# Oatlands School

# Complaints Policy

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# Version history

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| Version 7 | Updated Autumn 2026<br>• Pages 5 to 7 - General review and update including reference to Parentkind Parent Complaint Guide, clarification of complaint timescales, extensions, pausing complaints, procedural deviations, electronic recordings and virtual complaint meetings.<br>• Pages 10 to 16 - Clarification of timescales, investigations, panel hearing arrangements and complaint outcomes.<br>• Pages 17 to 18 - Updated information regarding escalation of complaints to the Department for Education.<br>• Pages 19 to 21 - Revisions to the procedures for managing serial and unreasonable complaints and complaint campaigns. |

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**Approved by: Tanya Mooney & Personnel Committee**
**Date from: Autumn 2026**
**Review Date : Autumn 2028**

# Introduction

Oatlands School aims to provide a safe, happy and caring learning environment for every child so that they may thrive. We welcome feedback from pupils, parents/carers and others and we accept that not all of this will be positive.

The school is committed to addressing concerns and complaints fairly, objectively, promptly and respectfully.

# Who can make a complaint?

This complaints procedure is not limited to parents or carers of children that are registered at the school. Any person, including members of the public, may make a complaint to Oatlands School about any provision of facilities or services that we provide. Unless complaints are dealt with under separate statutory procedures (such as appeals relating to exclusions or admissions), we will use this complaints procedure.

# The difference between a concern and a complaint

A concern may be defined as '*an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought'*.

A complaint may be defined as '*an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action'.*

It is in everyone's interest that concerns and complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. Many issues can be resolved informally, without the need to use the formal stages of the complaints procedure. Oatlands School takes concerns seriously and will make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.

If you have difficulty discussing a concern with a particular member of staff, we will respect your views. In these cases, you will be referred to an appropriate alternative staff member. Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels unable to deal with a concern, you will be referred to another staff member. The member of staff may be more senior but does not have to be. The ability to consider the concern objectively and impartially is more important.

We understand however, that there are occasions when people would like to raise their concerns formally. In this case, Oatlands School will attempt to resolve the issue internally, through the stages outlined within this complaints procedure.

# How to raise a concern or make a complaint

A concern can be raised in person, in writing or by telephone. They may also be made by a third party acting on behalf of the person with the concern, as long as they have appropriate consent to do so. Concerns should be raised in the first instance with either the class teacher or headteacher. Most concerns can be resolved quickly through informal discussion with the appropriate member of staff.

If the issue remains unresolved, the next step is to make a formal complaint. A template complaint form is included at the end of this procedure (Appendix B), for use at any stage of the procedure as required. If you require help in completing the form, please contact the school office. You can also ask a third-party organisation such as the Citizens Advice to help you.

In accordance with equality law, 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 a later stage of the procedure.

Guidance on raising concerns effectively is available in a leaflet, co-produced by Ofsted, the Department for Education and other organisations: Parent Complaint Guide

## Anonymous complaints

We will not normally investigate anonymous complaints. However, the Headteacher or Chair of Governors, if appropriate, will determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation.

## Timeframe for raising a complaint

You 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. We will consider complaints made outside of this time frame only if exceptional circumstances apply. The complainant will be provided with reasons if their request has not been allowed.

## Extensions to complaint timescales

If at any point we cannot meet the timescales set out in this policy, we will explain the reasons for the delay and keep the complainant informed of revised target dates.

## School working days

School working days do not include INSET days. A school working day is considered to end at 3pm. Therefore, any notification received after this time is considered to be received on the following school working day.

## Pausing a complaint

Where a complaint is raised but we do not have clarity from the complainant on the issues, we may pause the timescales of the complaints process whilst clarity is sought so that the matters being complained about are clearly understood and can be investigated fairly. If this happens, we will inform the complainant of a proposed new timescale.

## Complaints received outside of term time

We will consider complaints made outside of term time to have been received on the first school day after the holiday period.

## Electronic recordings

Everyone involved in the complaints process is expected to respect the confidentiality of the process and must not make any electronic recording of a meeting or telephone conversation without the prior agreement of all participants. For the purposes of this policy, electronic recording includes audio, video and audiovisual recording.

Where possible, the school will arrange for a written record of complaint meetings to be taken, and will share a copy of the notes with the complainant.

Any proposal to electronically record a complaint meeting or conversation must be discussed and agreed in advance by all those involved. If it becomes apparent that a participant is making a recording without consent, the meeting or conversation may be paused while appropriate next steps are considered.

In line with Department for Education (DfE) guidance, we do not normally accept electronic recordings as evidence when considering a complaint. Unless exceptional circumstances apply, recordings obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties involved will not be accepted as evidence.

## Virtual meetings

To accommodate differing circumstances, there may be occasions where it is deemed appropriate to hold a complaint-related meeting virtually.

## Deviation from the procedure

There may be occasions when it is necessary or reasonable to deviate from the published complaints procedure. In these cases, the complainant will be kept informed in a timely manner with the reasons for the deviation explained.

## Retention of complaints paperwork

The school will ensure that a copy of all relevant information relating to complaints is kept at the school in a secure, confidential file, separate from staff and pupil records. This information will be retained in line with the school's retention policy and in accordance with the principles of the Data Protection Act (DPA) 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR). The complainant should be informed that this will be done.

# Scope of this complaints procedure

This procedure covers all complaints about any provision of community facilities or services by Oatlands School, other than complaints that are dealt with under other statutory procedures, including those listed below.

| Exceptions | Who to contact |
|---|---|
| Complaints about data protection from any individual whose personal data is processed by the school, including:<br>• Pupils<br>• Parents and carers<br>• Staff (current and former)<br>• Governors / Trustees<br>• Visitors and third parties<br><br>Data Protection complaints include:<br>• Use or sharing of personal data<br>• Accuracy of information<br>• Data security<br>• Retention or deletion of data<br>• Responses to data rights requests including Subject Access Requests (SARs)<br>• CCTV and monitoring systems | Dealt with under the school's Data Protection Complaints Policy – *Please contact the school office at info@oatlands.surrey.sch.uk* |
| • Admissions to schools<br>• Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs<br>• School re-organisation proposals | Concerns about admissions, statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs, or school re-organisation proposals should be raised with the relevant local authority. |
| • Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation | Complaints about child protection matters are handled under our child protection and safeguarding policy and in accordance with relevant statutory guidance.<br><br>If you have serious concerns, you may wish to contact the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) who has local responsibility for safeguarding or the Surrey Children's Single Point of Access (C-SPA) on 0300 470 9100. |
| • Exclusion of children from school* | Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at: www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions.<br><br>**complaints about the application of the behaviour policy can be made through the school's complaints* |

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| | *procedure.* Oatlands School Policies |
| • Whistleblowing | We have an internal whistleblowing procedure for all our employees, including temporary staff and contractors.<br><br>The Secretary of State for Education is the prescribed person for matters relating to education for whistle-blowers in education who do not want to raise matters direct with their employer. Referrals can be made at: Contact the Department for Education (DfE) - GOV.UK<br><br>Volunteer staff who have concerns about our school should complain through the school's complaints procedure. You may also be able to complain direct to the LA or the Department for Education (see link above), depending on the substance of your complaint. |
| • Staff grievances | Concerns, complaints or grievances raised by current members of staff will be managed under the school's staff grievance procedures and not under this complaints procedure.<br><br>Concerns raised by former members of staff relating to their previous employment will normally be considered under the school's employment policies where appropriate, or through a separate management process determined by the Headteacher/Chair of Governors, rather than under this complaints procedure. |
| • Staff conduct | Complaints about staff will be dealt with under the school's internal disciplinary procedures, if appropriate.<br><br>Complainants will not be informed of any disciplinary action taken against a staff member as a result of a complaint. However, the complainant will be notified that the matter is being addressed. |
| • Complaints about services provided by other providers who may use school premises or facilities | Providers should have their own complaints procedure to deal with complaints about service. Please contact them directly. |
| • National Curriculum - content | Please contact the Department for Education at: Contact the Department for Education (DfE) - GOV.UK |

If other organisations are investigating any aspects of the complaint, for example the police, local authority (LA) safeguarding teams or Tribunals, this may impact on our ability to adhere to the

timescales within this procedure or result in the procedure being suspended until those organisations have completed their investigations. If this happens, complainants will be kept informed.

