

SFET Concerns and Complaints Policy and Procedure

REVIEW DATE:	Summer 2026
NEXT REVIEW DATE:	Summer 2027

1. Introduction and Our Commitment

At South Farnham Educational Trust, we believe that strong partnerships between family and school are fundamental and sharing the same goal to support a child's education is vital.

Each school within the Trust undertake to provide a safe and friendly environment in which pupils/students are supported to achieve their potential, both academically and socially.

We recognise, however, that sometimes things can go wrong and that a concern or complaint may be raised. This policy explains what to do when that happens and the procedures outlined apply to all schools within South Farnham Educational Trust.

We welcome feedback as it provides valuable opportunities to listen, learn and improve. Our aim is always to resolve matters at an informal stage; quickly, fairly and positively, keeping the focus on what is best for the child.

This policy sets out a clear, four-stage process designed to:

- Encourage early, informal resolution wherever possible.
- Provide clear steps for raising concerns and complaints.
- Ensure all parties are treated with respect and courtesy.
- Be fair, impartial and transparent.
- Help us learn and continuously improve.

We are committed to making this process accessible. If support is required at any stage, such as interpretation services or assistance in putting thoughts in writing, please contact the Clerk to the Trust Board and we will do our best to help (see Section 15 for contact details).

2. Understanding the Difference: Feedback, Concerns and Complaints

Before raising an issue, it can be helpful to consider what kind of issue it is and what is hoping to be achieved:

Feedback ('I need this to be heard')

An opportunity to share a view without needing a formal response. We actively seek and welcome parental feedback to help us improve.

Concern ('I need reassurance or guidance')

A concern is an expression of worry or doubt about an issue for which reassurance or clarification is sought. Our schools take informal concerns seriously and will make every effort to resolve them quickly.

Complaint ('I need action')

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

3. Scope

This policy applies to concerns and complaints from parents/carers of pupils/students at our schools and others from the public.

This policy does not cover:

Areas not covered by this policy	Appropriate Policy	Location
Admissions	Admissions Policy	School website
Data protection and GDPR	Data Protection Policy	School website
Safeguarding/child protection	Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy	School website
Staff conduct	Complaints about staff will be dealt with under internal disciplinary procedures, if appropriate. Complainants will not be informed of any action taken against a member of staff.	N/A
Statutory assessments of special educational needs (SEND)	SEND Policy	School website
Suspension and permanent exclusion	Exclusions and Suspensions Policy	School Website
Whistleblowing	Whistleblowing Policy	Trust website
Services provided by other providers who use our school premises	Complaints should be directed to the provider concerned.	N/A

We will not investigate anonymous complaints under the procedures in this policy.

For complaints about the CEO, Headteacher, a Local Governor/Trustee of the Local Governing Body/Trust Board, please see section 7.

4. Legislation and guidance

This document meets the requirements set out in part 7 of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, which states that we must have and make available a written procedure to deal with complaints.

It is also based on guidance published by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) on creating a complaints procedure that complies with the above regulations and refers to good practice guidance on setting up complaints procedures from the Department for Education (DfE).

This policy complies with our funding agreement and articles of association.

In addition, it addresses duties set out in the Early Years Foundation Stage statutory framework with regards to dealing with complaints about the school's fulfilment of Early Years Foundation Stage requirements.

5. Timescales

Concerns and complaints should be raised within 3 months of the incident, or within 3 months of the last incident if the matter involves a series of related events. We reserve the right to refuse to investigate concerns and complaints outside of this timeframe. We will consider exceptions where there were valid reasons for delay and the matter can still be investigated fairly for all involved.

