



VANDYKE UPPER SCHOOL

Responsible, Respectful, Resilient. World Ready.

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COMPLAINTS POLICY (INCLUDING COMPLAINTS AGAINST THE CURRICULUM)

RESPONSIBILITY:	LEARNING & ACHIEVEMENT COMMITTEE
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PROPOSED BY:	DEPUTY HEADTEACHER - CURRICULUM
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TYPE OF POLICY:	STATUTORY
ON WEBSITE:	YES

DATE AGREED BY LEARNING & ACHIEVEMENT COMMITTEE:	17 NOVEMBER 2025
FREQUENCY OF REVIEW:	ANNUAL
NEXT REVIEW:	DECEMBER 2026

APPROVED BY:	GOVERNING BOARD
DATE APPROVED AND ISSUED:	9 DECEMBER 2025
SIGNATURE:	 PIPPA BAZALGETTE CHAIR OF GOVERNORS

In reviewing this policy, Learning & Achievement Committee has taken into account the provisions of the Equality Policy

Policy Statement

Our policy is to ensure that any concerns or complaints are taken seriously and dealt with promptly and that we have in place a clear and transparent procedure for addressing them.

Raising Concerns and/or complaints

At Vandyke Upper School ("the School") in order for every student to develop to their full potential, it is vital that the School's liaison with parents/carers is of the highest quality possible.

Our fundamental aim is that you are happy with what the School is doing for your child to support their wellbeing and academic success. However, there may be times when you have questions or concerns which you wish to bring to the School's attention.

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. Vandyke Upper School takes concerns seriously and will make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.

Concerns or complaints should be made within three months of the incident or in the case of a series of incidents it should be within three months of the last incident. Complaints outside this timescale will not be considered unless there are exceptional circumstances.

To ensure all concerns and complaints are addressed in line with our policy statement we have a three-stage process. All stages must be followed in order unless in exceptional circumstances.

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

Stage 1: The Informal Stage

Many concerns can be settled by contacting your child's tutor, subject teacher or year team because they work regularly with your child. However, if your concern is of a more general nature or is about a teacher, your first point of contact is your child's Head of Year. Should the concern be in reference to the year team then this can be addressed by the Director of Year or a member of the Leadership group. If you wish to raise an informal concern you can contact staff by contacting the school office first, making it clear you are raising an informal concern. Letters and emails should be labelled 'for the attention of' the staff member you wish to contact. You will then be able to arrange an appointment to speak with them in person or on the telephone. We will respond promptly and politely; our school policy is to acknowledge receipt of your concern with three school days. You will receive an informal response within seven school days of the receipt of the complaint.

Although there is no requirement for informal concerns to be made in writing, the staff member(s) responding to the concerns will keep a written record of the issues raised and what

action is taken. All written records of meetings and discussions will be summary notes, rather than minutes, and therefore will not be verbatim. Complainants are welcome to take their own notes in any meeting/ discussion. Recordings of meetings or phone calls for either party is not allowed.

Having followed these steps, if you remain dissatisfied with the School's response to your concern, you may make a formal complaint.

Complainants should not approach Governors to raise concerns or complaints. This may prevent Governors from considering complaints at Stage 3 of the procedure.

The complainant will be advised of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 1.

Stage 2: The Formal Stage

If you are not able to resolve your stage 1 concern with the member of staff and wish to take the matter further, you need to contact the Headteacher. The Headteacher may refer your concern to a member of the Leadership Group for further investigation.

A formal complaint needs to be submitted to the Headteacher in writing (letter or email). The Headteacher will review the stage 1 process; if this has not been completed the Headteacher may advise that this stage needs to be completed first. The letter must contain your contact address, email and telephone number. In your letter you must include the precise details of your complaint, times, dates and locations if applicable, and your desired outcome.

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 in exceptional circumstances apply.

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. We are happy to provide the assistance of someone unconnected with the complaint if you would like support in completing the letter/email.

The Headteacher will acknowledge receipt of the complaint within three school days and you will be informed when the Headteacher will be in contact with you to set out in broad terms how the complaint will be investigated. We will consider complaints made outside of term time to have been received on the first school day after the holiday period.

After this contact with the Headteacher the complaint will be investigated within ten school days. You will be informed if the investigation is likely to take longer. You may be contacted for more information if the Headteacher deems necessary. At the conclusion of the investigation, you may be invited to a meeting to discuss the matter. All written records of meetings and discussions will be summary notes, rather than minutes, and therefore will not be verbatim. Complainants are welcome to take their own notes in any meeting. The Headteacher will provide you with a written reply to your complaint together with details of any actions which the School may be taking.

The Headteacher will advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 2.