If a complainant commences legal action against Oatlands School in relation to their complaint, we will consider whether to suspend the complaints procedure until those legal proceedings have concluded.

Financial compensation is not a possible outcome of the complaints process.

# Resolving complaints

At each stage in the procedure, Oatlands School wants to resolve the complaint. If appropriate, we will acknowledge that the complaint is upheld in whole or in part. In addition, we 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 about will not recur
- 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 policies in light of the complaint
- an apology.

In addition, mediation or facilitated meetings can provide helpful mechanisms for discussion when a complaint is raised, or at any stage during the complaints process. These meetings can help to rebuild the relationship between parties either during the investigative stages or once the complaints procedure has been completed.

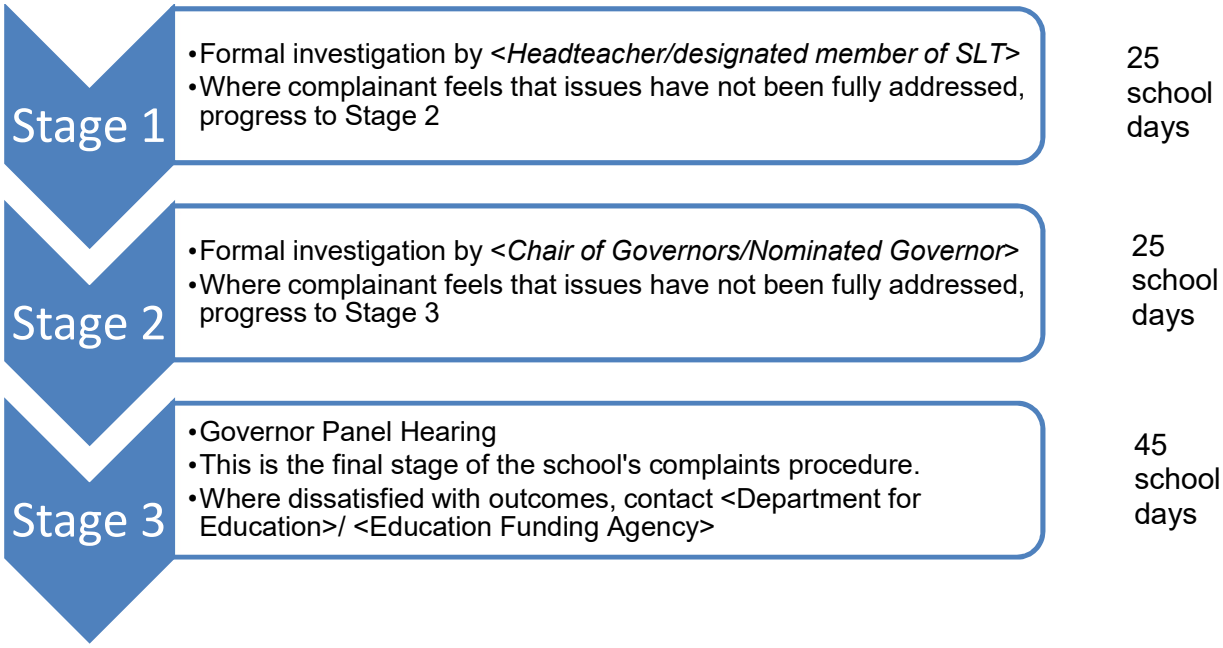
Mediation and/ or facilitated meetings can be arranged via the Area Schools Officer and will be impartial and objective. If agreed by all parties, the complaint may be paused to allow time for this to occur.

# Withdrawal of a complaint

If a complainant wants to withdraw their complaint, we will ask for this to be confirmed in writing.

