School Complaints

Policy & Procedure

Headteacher: *Alison Field*

Chair of Governors: *David Wright*

Status: Statutory

Date adopted: February 2025

Date for review: February 2027

Sheepy Magna Church of England Complaints Policy

Our policy is:

- To provide a fair complaints procedure which is clear and easy to use for anyone wishing to make a complaint;
- To publicise the existence of complaints procedure so that people know how to contact us to make a complaint;
- To make sure everyone at Sheepy School knows what to do if a complaint is received;
- To make sure all complaints are investigated fairly and in a timely way;
- To make sure that all complaints are, wherever possible, resolved and that relationships are repaired;
- To gather information which helps us to improve what we do.

Where concerns are raised we aim to resolve these quickly and as efficiently as possible. Usually concerns that are raised can be resolved very quickly through the school's day to day communication between parents and the school staff. However, for those situations where this is not the case, we have a more formal process to investigate and deal with complaints. Our complaints procedure is detailed on the following pages.

We will try to resolve every concern, difficulty or complaint in a positive way with the aim of putting right a matter which may have gone wrong, where necessary, reviewing the school's systems and procedures in the light of matters raised.

This procedure will apply to most general complaints received by the school. It is not intended to cover those matters for which there is a specific statutory process to object, complain or appeal.

Who can raise a complaint?

This complaints procedure is mainly aimed at parents or carers of children who are registered at the school, but it is not limited to them.

Any member of the public may make a complaint to Sheepy Magna CE Primary School about any provision of facilities or services that the school provides.

Unless complaints are dealt with under separate statutory procedures (such as appeals relating to exclusions or admissions), the school 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 opportunity. Many issues can be resolved informally, without the need to use the formal stages of the complaints procedure. Sheepy Magna CofE Primary 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, The Headteacher will refer you to another staff member. Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels unable

to deal with a concern, they will refer you 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, Sheepy Magna CofE Primary 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 or complaint can be made in person, in writing or by telephone. They may also be made by a third party acting on behalf of a complainant, as long as they have appropriate consent to do so.
Concerns should be raised with either the class teacher or head teacher. If the issue remains unresolved, the next step is to make a formal complaint.
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 during the actual procedure.
Complaints against school staff (except the Headteacher) should be made in the first instance, to Mrs Field (the Headteacher) via the school office. Please mark them as 'private and confidential.'
Complaints that involve or are about the Headteacher should be addressed to
Mr David Wright (the chair of governors), via the school office. Please mark them as 'private and confidential.'
Complaints about the chair of governors, any individual governor or the whole governing body should be addressed to the clerk to the governing body via the school office. Please mark them as 'private and confidential.'
For ease of use, a template complaint form is included at the end of this procedure. If you require help in completing the form, please contact the school office. You can also ask third party organisations such as 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.

Anonymous complaints
The school will not normally investigate anonymous complaints. However, the Headteacher or chair of governors, if appropriate, will determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation.

Complaint campaigns
If we receive what we consider to be a large volume of complaints, all based on the same subject and possibly from complainants not connected to the school, then we will treat these complaints as being part of a campaign and respond in one of the following two ways, depending upon the nature and scale of the complaint:

- send the same response to all complainants; or
- publish a single response on the school's website.

Timescale for submitting a complaint
Complainants 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 this time frame if exceptional circumstances apply.

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

Confidentiality
All complaint information will be handled sensitively, telling only those who need to know and following any relevant data protection requirements.

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

Exceptions	**Who to contact**
• Admissions to schools • Statutory assessments of special educational needs • School re-organisation proposals	Concerns about admissions, statutory assessments of special educational needs or school reorganisation proposals should be raised with Leicestershire County Council.
• 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. If you have serious concerns, you may wish to contact the local authority designated officer (LADO) who has local responsibility for safeguarding or the the First Response Children's Duty Team. Tel 0116 305 0005
• Exclusion of children from school*	Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions. *complaints about the application of the behaviour policy can be made through the school's complaints procedure.
• Whistleblowing	We have an internal whistleblowing procedure for all our employees, including temporary staff and contractors.

	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 www.education.gov.uk/contactus. 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 local authority or the DfE (see link above), depending on the substance of your complaint.
• Staff grievances	Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the school's internal grievance procedures.
• Staff conduct	Complaints about staff will be dealt with under the school's internal disciplinary procedures, if appropriate. 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 direct.
• National curriculum – content	Please contact the DfE at www.education.gov.uk/contactus.

