

Old Vicarage School

COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

Legal Status:

This policy incorporates the requirements of Part 7, paragraph 33, and Part 6, paragraph 32(3)(f), of The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 (as amended). It also reflects the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) statutory framework for group and school-based providers dated 13 July 2026 and effective from 1 September 2026. Where a complaint concerns the handling of personal data, the School will also comply with section 164A of the Data Protection Act 2018, inserted by the Data (Use and Access) Act 2025 and in force from 19 June 2026.

Applies to:

- the whole school including the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), the out of school care and extra-curricular activities inclusive of those outside of the normal school hours;
- all staff (teaching and support staff), the proprietors and volunteers working in the school.

The School keeps complaint records for at least three years and longer where required by its Records Retention Schedule or another legal, safeguarding, employment or regulatory requirement.

Availability

- The Complaints Procedure is made available free of charge to parents of current pupils and is also made available to prospective parents in accordance with the information requirements for independent schools. The statutory three-stage procedure in Part 7 applies to complaints from parents of current pupils; making the policy available to prospective parents does not give a right to use that procedure for an admissions complaint.
- Complaints from parents of current pupils about the School's provision or services will be considered under this procedure unless another procedure must take precedence, for example safeguarding/allegations, staff grievance, data protection, admissions or exclusions. Concerns from prospective parents, former parents, pupils or members of the public may be considered under an appropriate School process, but Part 7 does not require the three-stage procedure to apply to them. A complaint begun while a child was a pupil may continue after the child has left.

Monitoring and Review:

- The Head of School logs all complaints received by the school and records at which stage and how they were resolved. The record includes, at least: the person making the complaint, the date of the complaint, the nature of the complaint, any action taken and the outcome of the complaint.
- The Proprietors monitor the complaints procedure to ensure that complaints are handled properly and within the stated timescales. They review the number and nature of formal complaints, outcomes, actions taken, recurring themes, safeguarding or equality issues and any lessons for School practice, and make any necessary amendments to this policy. A formal review is undertaken at least annually.
- The Head of School keeps the procedure under regular review between annual Proprietor reviews and ensures that any identified deficiency or weakness is remedied promptly.

Signed:

Date: September 2026

Next Review: September 2027

Kerry Wise
Head of School

Matthew Adshead
Proprietor

Jenny Adshead
Proprietor

Old Vicarage School is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and expects all staff and volunteers to share this commitment. It is our aim that all pupils fulfil their potential.

Introduction

This policy is made available on the School website and in the Parent Handbook, and a copy is available from the School Office during the school day or by e-mail. Its existence is identified in information for prospective pupils and parents. Old Vicarage School prides itself on the quality of its teaching and pastoral care. Parents of current pupils who have a concern or complaint can expect it to be handled in accordance with this Procedure; concerns from others are handled as described above.

For this Procedure, a complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction about an action taken, or a lack of action, by the School which a parent of a current pupil wishes the School to address. A concern may be resolved informally before it becomes a complaint. Safeguarding allegations, criminal matters, data-protection complaints and employment grievances may require separate or additional procedures and will not be delayed by this Procedure.

We use the term “complainant” to refer to the person making the complaint. For the statutory Part 7 procedure, this means a parent, person with parental responsibility or person who has care of a current pupil. This Procedure encompasses the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). Parents should normally complete the School’s procedure first. Serious concerns that an independent school may not meet the Independent School Standards may be reported to the Department for Education (DfE). Concerns that the School may not be meeting applicable EYFS requirements may also be raised with Ofsted. ISI does not investigate individual complaints about schools; DfE may ask the inspectorate to consider relevant concerns.

The statutory three-stage procedure applies to parents of current pupils. Pupils and members of the public may raise concerns, and staff complaints are dealt with separately below. Where a complaint concerns personal data, the School will facilitate the making of the complaint and, in accordance with section 164A of the Data Protection Act 2018, acknowledge it within 30 days, take appropriate steps to investigate without undue delay, keep the complainant informed of progress and notify them of the outcome. A data subject may also complain to the Information Commissioner’s Office (ICO).

The School will make reasonable adjustments for complainants where required, including for disability, special educational needs, language needs or other protected characteristics, in accordance with the Equality Act 2010.