# Formal complaints

## Summary of timeline for formal complaints




**Stage 1 Headteacher Investigation**

- Acknowledgement of receipt of complaint to be sent within 5 days of receipt of the complaint.
- Complaint to be investigated and written response to be received by complainant within 20 days of the acknowledgement.

**Stage 2 Governor Investigation**

- If the complainant believes that their complaint has not been fully addressed at stage 1, they may request to move to stage 2. This request must be made within 10 days of the receipt of the outcome letter at stage 1.
- Acknowledgement of receipt of complaint to be sent within 5 days of receipt of the complaint.
- Complaint to be investigated and written response to be received by complainant within 20 days of the acknowledgement.

**Stage 3 Governor Panel Hearing**

- If the complainant believes that their complaint has not been fully addressed at stage 2, they may request to move to stage 3. This request must be made within 10 days of the receipt of the outcome letter at stage 2.
- Acknowledgement of receipt of request to escalate complaint to stage 3 to be sent within 5 days.
- Hearing to be held within 30 days of the acknowledgement.
- Paperwork for Stage 3 hearing to be received from all parties at least 10 days before the hearing.
- Paperwork for Stage 3 hearing to be sent to all parties at least 5 days before the hearing.
- Outcome letter from the Panel to be received by complainant within 10 days of the hearing.

**Note: In all cases, timescales refer to school days so exclude weekends, school holidays and INSET days**.

# Stage 1 – Headteacher investigation

Formal complaints must be made to the Headteacher (unless they are about the Headteacher), via the school office. This may be done in person or in writing, preferably on the Complaint form (see Appendix A for the contact details of the Headteacher, and Appendix B for a copy of the form). The form is useful as it ensures that relevant information is communicated at the outset.

The Headteacher will record the date the complaint is received and will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within **5 school days**.

Within this response, the Headteacher will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, ask what remains unresolved and what outcome the complainant would like to see. The Headteacher can consider whether a face-to-face meeting is the most appropriate way of doing this.

***Note: The Headteacher may delegate the investigation to another member of the school's senior leadership team but not the decision to be taken.***

During the investigation, the Headteacher (or investigator) will:

- if necessary, interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish
- keep a written record of any meetings/interviews in relation to their investigation.

At the conclusion of their investigation, the Headteacher will provide a formal written response within **20 school days** of the acknowledgement.

If the Headteacher is unable to meet this deadline, they will provide the complainant with an update and revised response date.

The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions Oatlands School will take to resolve the complaint.

The Headteacher will advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint if they believe it has not been fully addressed at this stage.

If the complaint is about the Headteacher, or a member of the governing body (including the Chair or Vice-Chair), a suitably skilled governor will be appointed to complete all the actions at Stage 2.

Complaints about the Headteacher or member of the governing body must be made to the Clerk, via the school office.

If the complaint is:

- jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair or
- the entire governing body or
- the majority of the governing body

The complaint will move to Stage 2 and will be considered by an independent investigator appointed by the governing body or. At the conclusion of their investigation, the independent investigator will provide a formal written response to the complainant with a copy to the Headteacher or the Chair of Governors if appropriate.

# Stage 2 – Governor investigation

If the complainant believes that their complaint has not been fully addressed at Stage 1, they may request a Governor investigation. This should be done in writing, preferably on the Complaint Form (see Appendix A for the contact details of the Chair of Governors, and Appendix B for a copy of the form). The form should be returned to the Clerk to the governing body within 10 school working days from the date of the Stage 1 outcome letter. A request to move to Stage 2 will not normally be accepted after 10 days and will be at governors' discretion.

The Chair of Governors may choose to delegate the investigation of the complaint to a Nominated Governor who may, at the sole discretion of the Chair of Governors, be independent of the school. The investigating governor will have had no prior involvement in the complaint.

Receipt of the complaint form will be acknowledged within 5 days. In most cases the complainant will be invited to meet with the Chair of Governors/ Nominated Governor at the outset of the process. The aim of this meeting is to enable the Chair of Governors/ Nominated Governor to understand the scope of the complaint and desired outcomes prior to commencing their investigation.