If other bodies are investigating 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 public bodies have completed their investigations.

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

Resolving complaints
At each stage in the procedure, Sheepy Magna CofE Primary 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 of 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.

Withdrawal of a complaint
If a complainant wants to withdraw their complaint, we will ask them to confirm this in writing.

Sheepy Magna CE Primary School Complaints Procedure

Complaints, stage one
Formal complaints must be made to the head teacher (unless they are about the head teacher), via the school office. This may be done in person, in writing (preferably on the complaint form), or by telephone. The head teacher 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 head teacher will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, ask what remains unresolved and what outcome the complainant would like to see. The head teacher can consider whether a face-to-face meeting is the most appropriate way of doing this.
Note: The head teacher 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 head teacher (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 head teacher will provide a formal written response within 15 school days of the date of receipt of the complaint. If the head teacher 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 Sheepy Magna CofE Primary School will take to resolve the complaint.
The head teacher will advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of stage one. If the complaint is about the head teacher 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 one.
Complaints about the head teacher 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, stage one will be considered by an independent investigator appointed by the governing body or Leicester Diocese Board of Education. At the conclusion of its investigation, the independent investigator will provide a formal written response.

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome at stage one and wishes to take the matter further, they can escalate the complaint to stage two – a meeting with members of the governing body's complaints committee, which will be formed of the first three, impartial, governors available. This is the final stage of the complaints procedure.
A request to escalate to stage two must be made to the clerk, via the school office, within 5 school days of receipt of the stage one response. 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. Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.
The clerk will write to the complainant to inform them of the date of the meeting. They will aim to convene a meeting within 15 school days of receipt of the stage two request. If this is not possible, the clerk will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed.
If the complainant rejects the offer of three proposed dates without good reason, the clerk will decide when to hold the meeting. It will then proceed in the complainant's absence on the basis of written submissions from both parties.

The complaints committee will consist of at least three governors with no prior involvement or knowledge of the complaint. Prior to the meeting, they will decide among themselves who will act as the chair of the complaints committee. If there are fewer than three governors from Sheepy Magna CofE Primary School available, the clerk will source any additional, independent governors through another local school or through their local authority's governor services team, in order to make up the committee. Alternatively, an entirely independent committee may be convened to hear the complaint at stage two.
The committee will decide whether to deal with the complaint by inviting parties to a meeting or through written representations, but in making its decision it will be sensitive to the complainant's needs. If the complainant is invited to attend the meeting, they may bring someone along to provide support. This can be a relative or friend.
Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

At least 10 school days before the meeting, the clerk will:

- confirm and notify the complainant of the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that if the complainant is invited, the dates are convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible
- request copies of any further written material to be submitted to the committee at least 5 school days before the meeting.

Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least 3 school days before the date of the meeting. The committee will not normally accept, as evidence, recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.
The committee will also not review any new complaints at this stage or consider evidence unrelated to the initial complaint to be included. New complaints must be dealt with from stage one of the procedure.

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. Prior knowledge and consent of all parties attending must be sought before meetings or conversations take place. Consent will be recorded in any minutes taken.
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.

The chair of the committee will provide the complainant and Sheepy Magna CofE Primary School with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within 10 school days. The letter to the complainant will include details of how to contact the DfE if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled by the school.
If the complaint is jointly about the chair and vice chair or the entire governing body or the majority of the governing body, stage two will be heard by a committee of independent governors. 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 Sheepy Magna CofE Primary School will take to resolve the complaint. The response will also advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied.

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 two.

The DfE will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by Sheepy Magna CofE Primary School. They will consider whether Sheepy Magna CofE Primary School has adhered to education legislation and any statutory policies connected with the complaint. The complainant can refer their complaint to the DfE 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

Complaint Form for Sheepy Magna Church of England Primary School

Your Name:	
Pupil's Name (if relevant):	
Complainant's Relationship to pupil (if relevant):	
Address of Complainant:	
Post Code:	Daytime Tel:
Mobile:	E-mail:
Please give details of your complaint, including whether you have spoken to anybody at the school about it:	

What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?
Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details.
Signed: **Date:**

Official Use: **Date acknowledgement sent:** **By who:**
Complaint referred to: **Date:**

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
- cooperate with the school in seeking a solution to the complaint
- respond promptly to requests for information or meetings or in agreeing the details of the complaint
- 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 establish the facts relevant to the complaint by:

- providing a comprehensive, open, transparent and fair consideration of the complaint through
  - sensitive and thorough interviewing of the complainant to establish what has happened and who has been involved
  - interviewing staff and children/young people and other people relevant to the complaint
  - consideration and analysis of records and other relevant information
- liaising with the complainant and the complaints coordinator as appropriate to clarify what the complainant feels would put things right.