Old Vicarage School aims to be fair, open and honest by giving careful consideration to all complaints, dealing with them as swiftly as possible. Investigations will be thorough, fair and completed in a reasonable time-frame. The complainant may not be entitled to all information regarding the investigation, but will be kept informed of the process and of the decisions reached. We aim to resolve any complaints through dialogue and mutual understanding and, in all cases, we put the interests of the child above all other issues. Pupils will never be penalised for making a complaint in good faith. We actively encourage strong home-school links and ensure that all staff have opportunities to discuss and understand the school’s response to concerns and complaints made by parents. We also ensure that any person complained against has equal rights with the person making the complaint.

Where the person complained about would otherwise be responsible for handling the complaint, the matter will be passed to a person who has not been directly involved. A complaint about a teacher will normally pass to the Head of School; a complaint about the Head of School to a Proprietor who is not the subject of the complaint; and a complaint about one Proprietor to the other. Where both Proprietors are involved, or another conflict of interest exists, a suitably independent person will be identified to manage the formal stage and/or the panel arrangements. A person complained about will not take part in deciding the complaint or selecting panel members.

In the academic year 2025-2026 the school received 0 complaints under Stage 2 or Stage 3 of this procedure.

The Complaints Process Stage 1 – Informal Resolution

(References to working days mean term-time working days. This does not override the EYFS 28-day outcome requirement, the 30-day acknowledgement requirement for data-protection complaints, or the need to act immediately on safeguarding concerns.)

- It is hoped that most complaints and concerns will be resolved quickly and informally.
- If parents have a complaint they should contact the most appropriate member of staff, such as the child's teacher. If the member of staff contacted cannot resolve the matter alone it may be necessary for the member of staff to consult the Senior Leadership Team
- The member of staff who is dealing with the matter will make a written record of all concerns and complaints and the date on which they were received. A note should be kept of the date a resolution was reached and the agreed nature of this.
- The School will aim to resolve the matter as promptly as possible and normally within five (5) working days where reasonably practicable. If this timescale cannot be met, the parent will be told the reason and given a revised date for response.
- Should parents not be satisfied by the resolution in Stage 1 they may ask the Head of School to move to Stage 2.

Stage 2 – Formal Resolution

(References to working days mean term-time working days. This does not override the EYFS 28-day outcome requirement, the 30-day acknowledgement requirement for data-protection complaints, or the need to act immediately on safeguarding concerns.)

- If the complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis, the parent should put the complaint in writing to the Head of School. Where disability, language or another accessibility need makes this difficult, the School will provide reasonable assistance to record the complaint in writing. The Head of School will consider the complaint and decide the appropriate course of action.
- In most cases, the Head of School will meet or speak to the parents concerned, normally within five working days of receiving the complaint, to discuss the matter. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage.
- It may be necessary for the Head of School to carry out further investigations.
- The Head of School will keep written records of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint. These records will include the stage at which it was resolved and details of actions taken by the school as a result of the complaint (regardless of whether it was upheld).
- Once the Head of School is satisfied that, so far as is practicable, all of the relevant facts have been established, a decision will be made and parents will be informed of this decision in writing. The Head of School will also give reasons for her decision. A note will also be kept of when a final outcome was reached.
- The School will aim to provide the written Stage 2 decision as promptly as possible and normally within five (5) working days where reasonably practicable. If further investigation means that this cannot be achieved, the parent will be told the reason for the delay and given a revised response date.
- Should a parent or guardian have a complaint about the Head of School, the formal complaint should be addressed to a Proprietor who is not the subject of the complaint, via the School Office. That Proprietor will perform the Stage 2 role otherwise undertaken by the Head of School. If the complaint also concerns that Proprietor, or both Proprietors, the conflict-of-interest arrangements set out above will apply.
- If parents are still not satisfied with the decision, they should proceed to Stage 3 of this Procedure.

Stage 3 – Panel Hearing

(References to working days mean term-time working days. This does not override the EYFS 28-day outcome requirement, the 30-day acknowledgement requirement for data-protection complaints, or the need to act immediately on safeguarding concerns.)