The Chair of Governors/Nominated Governor will consider all relevant evidence; this may include but is not limited to:

- evidence and outcome from Stage 1 investigation if applicable
- a statement from the complainant
- where relevant a meeting with/statement from an individual who is the subject of the complaint
- any previous correspondence regarding the complaint
- any supporting documents from all parties
- interviews with /statements from anyone related to the complaint
- relevant policies and whether they were followed

After considering the available evidence, the Chair of Governors/Nominated Governor will inform the complainant of their decision(s) in writing within 20 school days of the acknowledgement. They will explain clearly why they have come to the decision(s) that they reached:

- **Upheld**: the complaint is supported by the evidence.
- **Not upheld**: the evidence does not support the complaint.
- **Partially upheld**: some aspects are supported by the evidence.
- **Inconclusive**: this judgement will be used in exceptional cases where the investigation found insufficient impartial, reliable evidence to determine, on the balance of probabilities, whether the complaint should be upheld, not upheld or partially upheld.

Regardless of the finding(s), the Chair of Governors/Nominated Governor may still identify lessons learned or actions for improvement.

The Chair of Governors/Nominated Governor will detail any agreed actions or recommendations to the school as a result of the complaint. Finally, they will provide the complainant with details of how to progress the complaint to Stage 3 if they believe that their complaint has not been fully addressed, providing them with the contact details of the Clerk to the Governing Body (Appendix A). Should the complaint not be resolved mediation should be considered. This can be arranged through the School Relationships Team and will be impartial and objective.

# Stage 3 – Panel Hearing

If the complainant does not believe that their complaint has been fully addressed at Stage 2 and wishes to take the matter further, they can escalate the complaint to Stage 3. This consists of a panel hearing with at least three governors who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint or in any previous investigation into this complaint, with consideration being given to one or more of whom being an independent governor.

Complainants can request an independent complaints panel if they believe there is likely to be bias in the proceedings. They should provide evidence of bias in support of their request, as it is the Panel's decision whether to agree to it. If the appearance of bias is sufficient to taint the decision reached, then it is recommended that the Panel grants such requests.

This is the final stage of the school's complaints procedure.

On rare occasions the Panel may decide not to invite parties to a meeting but instead deal with the complaint in private through consideration of the written representations. In making their decision they will be sensitive to the complainant's needs and expressed preference.

**Timeline**
A request to escalate to Stage 3 must be made to the Clerk, via the school office, within **10 school days** of receipt of the Stage 2 response. This should be done in writing (preferably on the Complaint Form (see Appendix A for the contact details of the Chair of Governors, and Appendix B for a copy of the form). Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply and are explained to the Clerk at the same time that the request for a Stage 3 hearing is made.

The Clerk will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within **5 school days**.

The Clerk will ask the complainant to identify any dates, times or days of the week within the following 30 school days when they would be unavailable to attend a meeting. Taking this information into account, the Clerk will work with all parties to identify a suitable date and will aim to convene the meeting within 30 school days of the acknowledgement. If this is not possible, the Clerk will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed.

Where the Clerk has taken reasonable steps to avoid dates, times and days identified by the complainant as unavailable, the complainant is expected to cooperate with the arrangements made and attend the meeting on the date offered. If the Panel determines that all reasonable efforts to identify a mutually convenient date have been exhausted, it may decide to proceed with the meeting in the complainant's absence.

At least **15 school days** before the meeting, the Clerk will:

- confirm and notify both parties 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 and
- inform both parties that copies of all evidence considered at Stages 1 and 2 should be submitted to the Clerk at least **10 school days** before the meeting. Any evidence submitted after this, including on the day of the hearing, will only be considered in exceptional circumstances with the agreement of the Panel, whose decision is final.

Any written material will be collated and circulated by the clerk to all parties attending the meeting so that it is received at least **5 school days** before the date of the meeting. The Panel will not normally accept, as evidence, recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.