The investigator should:

- conduct interviews with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning
- keep notes of interviews or arrange for an independent note taker to record minutes of the meeting
- ensure that any papers produced during the investigation are kept securely pending any appeal
- be mindful of the timescales to respond
- prepare a comprehensive report for the head teacher or complaints committee that sets out the facts, identifies solutions and recommends courses of action to resolve problems.

The head teacher or complaints committee will then determine whether to uphold or dismiss the complaint and communicate that decision to the complainant, providing the appropriate escalation details.

Complaints coordinator

This could be the head teacher/designated complaints governor or other staff member providing administrative support. The complaints coordinator should:

- ensure that the complainant is fully updated at each stage of the procedure
- liaise with staff members, the head teacher, chair of governors, clerk and local authorities (if appropriate) to ensure the smooth running of the complaints procedure
- be aware of issues regarding:
  - sharing third party information
  - additional support – this may be needed by complainants when making a complaint including interpretation support
- keep records.

Clerk to the governing body

The clerk is the contact point for the complainant and the committee 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 (for example stage one paperwork, school and complainant submissions) and send it to the parties in advance of the meeting within an agreed timescale
- record the proceedings
- circulate the minutes of the meeting
- notify all parties of the committee's decision.

Committee chair

The committee's chair, who is nominated in advance of the complaint meeting, should ensure that:

- both parties are asked (via the clerk) to provide any additional information relating to the complaint by a specified date in advance of the meeting

- the meeting is conducted in an informal manner, is not adversarial, and that, if all parties are invited to attend, everyone is treated with respect and courtesy
- complainants, who may not be used to speaking at such a meeting, are put at ease
- the remit of the committee is explained to the complainant
- written material is seen by everyone in attendance, provided it does not breach confidentiality or any individual's rights to privacy under the DPA 2018 or GDPR – if a new issue arises it would be useful to give everyone the opportunity to consider and comment upon it; this may require a short adjournment of the meeting
- both the complainant and the school are given the opportunity to make their case and seek clarity, either through written submissions ahead of the meeting or verbally in the meeting itself
- the issues are addressed
- key findings of fact are made
- the committee is open-minded and acts independently
- no member of the committee has an external interest in the outcome of the proceedings or any involvement in an earlier stage of the procedure
- the meeting is minuted
- they liaise with the Clerk (and complaints coordinator, if the school has one).

Committee member

Committee 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 committee if they have had a prior involvement in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it
- The aim of the meeting should be to resolve the complaint and 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
- Many complainants will feel nervous and inhibited in a formal setting. Parents/carers often feel emotional when discussing an issue that affects their child
- Extra care needs to be taken a child/young person is present during all or part of the meeting. Careful consideration of the atmosphere and proceedings should ensure that any child/young person present does not feel intimidated. The committee should respect the views of the child/young person and give them equal consideration to those of adults. Where the

child/young person's parent is the complainant, the committee 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 committee considers is not in the child/young person's best interests
- The welfare of the child/young person is paramount.

Policy for managing serial and unreasonable complaints

Sheepy Magna CofE Primary 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.

Sheepy Magna CofE Primary 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 that are incompatible with the complaints procedure or with good practice
- introduces trivial or irrelevant information that 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 DfE

- 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 and/or
- 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. 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 head teacher or chair of governors will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying an '*unreasonable*' marking.
If the behaviour continues, the head teacher will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and ask them to change it. For complainants who excessively contact Sheepy Magna CofE Primary School causing a significant level of disruption, we may specify methods of communication and limit the number of contacts in a communication plan. This will be reviewed after six months.

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 Sheepy Magna CofE Primary School.

Persistent correspondents
If complainants frequently contact the school, causing a significant level of disruption, but refuse to engage with the complaints procedure, Sheepy School can:

- restrict the complainant to a single point of contact via an email address; and/or
- limit the number of times the complainant can make contact.

This restriction will be limited to the complainant's capacity to complain. For all other issues the complainant can contact the school as normal.