staff.
- There is heavy reliance on AI-generated content, particularly where it replaces firsthand knowledge, evidence, or personal analysis.

8.6 Where an active complainant engages in excessive, persistent, or disruptive communication, the Executive Headteacher or Chair of Governors may implement a tailored Communication Plan. This may specify a single named point of contact, limit contact methods (e.g. written correspondence only) and establish fixed contact frequencies. It can also be suggested that complainants who are difficult to deal with ask a third party to act on their behalf. Communication plans will usually be reviewed after six months.

9 Barring from the school premises

9.1 Although fulfilling a public function, schools are private places. The public has no automatic right of entry. We will therefore act to ensure our schools remain a safe place for pupils, staff and other members of our community.

9.2 Where a complainant exhibits severe aggression, intimidation, or violence during the consideration of a complaint, the Executive Headteacher may notify them in writing that their implied licence to be on school premises has been temporarily revoked under Section 547 of the Education Act 1996, and the police will be informed if necessary.

9.3 The decision to bar should then be reviewed, taking into account any representations made by the parent/carer, and either confirmed or lifted. If the decision is confirmed the parent/carer should be notified in writing, explaining how long the bar will be in place.

9.4 Anyone wishing to complain about being barred can do so, by letter or email, to the Executive Headteacher or Chair of Governors. However, complaints about barring cannot be escalated to the Department for Education. Once the federation's Complaints Procedure has been completed, the only remaining avenue of appeal is through the Courts; independent legal advice must therefore be sought.

9.5 General standards of adult behaviour on school grounds, including driving/parking, peer disputes, visitor conduct and non-complaint premises bans are governed separately under the federation's Code of Conduct for Parents/Carers and Visitors.

Appendix A: Roles Within Complaints Procedure

Complainant

The complainant is the person who raises their issue with the federation in line with the federation's Complaints Procedure. Individuals are expected to engage with the process in an open and honest manner in order to try to reach an equitable outcome. Complainants need to consider what they would feel to be appropriate outcomes from the process. Complainants must not try to pursue their complaint outside the process as this can cause difficulties in accessing sufficient individuals without connections to the complaint if too many people are contacted at the initial stages.

Initial Contact

Anyone who is contacted by the complainant would be the initial contact - the only role this person would have within the process would be to ensure that the complainant had a copy of the Complaints Procedure and how to move this forward. No discussion of the actual complaint should take place other than to identify who the complaint should properly be addressed to.

Stage One Contact

The Complaints Procedure expects that all complaints should be resolved at the earliest opportunity with the person most associated with the allegation being made - this could be a class teacher or other member of staff. A face-to-face discussion would usually be the first step and many complaints can be brought to a conclusion at this stage. Otherwise, the Executive Headteacher might take this role if the member of staff or the complainant is not comfortable with the usual arrangements. Exceptionally, if the complaint is about the Executive Headteacher and they are not able to participate in the Stage One discussion, the Chair of Governors might take this role or delegate to another appropriate governor.

Nominated Officer

Depending on the level at which the Stage One discussion is held, this role may be taken by a senior leader, the Executive Headteacher, a governor designated by the Chair, or the Chair of Governors themselves. The role of Nominated Officer would be to commission an investigation report from an Investigating Officer. The Nominated Officer would prepare a brief for the Investigating Officer to follow based on the substance of the complaint. On receipt of the Investigating Officer's report, the Nominated Officer would draw up and send a Stage Two outcome letter to the Complainant. The Nominated Officer would also consider the appropriate response to complainants not satisfied at Stage Two. The Nominated Officer would also present the school case to the panel at Stage Three should this be required.

Investigating Officer

Depending on the level at which the Stage One discussion is held, this role may be taken by a senior leader, the Executive Headteacher, a governor designated by the Chair, or the Chair of Governors themselves. Exceptionally, if there is no-one with sufficient independence, an Investigating Officer may be commissioned from outside of the federation, but it is likely that there would be a cost to this. The Investigating Officer would interview witnesses; scrutinise documentation, formulate conclusions and draw up recommendations within a report prepared for the Nominated Officer.

Panel Chair or Member

Should the complaint move to Stage Three a panel might be drawn up to consider the school case - both complainant and Nominated Officer would attend to present their case; each would be able to call witnesses as appropriate. The chair of the panel would be

voted from within the panel and would be responsible for communicating the judgement to the panel in a Stage Three outcome letter.

Witnesses

Individuals identified as having specific knowledge in respect of the complaint would be identified as potential witnesses; these witnesses would be interviewed by the Investigating Officer and statements drawn up for signature. These statements would form part of the evidence in support of the Investigating Officer's conclusions and recommendations within their report to the Nominated Officer.

Appendix B: Template complaint form

Please complete and return addressed to the Executive Headteacher, Chair of Governors or Clerk to the Governing Body as appropriate, who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken. If you have difficulties completing the form, please contact clerk@svf.org.uk so specific arrangements to consider your complaint can be made.

Your name:

Pupil's name (if applicable):

Your relationship to the pupil (if applicable):

Address:

Postcode:

Day time telephone number:
Evening telephone number:
E mail:

Please give details of your complaint:

What action, if any, have you already taken to try and resolve your complaint.
(Who did you speak to and what was the response)?

What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?

Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details:

Signature:

Date: