



Vita et Pax
PREPARATORY SCHOOL

Vita et Pax Preparatory School

Established 1936

Complaints Policy

Policy Originator	Head Teacher
Approved by	Governing Body
Governor Responsible	Mr P. Acharya (Chair)
Date Approved	1 March 2026
Review Period	Every 2 years (next: March 2028)
Status	Statutory

1. Aims

Vita et Pax Preparatory School aims to meet its statutory obligations when responding to complaints from parents and carers of pupils at the school, and others.

When responding to complaints, we aim to:

- Be impartial and non-adversarial
- Facilitate a full and fair investigation by an independent person or panel, where necessary
- Address all the points at issue and provide an effective and prompt response
- Respect complainants' desire for confidentiality
- Treat complainants with respect and courtesy
- Ensure that any decisions we make are lawful, rational, reasonable, fair and proportionate, in line with the principles of administrative law
- Keep complainants informed of the progress of the complaints process
- Consider how the complaint can feed into school improvement evaluation processes

We try to resolve complaints by informal means wherever possible. Where this is not possible, formal procedures will be followed.

The school will aim to give the complainant the opportunity to complete the complaints procedure in full. To support this, we will make sure we publicise the existence of this policy and make it available on the school website.

Throughout the process, we will be sensitive to the needs of all parties involved, and make any reasonable adjustments needed to accommodate individuals.

2. 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 from parents and carers of pupils at the school.

It has regard to the DfE guidance on handling complaints for independent schools and the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) Regulatory Requirements Review (January 2026).

In addition, it addresses duties set out in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) statutory framework (2024) with regards to dealing with complaints about the school's fulfilment of EYFS requirements.

3. Scope

This policy does not cover complaints procedures relating to:

- Admissions
- Statutory assessments of special educational needs (SEND)
- Safeguarding matters (see Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy)
- Suspension and permanent exclusion
- Whistleblowing
- Staff grievances
- Staff discipline

Please see our separate policies for procedures relating to these types of complaint. Complaints about services provided by other providers who use school premises or facilities should be directed to the provider concerned.

4. Roles and Responsibilities

4.1 The Complainant

The complainant will get a more effective and timely response to their complaint if they:

- Follow these procedures
- Co-operate with the school throughout the process, and respond to deadlines and communication promptly
- Ask for assistance as needed
- Treat all those involved with respect
- Do not approach individual governors about the complaint
- Do not publish details about the complaint on social media

4.2 The Investigator

An individual will be appointed to look into the complaint and establish the facts. They will:

- Interview all relevant parties, keeping notes

- Consider records and any written evidence and keep these securely
- Prepare a comprehensive report to the Head Teacher or complaints committee, which includes the facts and potential solutions

4.3 The Complaints Co-ordinator

The complaints co-ordinator may be the Head Teacher, the designated complaints governor, or any other staff member providing administrative support. The co-ordinator will:

- Keep the complainant up to date at each stage in the procedure
- Ensure the process runs smoothly by liaising with staff, the Head Teacher, Chair of Governors, and clerk
- Be aware of issues relating to sharing third-party information, and additional support needed by complainants (e.g. interpretation support, or where the complainant is a child or young person)
- Keep records

4.4 Clerk to the Governing Body

The clerk will:

- Be the contact point for the complainant and the complaints committee, including circulating the relevant papers and evidence before committee meetings
- Arrange the complaints hearing
- Record and circulate the minutes and outcome of the hearing

4.5 Panel Chair

The panel chair will:

- Chair the meeting, ensuring that everyone is treated with respect throughout
- Make sure all parties see the relevant information, understand the purpose of the committee, and are allowed to present their case

5. Principles for Investigation

When investigating a complaint, we will try to clarify:

- What has happened
- Who was involved
- What the complainant feels would put things right

5.1 Timescales

The complainant must raise the complaint within 3 months of the incident. If the complaint is about a series of related incidents, they must raise the complaint within 3 months of the last incident.

We will consider exceptions to this timeframe in circumstances where there were valid reasons for not making a complaint at that time and the complaint can still be investigated in a fair manner for all involved.

When complaints are made out of term time, we will consider them to have been received on the first school day after the holiday period.

If at any point we cannot meet the timescales set out in this policy, we will:

- Set new time limits with the complainant
- Send the complainant details of the new deadline and explain the delay

5.2 Complaints About Our Fulfilment of EYFS Requirements

We will investigate all written complaints relating to the school's fulfilment of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) requirements, and notify the complainant of the outcome within 28 days of receiving the complaint. The school will keep a record of the complaint (see Section 10) and make this available to Ofsted on request.

Parents and carers can notify Ofsted if they believe that the school is not meeting EYFS requirements, by:

- Calling 0300 123 4666
- Emailing enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
- Using the online contact form at <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted#org-contacts>

We will notify parents and carers if we become aware that the school is to be inspected by Ofsted. We will also supply a copy of the inspection report to parents and carers of children attending the setting on a regular basis.

6. Stages of Complaint

We have adopted a 3-stage process for dealing with complaints (not including complaints against the Head Teacher or governors — see Section 7):

- Stage 1 — Informal resolution
- Stage 2 — Formal investigation
- Stage 3 — Review panel

6.1 Stage 1: Informal

Our school will take informal complaints seriously and make every effort to resolve the matter quickly. It may be the case that the provision or clarification of information will resolve the issue.

The complainant should raise the complaint as soon as possible within the timescales set out in Section 5.1. The complaint should be addressed to the relevant member of school staff or the Head Teacher, either in person or by letter, telephone or email. If the complainant is unclear who to contact, they should contact the school office.

The school will acknowledge informal complaints within 5 school days, confirming how the school intends to proceed, including an indication of the anticipated timescale.

The informal stage will involve a meeting between the complainant and the Head Teacher, if appropriate. A written response will be provided by the school within 10 school days following the informal meeting.

If the complaint is not resolved informally, it will be escalated to a formal complaint.

6.2 Stage 2: Formal

The formal stage involves the complainant putting the complaint to the Head Teacher and/or the subject of the complaint, in a letter or email (preferred), over the phone, in person, or through a third party acting on their behalf.

The complainant should provide details such as relevant dates, times and the names of witnesses of events, alongside copies of any relevant documents. The complainant should also state what they feel would resolve the complaint.

The Head Teacher will record the date the complaint is received and will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing within 5 school days.

The Head Teacher (or other person appointed for this purpose) will then conduct their own investigation. The written conclusion of this investigation will be sent to the complainant within 10 school days.

How to escalate: If the complainant wishes to proceed to the next stage, they should inform the clerk to the Governing Body in writing within 10 school days. Requests received outside of this timeframe will be considered in exceptional circumstances.

6.3 Stage 3: Review Panel

Complaints will be escalated to the panel hearing stage if the complainant is not satisfied with the response at the second, formal stage.

The panel will be appointed by, or on behalf of, the proprietor and must consist of at least 3 people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint. At least 1 panel member must be independent of the management and running of the school. The panel cannot be made up solely of Governing Body members, as they are not independent of the management and running of the school.

The panel will have access to the existing record of the complaint's progress. The complainant must have reasonable notice of the date of the review panel. The clerk will aim to find a date within 5 school days of the request, where possible.

If the complainant rejects the offer of 3 proposed dates without good reason, the clerk will set a date. The hearing will go ahead using written submissions from both parties. Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least 5 school days before the date of the meeting.

The meeting will be held in private. Electronic recordings are not normally permitted unless required as part of reasonable adjustments. Prior consent of all parties will be sought before recordings take place.

At the meeting, the complainant and representatives from the school will be present. Each will have an opportunity to set out written or oral submissions. The complainant must be allowed to attend and be accompanied if they wish. We do not encourage either party to bring legal representation but will consider it on a case-by-case basis.

The panel can:

- Uphold the complaint, in whole or in part
- Dismiss the complaint, in whole or in part

If the complaint is upheld, the panel will decide the appropriate action to resolve the complaint and, where appropriate, recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures. The school will inform those involved of the decision in writing within 10 school days.

7. Complaints Against the Head Teacher, a Governor or the Governing Body

7.1 Stage 1: Informal

Complaints made against the Head Teacher or any individual member of the Governing Body (including the Chair or Vice-Chair) should be directed to the clerk of the Governing Body in the first instance. A suitably skilled and impartial governor will then carry out the steps at Stage 1 set out in Section 6.

7.2 Stage 2: Formal

Complaints about the Head Teacher should be addressed to the Chair of Governors, via the school office, marked as private and confidential. Complaints about the Chair or any individual governor or the whole Governing Body should be addressed to the clerk, via the school office, marked as private and confidential.

If the complaint is jointly about the Chair and Vice-Chair, the entire Governing Body, or the majority of the Governing Body, an independent investigator will carry out the steps in Stage 2 set out in Section 6. They will be appointed by the Governing Body and will write a formal response.

8. Referring Complaints on Completion of the School's Procedure

If the complainant is unsatisfied with the outcome of the school's complaints procedure, they can refer their complaint to the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) or the Department for Education (DfE). The ISI/DfE will check whether the complaint has been dealt with properly by the school.

The DfE will not overturn a school's decision about a complaint, but will intervene if a school has:

- Failed to act in line with its duties under education law
- Acted (or is proposing to act) unreasonably when exercising its functions
- Failed to meet the independent school standards

If the school's complaints procedure is found not to meet regulations, the school will be asked to correct its procedure accordingly.

For more information or to refer a complaint: www.gov.uk/complain-about-school

We will include this information in the outcome letter to complainants.

9. Unreasonable and Persistent Complaints

9.1 Unreasonable Complaints

Most complaints raised will be valid and will be treated seriously. However, a complaint may become unreasonable if the person:

- Refuses to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds, despite offers of assistance
- Refuses to co-operate with the complaints investigation process

- Refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of the complaints procedure
- Insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways incompatible with this procedure or good practice
- Introduces trivial or irrelevant information which they expect to be taken into account
- Raises large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions and insists they are answered immediately
- Makes unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues
- Changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds
- Repeatedly makes the same complaint despite previous investigations concluding it is groundless
- Refuses to accept the findings where the procedure has been fully implemented, including referral to the ISI/DfE
- Seeks an unrealistic outcome
- Makes excessive demands on school time through frequent, lengthy contact
- Uses threats to intimidate
- Uses abusive, offensive or discriminatory language or violence
- Knowingly provides falsified information
- Publishes unacceptable information on social media or other public forums

This list is not exhaustive; it is at the discretion of the school what is deemed unreasonable.

Steps we will take:

We will take every reasonable step to address the complainant's comments and give them a clear statement of our position and their options. Whenever possible, the Head Teacher or Chair of Governors will discuss concerns informally before applying an 'unreasonable' marking. For complainants who excessively contact the school causing significant disruption, we may:

- Give the complainant a single point of contact via an email address
- Limit the number of times the complainant can make contact
- Ask the complainant to engage a third party to act on their behalf
- Put any other strategy in place as necessary

In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, we will immediately inform the police and communicate our actions in writing.

9.2 Serial and Persistent Complaints

If the complainant contacts the school again on the same issue, the correspondence may be viewed as 'serial' or 'persistent'. We may stop responding when: we have taken every reasonable step to address the complainant's concerns; the complainant has been given a clear statement of our position and their options; and the complainant contacts the school repeatedly making substantially the same points each time.

Where we decide to stop responding, we will inform the individual and explain that we will consider any new complaints provided the concerns raised are materially different.

9.3 Duplicate Complaints

If we have resolved a complaint under this procedure and receive a duplicate complaint on the same subject from a partner, family member or other individual, we will assess whether there are aspects we had not previously considered or any new information. If satisfied there are no new aspects, we will tell the new complainant that we have already investigated and direct them to the ISI/DfE if dissatisfied with the original handling.

9.4 Complaint Campaigns

Where the school receives a large volume of complaints about the same topic, especially from complainants unconnected with the school, the school may publish a single response on the school website or send a template response. Normal procedures apply for those who wish to pursue the matter further.

10. Record Keeping and Confidentiality

The school will record the progress of all complaints, including information about actions taken at all stages, the stage at which the complaint was resolved, and the final outcome. The records will also include copies of letters and emails, and notes relating to meetings and phone calls.

This material will be treated as confidential and stored securely, and will be viewed only by those involved in investigating the complaint or on the review panel.

This is except where the Secretary of State (or someone acting on their behalf) or the complainant requests access through a freedom of information (FOI) request or a subject access request under the Data Protection Act 2018 (UK GDPR), or where the material must be made available during a school inspection.

Records of complaints will be kept securely, only for as long as necessary and in line with data protection law, our privacy notices and record retention schedule.

The details of the complaint, including the names of individuals involved, will not be shared with the whole Governing Body in case a review panel needs to be organised at a later point. Where the Governing Body is aware of the substance of the complaint before the review panel stage, the school will (where reasonably practicable) arrange for an independent panel to hear the complaint.

Complainants also have the right to request an independent panel if they believe there is likely to be bias in the proceedings. The decision to approve this request is made by the Governing Body, who will not unreasonably withhold consent.

11. Learning Lessons

The Governing Body will review any underlying issues raised by complaints with the Head Teacher where appropriate, and respecting confidentiality, to determine whether there are any improvements that the school can make to its procedures or practice to help prevent similar events in the future.

12. Monitoring Arrangements

The Governing Body will monitor the effectiveness of the complaints procedure in ensuring that complaints are handled properly. The Governing Body will track the number and nature of complaints,

and review underlying issues as stated in Section 11.

The complaints records are logged and managed by the Governing Body.

This policy will be reviewed every 2 years. At each review, the policy will be approved by the Governing Body.

13. Links with Other Policies

This policy links with the following policies and procedures:

- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy
- Admissions Policy
- SEND Policy
- Behaviour and Discipline Policy
- Anti-Bullying Policy
- Exclusions Policy
- Whistleblowing Policy
- Privacy Notice and Data Protection Policy
- Staff Grievance Procedure

Approved by: Governing Body of Vita et Pax Preparatory School

Date: 1 March 2026