Stage 3: The Formal Panel Hearing Stage

If you are not satisfied with the formal stage 2 reply, you need to write to/email the Chair of Governors at the School address within ten school days of receiving the formal reply to your complaint to ask for a formal hearing. Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply. In your letter you must include the precise details of your complaint, times, dates and locations if applicable. You must also state why you require an escalation to stage 3 and your intended outcome.

You will receive an acknowledgement from the Clerk to the Governors within five school days of this request being received. The Chair of Governors will decide if your complaint meets the threshold for Governor review and the Chair or the Clerk will inform you of the next steps.

If your complaint is heard by the Governors' Complaints Committee it will happen within fifteen school days of the acknowledgment of the request for a formal panel hearing. The Clerk will contact the complainant to inform them of the date of the meeting. This meeting is held to resolve the matter and you will be asked how you expect the case to be resolved. The committee will decide whether to deal with the complaint by either inviting parties to a meeting or through written representations only or both, but in making their decision they will be sensitive to the complainant's needs. If you are invited to a meeting the time and date of the meeting will be arranged to suit everyone and you may bring someone along to provide support. This can be a relative or friend. Generally, we do not encourage either party to bring legal representatives to the committee meeting. However, there may be occasions when legal representation is appropriate. The meeting 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. Consent of all parties attending must be sought before recording meetings or conversations. Consent will be recorded in any notes taken. All written records of meetings and discussions will be summary notes, rather than minutes, and therefore will not be verbatim. Complainants are welcome to take their own notes in any meeting.

If a complainant wants to withdraw their complaint, we will ask them to confirm this in writing and this must be before the Governor complaints committee sits to hear the complaint.

The committee will be chaired by a member of the governing board and be independent and impartial consisting of at least three members, who have had no prior connection with the complaint. If there are fewer than three Governors from Vandyke Upper School available, the Clerk will source any additional, independent Governors through another local school, in order to make up the committee.

The committee will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented. The committee can:

- uphold the complaint in whole or in part
- dismiss the complaint in whole or in part.

If the complaint is upheld in whole or in part, the committee will:

- 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.

At each stage in the procedure, the person investigating the complaint should keep in mind ways in which a complaint may be resolved. It might be sufficient to acknowledge that the complaint is valid in whole or in part.

In addition, it may be appropriate to offer one or more of the following:

- an apology;
- an explanation;
- an admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better;
- an assurance that the event complained of will not recur;
- an explanation of the steps that have been taken to ensure that it will not happen again;
- an undertaking to review school procedures in light of the complaint.

At the conclusion of the meeting the committee and the Chair will decide on an appropriate response with reasons which will be sent to the complainant in writing within 5 school days of the meeting.

The letter to the complainant will include details of how to contact the Department for Education if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled by the School.

Next Steps

If the complainant believes the school did not handle their complaint in accordance with the published complaints procedure or they acted unlawfully or unreasonably in the exercise of their duties under education law, they can contact the Department for Education after they have completed Stage 3.

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

The complainant can refer their complaint to the Department for Education online at:

www.education.gov.uk/contactus, by telephone on: 0370 000 2288 or by writing to:

Department for Education

Piccadilly Gate

Store Street

Manchester

M1 2WD.

Complaints not covered by this Policy

There are a number of matters for which special procedures have been established to deal with complaints. If your complaint relates to one of these areas, please ask for advice from the School regarding what to do.

The special procedure areas are:

- Admissions
- School suspensions/ exclusions
- Special Educational Needs Statutory Assessments
- Staff Disciplinary or Capability Procedures – Complainants will not be informed of any investigatory or disciplinary action taken against a staff member following a complaint. However, the school will inform the complainant only that the matter is being addressed and will confirm when it is concluded

- Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation
- Complaints about services provided by other suppliers who may use the School's facilities
- Complaints about the Headteacher (in writing to the Chair of Governors, this is automatically a stage 3 complaint)
- Complaints about Governors (in writing to the Headteacher, this is automatically a stage 2)

Serial and Persistent Contacts or Complaints

This policy should be read in conjunction with the school's vexatious policy on our website:
<https://vandyke.beds.sch.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/Vexatious-policy-2025.pdf>

The 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 unless the behaviour of a complainant is deemed to be unreasonable.

The 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 cooperate 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 irrelevant information which they expect to be taken into account and commented on
- changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds
- makes unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues, and seeks to have them replaced
- 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 false information
- publishes unacceptable information on social media or other public forums

Complainants should try to limit their communication with the School that relates to their complaint while the complaint is being progressed.

Whenever possible, the Headteacher or Chair of Governors will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally.

If the behaviour continues, the Headteacher will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and asking them to change it. For complainants who excessively contact the School causing a significant level of disruption, the School may specify methods of communication and limit the number of contacts.

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