**Attendees at the meeting**
The Clerk will invite the following core participants as applicable:

- a panel of three governors, one or more of whom may be independent of the school
- the complainant
- the Headteacher and/or the Executive Headteacher
- the investigating governor who dealt with the complaint at Stage 2
- Area Schools Officer (procedural advice).

The complainant may ask to be accompanied to the meeting by a supportive companion, interpreter or advocate. It is not advisable for this person to be a member of the school community, for reasons of confidentiality and to avoid conflict of interest. The complainant must advise the Clerk to the Complaint Review Panel of the name and role of this additional person prior to the hearing, and the Clerk will seek agreement from the chair of the Panel. If the additional person is attending as an advocate, they will be presenting the complainant's case and speaking on their behalf, and therefore the complainant will not be able to address the Panel directly. If the additional person is attending as a supportive companion they will not be able to address the Panel directly.

If the attendance of any pupils is required at the hearing, parental permission will be sought if the pupil is under the age of 18. Extra care will be taken to consider the vulnerability of children where they are present at a complaints hearing. The Panel should respect the views of the child/young person and give them equal consideration to those of adults. If the child/young person is the complainant, the Panel should ask in advance if any support is needed to help them present their complaint. Where the child/young person's parent is the complainant, the Panel should give the parent the opportunity to say which parts of the meeting, if any, the child/young person needs to attend. However, the parent should be advised that agreement might not always be possible if the parent wishes the child/young person to attend a part of the meeting that the Panel considers is not in the child/young person's best interests. The welfare of the child/young person is paramount.

Either party may make a request to the Panel for a witness to attend for a section of the meeting. It is the expectation that witnesses will have provided an account to the investigator at an earlier stage of the complaint and therefore the attendance of witnesses in person is likely to be necessary only in rare circumstances in order to clarify aspects of their previously given statements. The Panel will consider the request on a case-by-case basis.

As this is not a legal process, neither party may bring legal representation with them except in exceptional circumstances, by prior agreement of the Panel.

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

**Scope of the meeting**
The Panel will:

- Consider those aspects of the complaint which the complainant believes have not been fully addressed at the previous stages in the complaints procedure and/or where the complainant believes that the school has not followed its complaints policy.
- Consider the effectiveness of the investigation process at Stage 1 and 2
- Consider ways to resolve the complaint and, if possible, achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant

We recognise that the complainant might not be satisfied with the outcome if the meeting does not find in their favour. It may only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations.

The panel hearing will consider the complaint as was submitted at stage 1 and/or 2. Any new issues will need to be dealt with by a separate complaint procedure.

**Procedure for the meeting**
The meeting is confidential.

There may be occasions that the Panel determines that it is appropriate for the meeting to be held virtually. This can be requested via the clerk by any party, and the Panel will consider the request on a case-by-case basis.

The format of the meeting is that the complainant is given a set amount of time to make their case. The Panel and the school may then ask the complainant questions for clarification. The school then has the same amount of time to make their case. The Panel and complainant then have the opportunity to seek clarification from the school. Both parties then leave the meeting and the Panel will deliberate.

**Alternative arrangements**
The Panel may agree alternative arrangements where necessary to support fair participation, accessibility and the effective consideration of the complaint. This may include split hearings (where the complainant and the school present their cases to the Panel separately rather than in a joint meeting), hybrid meetings, fully virtual meetings, or other reasonable adjustments appropriate to the circumstances of the complaint. Any such arrangements will be determined by the Panel on a case-by-case basis and will not affect the impartiality of the process or the way in which evidence is considered.

A request for alternative arrangements may be made by any party involved in the complaint, and the Panel will determine whether this is appropriate. Factors that may be considered include safeguarding concerns, participant vulnerability, the nature of the complaint, or where the Panel considers that alternative arrangements are necessary to ensure a fair, objective and effective hearing.

**Deliberation following the meeting**
The Panel will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented, and will come to their decisions on the balance of probabilities.

- **Upheld**: the complaint is supported by the evidence.
- **Not upheld**: the evidence does not support the complaint.
- **Partially upheld**: some aspects are supported by the evidence.
- **Inconclusive**: this judgement will be used in exceptional cases where the Panel found insufficient impartial, reliable evidence to determine, on the balance of probabilities, whether the complaint should be upheld, not upheld or partially upheld.