- If parents seek to invoke Stage 3 after Stage 2 has not resolved the complaint, they will be referred to the Convenor, appointed by or on behalf of the Proprietors to call hearings of the Complaints Panel. Exceptionally,

the School may agree that a complaint should proceed directly to Stage 3 where the circumstances make the earlier stages inappropriate; this does not reduce any of the safeguards that apply to the panel hearing.

- All parties will be given a reasonable opportunity to provide written evidence in advance of the hearing. Panel members will have had no prior direct involvement in the matters detailed in the complaint. Hearings will normally take place in person; a remote hearing may be used where the parent agrees, or where this is a reasonable adjustment or otherwise necessary and does not prevent the parent from participating fully.
- The Head of School will continue to keep written records of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint. These records will include the stage at which it was resolved and details of actions taken by the school as a result of the complaint (regardless of whether it was upheld).
- The matter will then be referred to the Complaints Panel for consideration. The Panel will consist of at least three persons not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint, one of whom shall be independent of the management and running of the School. The independent member will not be a member of the School workforce, the proprietorial or advisory body, or otherwise involved in managing the School; a person who regularly advises the School may not be sufficiently independent. Panel members will be appointed by or on behalf of the Proprietors. Where a complaint concerns a Proprietor, the person complained about will take no part in panel selection or administration. The Convenor will acknowledge the complaint and schedule the hearing as soon as practicable and normally within ten (10) working days; if this cannot be met, the parent will be told why and given a revised date.
- If the Panel deems it necessary, it may require that further particulars of the complaint or any related matter be supplied in advance of the hearing. Copies of such particulars shall be supplied to all parties not later than five (5) working days prior to the hearing.
- A parent may attend and be accompanied at the panel hearing by another person if they wish. Legal representation will not normally be appropriate unless the School agrees that it is justified by the complexity or seriousness of the matter. If a parent chooses not to attend, the panel hearing will still take place in accordance with this Procedure. The School will make reasonable arrangements to facilitate the parent's attendance.
- If possible, the Panel will resolve the complaint immediately without the need for further investigation.
- Where further investigation is required, the Complaints Panel will decide how it should be carried out. After due consideration of all facts it considers relevant, the Panel will reach a decision and make findings and, where appropriate, recommendations, normally within five (5) working days of the hearing. If this timescale cannot be met, the parties will be told the reason and the date by which the outcome will be issued.
- A copy of the Panel's findings, and/or any recommendation and the reasons for them will be:
 - provided to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about, and copied to the Head of School and the Proprietors except to the extent that a conflict of interest or legal restriction requires more limited distribution;
 - available for inspection on the school premises by the Proprietors and the Head of School.
- The decision of the Panel is final in relation to the School's internal complaints procedures.
- The number of complaints registered under the Stage 2 formal procedure during the preceding school year is made available to parents of current and prospective pupils.

Confidentiality

Parents and Guardians can be assured that all concerns and complaints will be treated seriously and confidentially.

- Such correspondence, statements and records will be kept confidential in accordance with the UK GDPR, the Data Protection Act 2018 and the School's Data Protection Policy, except where disclosure is required by law or safeguarding duties, including where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the Education and Skills Act 2008 requests access to them.

Managing Serial, Persistent or Unreasonable Complaints

The School is committed to dealing with complaints fairly and impartially. There may be occasions where a complainant's behaviour or communication becomes unreasonable, abusive, persistent or vexatious.

In such circumstances, the School reserves the right to:

- limit the methods of communication;
- require complaints to be submitted in writing;
- decline to respond to repeated complaints raising substantially the same issues already addressed;
- restrict contact to a designated member of staff.

Any restriction will be reasonable, proportionate, kept under review and communicated clearly to the complainant. It will not prevent a genuinely new complaint from being considered, obstruct a safeguarding or whistleblowing report, restrict a person's data-protection rights, or prevent contact with an appropriate regulator, public authority or court.

Record keeping for the Whole School, including Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)

A written record is kept by the Head of School of all complaints made at Stage 2 and above, including whether they are resolved following the formal procedure or proceed to a panel hearing, and of any action taken by the School as a result regardless of whether the complaint is upheld. The School also records written EYFS complaints and their outcomes and may record Stage 1 concerns where appropriate. Complaint records are kept for at least three years and longer where required by the School's Records Retention Schedule or another legal, safeguarding, employment or regulatory requirement. The Proprietors examine the record at least annually. The number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year is made available to parents of current and prospective pupils. Records are stored securely and accessed only by those with legitimate authority to do so.