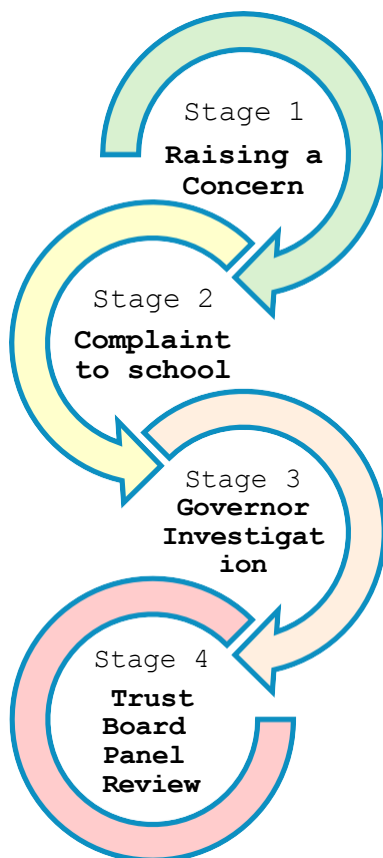
Throughout the policy, reference will be made to responses made within a number of 'school days'. Concerns and complaints raised during school holidays will be deemed received on the first school day of the new term. Concerns and complaints raised towards the end of half term / term will result in a response falling outside of a school holiday period. For clarity this refers to the published academic year calendar and excludes school closures.

If at any point we cannot meet the timescales set out in this policy, we will contact the complainant to confirm new timescales and explain the delay.

6. The Four Stages

We encourage resolution at the earliest possible stage. Most matters can be resolved through open and respectful dialogue.

For complaints about the CEO, Headteacher, a Local Governor/Trustee of the Local Governing Body/Trust Board, the stages outlined within this section do **not** apply. Please see section 7.



What stage 1 is for: For raising a concern, worry or doubt/question and/or where reassurance, guidance or clarification is needed.

What stage 2 is for: An attempt has been already been made to resolve a concern, or the nature of your concern means it needs to be addressed formally from the outset.

What stage 3 is for: The complaint has not been resolved at Stage two and has been escalated to an investigation by a Local Governor.

What stage 4 is for: The complainant remains dissatisfied after Stage three and is appealing to have their complaint reviewed by a Trust Board Panel.

This is the final stage of the internal procedure.

6.1 - Stage One: Raising a Concern

What this stage is for: For raising a concern, worry or doubt/question and/or where reassurance, guidance or clarification is needed.

Who to contact:

Issues are often best resolved by the person closest to the pupil/student:

- **School office or reception** - for day-to-day matters such as absences, logistics and communication.
- **Class teacher or form tutor** - for day-to-day matters such as homework, friendships, behaviour or classroom concerns.
- **Middle / Senior leader or Head of Year** - for issues that are wider than one lesson, or if a teacher/tutor has been unable to resolve the matter.
- **Headteacher** - for whole-school issues, more serious concerns, or if earlier steps haven't resolved the matter.

A concern can also be raised online using the Concern Form ([click here](#)). Where there are accessibility issues, a paper version of this form can be found in Appendix A. This can be returned to the school office by post, email or in person. A third party may submit the form, if needed.

The form will ask for the following information:

- A brief summary of the concern.
- What steps have already been taken to try to resolve the matter/staff contacted.
- What resolution/outcome is hoped for.

Please remember that school staff, especially teachers and form tutors, are generally non contactable during the school day as they will be teaching and caring for children/the student body. Use of the Concern Form ([click here](#) or go to Appendix A) will help. The school will make contact regarding the concern within five school days.

6.2 - Stage Two: Formal Complaint to the School

What this stage is for: An attempt has been already been made to resolve a concern, or the nature of your concern means it needs to be addressed formally from the outset.

How to make a formal complaint:

Formal complaints can be raised online using the Complaint Form ([click here](#)). Where there are accessibility issues, a paper version of this form can be found in Appendix B. This can be returned to the school office by post, email or in person. A third party may submit the form, if needed.

What happens next:

- The school will acknowledge the complaint in writing within five school days.
- The Headteacher or a senior member of staff will investigate the complaint.
- Where appropriate, it may be necessary to arrange a meeting with the complainant.
- The Headteacher will provide a written response to the complaint within 15 school days of the acknowledgement.

6.3 - Stage Three: Investigation by Local Governor

What this stage is for: The complaint has not been resolved at Stage two and has been escalated to a Local Governor for investigation.

How to escalate a complaint to stage three:

The complainant should write to the Clerk to the Trust Board (see section 15 for contact details) within ten school days of receiving the stage two response.

The complainant should briefly and clearly set out:

- Why they do not accept the findings made under stage two.
- Why they remain dissatisfied with the outcome.
- The resolution being sought.

No new matters can be raised in this stage. Only documentation referenced in stages one and two can be reviewed. The complainant should not repeat the matters raised in their original communication or attach documentation already provided.

The Trust are committed to making this process accessible. If support is required, such as interpretation services or assistance in putting thoughts in writing, please contact the Clerk.

What happens next:

- The Clerk will record the date the complaint is received and will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing within five school days.
- A Governor (or other person appointed by the Trust for this purpose) will investigate your complaint.
- During the investigation, it may be necessary to arrange a meeting with the complainant and/or members of staff as appropriate. The complainant may be accompanied to this meeting and should inform the Clerk of the identity of their companion in advance. In certain circumstances, the Trust may need to refuse a request for a particular individual to attend any such meeting – for example, if there is a conflict of interest.
- The investigator will provide a written response to your complaint within 15 school days of the acknowledgement. This will be sent by the Clerk to the Trust Board.

6.4 - Stage Four: Review by a Trust Board Panel

What this stage is for: The complainant remains dissatisfied after Stage three and is appealing to have their complaint reviewed by a Trust Board Panel. This is the final stage of the internal procedure.

How to escalate a complaint to stage four:

The complainant should write to the Clerk to the Trust Board (see section 15 for contact details) within ten school days of receiving the stage three response.

The complainant should briefly and clearly set out:

- Why they feel the previous stages have not addressed the complaint sufficiently.
- The resolution/outcome being sought.

No new matters can be raised in this stage. Only documentation referenced in previous stages can be reviewed. The complainant should not repeat the matters raised in their original communication or attach documentation already provided.

The Trust are committed to making this process accessible. If support is required, such as interpretation services or assistance in putting thoughts in writing, please contact the Clerk.

What happens next:

- The Clerk will record the date the complaint is received and will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing within five school days.
- A panel will be convened.
- The complainant will be given reasonable notice of the date of the panel hearing and location of the meeting. The clerk will aim to find a date within 30 school days of the request, where possible.
- If the complainant rejects the offer of three proposed dates without good reason, the clerk will set a date. The hearing will go ahead using written submissions from both parties.
- An agenda and any written submissions/evidence will be circulated to all parties at least five school days before the date of the meeting.

Convening the panel:

The panel will consist of three members:

- Two members of a Local Governing Body / the Trust Board who do not have direct knowledge of the complaint.
- One panel member will be independent of the management and running of the school.
- The panel will select a panel chair from among themselves.

These individuals will have access to the existing record of the complaint's progress.

At the meeting:

The panel meeting with the complainant will be held in private. Electronic recordings of meetings or conversations are not normally permitted unless a complainant's own disability or special needs require it.

The complainant may be accompanied to this meeting and should inform the Clerk of the identity of their companion in advance. In certain circumstances, the Trust may need to refuse a request for a particular individual to attend any such meeting – for example, if there is a conflict of interest. Neither the complainant nor the school/trust can bring legal representation. This meeting is not a form of legal proceedings.

If a Trust employee is called as a witness, they may wish to be supported by their union. Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

During the meeting, each party will have the opportunity to:

- Give statements and present their evidence, and witnesses will be called as appropriate to present their evidence.
- Ask and reply to questions.

Following the presentation of cases and opportunity for questions, the panel will ask all other parties to leave the meeting. Evidence will then be considered, and the panel will put together its findings and recommendations.

The Outcome:

The panel can decide to:

- 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 Trust's systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future.

The Clerk will inform those involved of the decision in writing within ten school days. If you remain dissatisfied please refer to Section 8 below.

7. Complaints about the CEO, Headteacher, Local Governors or Trustees

Complaints made against the CEO, Headteacher, Local Governors or Trustees should be directed to the Clerk to the Trust Board in the first instance.