Regardless of the finding(s), the Panel may still identify lessons learned or actions for improvement.

The Panel will:

- where possible, decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint
- where appropriate, recommend changes to the school’s systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future.

The Chair of the Panel will provide the complainant and Oatlands School with a full explanation of their decision, the reason(s) for it, and any recommendations, in writing, and a copy of the minutes of the panel hearing, within **10 school days**. The outcome letter and minutes will be copied to the Headteacher and investigating governor.

The outcome letter will include details of how to contact the Department for Education if the complainant believes that their complaint has been handled unreasonably or unlawfully by Oatlands School.

## Complaints about governors

If the complaint is:

- jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair or
- the entire governing body or
- the majority of the governing body

Stage 3 will be heard by a panel of governors who are independent of the school.

## Next Steps

Once Oatlands School's complaints procedure has been fully completed, if the complainant remains dissatisfied they may contact the Department for Education (DfE). Complain about a school to the Department for Education - GOV.UK

The DfE cannot reinvestigate the complaint, overturn decisions, or act as an appeal body. However, it can review whether the school has complied with its legal obligations and followed its published complaints procedure correctly.

## Roles and Responsibilities

**Complainant**

The complainant will receive a more effective response to the complaint if they:

- explain the complaint in full as early as possible
- co-operate with the school in seeking a resolution to the complaint
- respond promptly to requests for information or meetings or in agreeing the details of the complaint
- provide all supporting evidence to investigators at the earliest opportunity
- ask for assistance as needed
- treat all those involved in the complaint with respect
- refrain from publicising the details of their complaint on social media and respect confidentiality.

**Investigator**

The investigator's role is to provide a comprehensive, open, transparent and fair consideration of the complaint through:

- sensitive and thorough discussion with the complainant to establish their perspective and desired outcomes
- interviewing staff and other people relevant to the complaint
- consideration of records and other relevant information
- analysing information
- liaising with the complainant and the Clerk as appropriate to clarify what the complainant feels would put things right.

**Clerk to the Stage 3 Panel Hearing**
The Clerk is the contact point for the complainant and the Panel and should:

- ensure that all people involved in the complaint procedure are aware of their legal rights and duties, including any under legislation relating to school complaints, education law, the Equality Act 2010, the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act (DPA) 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)
- set the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that the dates are convenient to all parties (if they are invited to attend) and that the venue and proceedings are accessible
- collate any written material relevant to the complaint and send it to the parties in advance of the meeting within an agreed timescale
- record the proceedings by way of taking notes
- circulate the notes of the Panel hearing
- notify all parties of the Panel's decision.

**Panel Chair**
The Panel's chair, who is nominated in advance of the complaint meeting, will ensure that the meeting is conducted in line with the complaints procedure and best practice principles.

**Panel Members**
Panel members should be aware that:

- The meeting must be independent and impartial, and should be seen to be so
- No governor may sit on the Panel if they have had a prior involvement in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it
- They should read all documentation and understand the aims and purpose of the meeting.

# Procedure for managing serial and unreasonable complaints

Oatlands School is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, and to providing a high quality service to those who complain. We will not normally limit the contact complainants have with our school. However, we do not expect our staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour and will take action to protect staff from that behaviour, including that which is abusive, offensive or threatening.

Oatlands School defines unreasonable behaviour as that which hinders our consideration of complaints because of the frequency or nature of the complainant's contact with the school, such as, if the complainant:

- refuses to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcomes sought by raising the complaint, despite offers of assistance
- refuses to co-operate with the complaints investigation process
- refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of the complaints procedure
- insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the complaints procedure or with good practice
- introduces trivial or irrelevant information which they expect to be taken into account and commented on
- raises large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions, and insists they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales
- makes unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues, and seeks to have them replaced
- changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds
- repeatedly makes the same complaint (despite previous investigations or responses concluding that the complaint is groundless or has been addressed)
- refuses to accept the findings of the investigation into that complaint where the school's complaint procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed including referral to the Department for Education
- seeks an unrealistic outcome
- makes excessive demands on school time by frequent, lengthy and complicated contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with
- uses threats to intimidate
- uses abusive, offensive or discriminatory language or violence
- knowingly provides falsified information
- uses social media, messaging groups or public forums to pursue, publicise or escalate complaints in a way that is abusive, defamatory, intimidatory, discriminatory, misleading, breaches confidentiality, or is likely to undermine the fair investigation and resolution of a complaint.