Child Protection

Any complaint raising a potential safeguarding or child protection concern will be referred immediately to the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) and managed in accordance with the School's Safeguarding (Child Protection) Policy and Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026. Where the complaint includes an allegation or concern about an adult working in or on behalf of the School, the allegations/LADO procedure takes precedence and the School will not investigate under this complaints process where doing so could prejudice safeguarding, children's social care or police action. A complaint about the School's handling of the matter may continue when it is safe and appropriate to do so. Immediate safeguarding action will never be delayed by this Procedure.

Complaints from External Bodies

Members of the public, prospective parents, former parents and pupils may raise concerns with the School, which will be considered under an appropriate process according to their nature. They do not have an automatic entitlement to the Part 7 three-stage procedure unless they are a parent of a current pupil, or the complaint was begun while the child was a pupil.

Monitoring and Review

- The Head of School logs all complaints received by the school and records at which stage and how they were resolved.
- The record includes, at least: the person making the complaint, the date of the complaint, the nature of the complaint, any action taken and the outcome of the complaint.
- The Proprietors review the complaints record regularly and at least annually, including timeliness, outcomes, actions taken, recurring themes, safeguarding implications, reasonable adjustments and any lessons for School policy or practice.

Policy for Dealing with Complaints from Staff

- This section is separate from the statutory parental complaints procedure required by Part 7. Old Vicarage School aims to be a listening and responsive School and encourages staff to raise concerns promptly. Employment grievances, whistleblowing, safeguarding concerns and low-level concerns about adults must be handled under the appropriate School procedure.

- Staff with an employment complaint should normally speak to the Senior Leadership Team or Head of School in the first instance, or to a Proprietor where that is not appropriate. Safeguarding concerns, allegations about adults and whistleblowing matters must be reported immediately through the routes in the Safeguarding (Child Protection), Low-Level Concerns and Whistleblowing policies and must not be delayed while a staff complaint is considered.
- A written record will be kept of all significant concerns and major complaints, the date on which they were received and the details of the subsequent investigation.
- The School will aim to investigate staff complaints promptly and normally within fourteen days where reasonably practicable. If more time is required, the member of staff will be told the reason and given a revised timescale. A formal closure letter will be provided for a formal staff complaint, indicating how the issue has been dealt with and the outcome.
- When a member of staff is dissatisfied with the outcome and has discussed this with the Head of School, the matter should be referred to a Proprietor who has not previously determined it. A contractual employment grievance must follow the School's formal grievance procedure and contractual arrangements. A complaint about the handling of the member of staff's personal data will also be dealt with in accordance with section 164A of the Data Protection Act 2018.

EYFS Requirements

Written complaints relating to the School's fulfilment of the EYFS requirements will be investigated and the complainant notified of the outcome within 28 calendar days of the School receiving the complaint. This statutory period applies during School holidays as well as term time.

Parents of EYFS children who are current pupils should follow the three stages of this Complaints Procedure. The 28-day EYFS outcome deadline applies regardless of the stage reached.

The School will make available to parents and carers details of how to contact Ofsted if they believe applicable EYFS requirements are not being met. Concerns that the School may not meet the Independent School Standards should be raised with the Department for Education. ISI does not investigate individual complaints about schools; DfE may ask ISI to consider relevant concerns as part of its regulatory and inspection arrangements.

Old Vicarage School will make the written record of EYFS complaints and their outcomes available to Ofsted on request, and will make complaint records available to the Secretary of State, ISI or another inspecting body where access is requested under the applicable legal or regulatory framework. Records will be retained in accordance with the retention arrangements set out above.

The relevant contact details for Ofsted and the Department for Education are:

Ofsted, Piccadilly Gate, Store Street, Manchester, M1 2WD.

Telephone for concerns about childcare: 0300 123 4666 Web:

www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted/about/complaints-procedure Email: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

Department for Education, Ministerial and Public Communication Division, Piccadilly Gate, Store Street, Manchester, M1 2WD

Telephone: 0370 000 2288 Web: www.gov.uk/complain-about-school/private-schools and www.gov.uk/contact-dfe