7.1 – Stage One (Informal)

A concern can be raised by letter or email, in person or by a third-party acting on behalf of the complainant. The concern should be submitted to the Clerk to the Trustees (contact details in section 15). The Trust take informal concerns seriously and it may be the case that the provision or clarification of information will resolve the issue.

It is important to include the following information:

- A brief summary of the concern.
- Any steps that have already been taken to try to resolve the matter.
- Detail of any contact made regarding this issue with a school or the Trust, including names and dates.
- What resolution/outcome is hoped for.

The Trust are committed to making this process accessible. If support is required, such as interpretation services or assistance in putting thoughts in writing, please contact the Clerk.

What happens next:

- The Clerk will acknowledge receipt of the concern in writing (either by letter or email) within five school days.
- A suitably skilled and impartial Local Governor or Trustee will investigate the concern.
- During the investigation, it may be necessary to arrange a meeting with the complainant and the Headteacher, CEO, Local Governor/Trustee, as appropriate. The complainant may be accompanied to this meeting and should inform the Clerk of the identity of their companion in advance. In certain circumstances, the Trust may need to refuse a request for a particular individual to attend any such meeting. Neither the complainant nor the school/trust can bring legal representation. This meeting, if required, would not be a form of legal proceedings.
- The written conclusion of this investigation will be sent to the complainant by the clerk to the Trust Board within 15 school days of the original acknowledgement.

7.2 – Stage Two (Formal)

Where a concern about the CEO, Headteacher, a Local Governor or Trustee has not been resolved at stage one, it can be escalated to a stage two formal complaint.

The complainant should write to the Clerk to the Trust Board (see section 15 for contact details) within ten school days of receiving the stage one response.

The complainant should briefly and clearly set out:

- Why they do not accept the findings made under stage one.
- Why they remain dissatisfied with the outcome.
- The resolution being sought.

No new matters can be raised in this stage. Only documentation referenced in stage one can be reviewed. The complainant should not repeat the matters raised in their original communication or attach documentation already provided.

The Trust are committed to making this process accessible. If support is required, such as interpretation services or assistance in putting thoughts in writing, please contact the Clerk.

What happens next:

- The Clerk will record the date the complaint is received and will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within five school days.
- For complaints made against the CEO, Headteacher, a Local Governor or Trustee, a suitably skilled and impartial Governor or Trustee with no prior involvement of Stage 1, will investigate the complaint.
- If a complaint is made about the entire Trust Board or a Local Governing Body an independent investigator will be appointed to carry out an investigation.
- During the investigation, it may be necessary to arrange a meeting with the complainant. The complainant may be accompanied to this meeting and should inform the Clerk of the identity of their companion in advance. In certain circumstances, the Trust may need to refuse a request for a particular individual to attend any such meeting. Neither the complainant nor the school/trust can bring legal representation. This meeting, if required, would not be a form of legal proceedings.
- The written conclusion of this investigation will be sent to the complainant by the clerk to the Trust Board within 15 school days of the original acknowledgement.

7.3 - Stage Three (Review Panel)

Where a complaint about the CEO, Headteacher, a Local Governor or Trustee has not been resolved at stages one and two, it can be escalated to stage three.

The complainant should write to the Clerk to the Trust Board (see section 15 for contact details) within ten school days of receiving the stage two response.

The complainant should briefly and clearly set out:

- How they feel the previous stages have not addressed their complaint sufficiently.
- The resolution being sought.

No new matters can be raised in this stage. Only documentation referenced in stages one and two can be reviewed. The complainant should not repeat the matters raised in their original communication or attach documentation already provided.

The Trust are committed to making this process accessible. If support is required, such as interpretation services or assistance in putting thoughts in writing, please contact the Clerk.

What happens next:

- The Clerk will record the date the complaint is received and will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing within five school days.
- A panel will be convened.