Complainants should try to limit their communication with the school that relates to their complaint, while the complaint is being progressed. It is not helpful if repeated correspondence is sent (either by letter, phone, email or text), as it could delay the outcome being reached.

Whenever possible, the Headteacher or Chair of Governors will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before determining that they may be acting "unreasonably".

If the behaviour continues, the Headteacher will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and ask them to change it. For complainants who excessively contact

Oatlands School placing a disproportionate burden on school resources, we may implement a communication plan, including measures such as:

- restricting contact to a named member of staff and/or single channel;
- limiting correspondence to a specified number of responses per week
- requiring contact to be made in writing only
- refusing to respond to correspondence that repeats previously considered issues.

Any restrictions will be proportionate, reasonable, time-limited and subject to regular review

In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, we will immediately inform the police and communicate our actions in writing. This may include barring an individual from Oatlands School.

## Procedure for managing complaint campaigns

In the rare event that the school receives a large volume of complaints all based on the same subject, from complainants unconnected with the school, we will either send a template response to all complainants or publish a single response on the school's website.

## Area Schools Officers (School Relationships Team)

The role of the Area Schools Officers (ASO) is to provide impartial advice and guidance to school staff, governors and complainants at all stages of the complaints process.*

The school may share data and seek advice from the team in the management of a concern or complaint in the interests of performing a task which is in the public interest.

**For those schools which purchase the service.*

| | |
|---|---|
| **West Surrey Area Schools Officers** | Kate Charles – 07792 587096 – kate.charles@surreycc.gov.uk<br>Cara Harding – 07968 834131 – cara.harding@surreycc.gov.uk |
| **East Surrey Area Schools Officers** | Ann Panton – 07976 924186 – ann.panton@surreycc.gov.uk<br>Liz Yeo - 07812 702111 – liz.yeo@surreycc.gov.uk (Maternity cover November 2025 to April 2027)<br><br>*Adelina (Addy) Mason - 07814 804432 – adelina.mason@surreycc.gov.uk (maternity leave)* |
| **Team Email** | school.relationships@surreycc.gov.uk |

# Appendix A – School contact details

Oatlands School
St. Marys Road
Weybridge
Surrey
KT13 9PZ

Telephone: 01932 843990
Email: info@oatlands.surrey.sch.uk

**Head Teacher**
Tanya Mooney
Email: head@oatlands.surrey.sch.uk

**Chairs of Governors**
Charles Langley
Email: govchair@oatlands.surrey.sch.uk

**Clerk to the Governing Body**
Moya Tytherleigh
Email: govclerk@oatlands.surrey.sch.uk

# Appendix B – Complaint form

Please complete and return to Tanya Mooney (Headteacher for Stage 1) or Moya Tytherleigh (Clerk for Stages 2 and 3) who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Your name:** | | |
| **Pupil's name (if relevant):** | | |
| **Your relationship to the pupil (if relevant):** | | |
| **Contact details:** | | |
| **Please give details of your complaint (adding extra pages if necessary):** | | |
| **No.** | **Details of issue** | **What action has been taken to resolve the matter and by whom?** |
| **1** | | |
| **2** | | |
| **3** | | |
| **etc** | | |

| |
|---|
| **What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?** |
| **Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details.** |
| **Signature:**<br><br>**Date:** |
| **Official use** |
| **Date acknowledgement sent and by whom:** |
| **Stage:** |
| **Complaint referred to:** |
| **Action taken:** |
| **Date:** |