- The complainant will be given reasonable notice of the date of the panel hearing and location of the meeting. The clerk will aim to find a date within 30 school days of the request, where possible.
- If the complainant rejects the offer of three proposed dates without good reason, the clerk will set a date. The hearing will go ahead using written submissions from both parties.
- An agenda and any written submissions/evidence will be circulated to all parties at least five school days before the date of the meeting.

Convening the panel:

The panel will consist of three members:

- Two members of a Local Governing Body / the Trust Board who do not have direct knowledge of the complaint.
- One panel member will be independent of the management and running of the school/Trust.
- The panel will select a panel chair from among themselves.

If a complaint is made about the entire Trust Board or a Local Governing Body, a panel of independent members will be appointed. These individuals will have access to the existing record of the complaint's progress.

At the meeting:

The panel meeting with the complainant will be held in private. Electronic recordings of meetings or conversations are not normally permitted unless a complainant's own disability or special needs require it.

The complainant may be accompanied to this meeting and should inform the Clerk of the identity of their companion in advance. In certain circumstances, the Trust may need to refuse a request for a particular individual to attend any such meeting – for example, if there is a conflict of interest. Neither the complainant nor the school/trust can bring legal representation. This meeting is not a form of legal proceedings.

If a Trust employee is called as a witness, they may wish to be supported by their union. Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

During the meeting, each party will have the opportunity to:

- Give statements and present their evidence, and witnesses will be called as appropriate to present their evidence.
- Ask and reply to questions.

Following the presentation of cases and opportunity for questions, the panel will ask all other parties to leave the meeting. Evidence will then be considered, and the panel will put together its findings and recommendations.

The Outcome:

The panel can decide to:

- 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 Trust's systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future.

The Clerk will inform those involved of the decision in writing within ten school days.

8. Referring Complaints Externally

If the complainant remains unsatisfied after completing all stages of this procedure, they may refer their complaint to the Department for Education (DfE).

The DfE will not re-investigate the matter of the complaint and will not overturn the Trust's decision about the complaint. It will consider whether the Trust's complaints policy and procedures comply with regulations and whether they were followed. The DfE will intervene where a school has failed to act in line with its duties under education law or has acted unreasonably.

For more information: www.gov.uk/complain-about-school

Please note: Ofsted does not resolve disputes between parents/carers and schools. They may keep a complaint on file for their next inspection but do not always provide a response.

9. Working Together: Building Positive Partnerships

Relationships between families and schools are long-term partnerships built on mutual trust and respect. The Trust/school want to work in partnership to resolve issues positively.

We ask that all parties:

- Follow the stages in this procedure, starting informally where possible.
- Be clear about what has happened and the outcome desired.
- Treat all those involved with respect.
- Respond to communications and deadlines promptly.
- Focus on processes and decisions rather than targeting individuals.
- Do not share details of complaints on social media.
- Avoid use of AI tools when drafting complaints, as they may not accurately cite laws or regulations and can make matters more complex than necessary.

The Trust commit to:

- Listening to concerns with an open mind.
- Keeping all parties informed throughout the process.
- Investigating thoroughly and fairly.
- Responding within the timescales set out or explaining any delays.
- Learning from complaints to improve practice.

The Trust Board reviews concerns and complaints regularly to identify any underlying issues and to determine how we can improve our procedures and practice. This helps us prevent similar issues in the future and continuously improve the experience for all.

10. Unreasonable Behaviour and Persistent or Vexatious Complaints

We treat all complaints seriously. However, we may need to manage contact differently if a complainant's behaviour becomes unreasonable. This may include situations where someone:

- Repeatedly raises the same complaint that has already been resolved (this includes a duplicate complaint on the same subject from a partner, family member, or other individual connected to the original complainant).
- Raises excessive or continuous complaints.
- Refuses to accept a decision made at the conclusion of the complaints procedure.
- Is harassing, threatening, abusive or aggressive (including publication of defamatory or misleading information online/on a public platform).
- Refuses to cooperate with the procedure or insists on unrealistic timescales.
- Makes unreasonable or excessive demands on staff time.
- Seeks outcomes that are unrealistic, disproportionate or lack serious purpose.

In such cases, we may implement communication strategies such as:

- Providing a single point of contact.
- Requirement for contact in a particular form (for example, letter only).
- Limiting contact frequency with the complainant.
- Requesting that a third-party act on the complainant's behalf.
- Informing the complainant that the matter is closed (once the complaints procedure has been fully exhausted).

In persistent or extreme cases of aggressive behaviour, the Trust may pause the complaints process, issue warnings, or ban individuals from school premises. Any serious incident of harassment, aggression or violence will be reported to the police.

11. Complaint Campaigns

If a school or the Trust becomes the focus of a campaign and receives a volume of complaints all based on the same subject/from complainants unconnected with the school/Trust, we will respond using the following strategies:

- Template response sent to all complainants.
- Publication of a single response on the school/Trust website.

12. Record Keeping and Confidentiality

We maintain records of all concerns and complaints, including actions taken and outcomes. These records are confidential and stored securely in line with data protection legislation and our Retention of Information Policy.

Records may be accessed by those investigating a complaint, by Ofsted during inspection, or in response to a lawful request under freedom of information or data protection legislation.

13. Complaints About Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Provision

We will investigate all written complaints relating to the Trust's fulfilment of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) requirements and notify the complainant of the outcome within 28 days of receiving the complaint. Records will be made available to Ofsted on request.

Parents/carers may also notify Ofsted directly if they believe the Trust is not meeting EYFS requirements:

- Telephone: 0300 123 4666
- Email: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
- Online: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted#org-contacts

14. Links with Other Policies

This policy should be read alongside:

- Child protection and safeguarding policy
- Admissions policy
- Data Protection and GDPR policy
- Suspension and permanent exclusion policy
- Staff grievance and disciplinary procedures
- Special educational needs policy
- Privacy notices

15. Trust Contact Details

South Farnham Educational Trust

Address: Menin Way, Farnham, Surrey, GU9 8DY, Telephone: 01252 716155, Email: Trust@sfet.org.uk

CEO

Mrs Claire Harnden MBE, Email: charnden@sfet.org.uk

Chair of the Trust Board

Mrs Alex Chester, Email: achester@sfet.org.uk

Clerk to the Trust Board

Ms George Kendall, Email: clerk@sfet.org.uk

Appendix A: Stage One Concern Form

Here is a paper version of the Stage one online concern form ([click here](#)) used to raise a concern with the school. If you are unable to access or submit this online, please complete this form and return it to the school office/relevant member of staff.

Your name:	
Name of school/organisation that the complaint is being made about:	
Pupil/student name and class:	
Your relationship to the pupil/student:	
Contact details (email and telephone):	
Date:	

Have you already spoken to anyone at the school about this concern? If so, who and when?

Please describe your concern briefly. What has happened? When? Who was involved?

What outcome are you hoping for? What would resolve this concern?

For office use:

Date received:	Date acknowledged:
Concern referred to:	Date response sent:
Outcome / action taken:	

Appendix B: Stage Two Complaint Form

Here is a paper version of the online complaints form ([click here](#)) used to make a formal complaint. If you are unable to access or submit this online, please complete this form and return it to the Headteacher or school office. If your complaint is about the Headteacher, please send it to the Clerk to the Trust Board: clerk@sfet.org.uk

Your name:	
Name of school/organisation that the complaint is being made about:	
Pupil/student name and class (if relevant):	
Your relationship to the pupil/student (if relevant):	
Contact details (email and telephone):	
Date:	

What steps have already been taken to try to resolve this matter? (Please include dates, names of staff contacted, and outcomes)

--

Please provide a brief summary of your complaint. Include relevant dates, times, and the names of any witnesses or people involved.

--

What outcome are you hoping for? What would resolve this complaint?

--

Are you attaching any supporting documents? If so, please provide detail.

--

Signature: _____ Date: _____

For office use:

Date received:	Date acknowledged:
Complaint referred to:	Date response sent:
Outcome / action taken:	

