

Complaints Procedure

Seven Springs Education



Approved by:	Willow Hewitt	Date: 08/09/23
Last reviewed on:	08/09/23	
Next review due by:	25/10/23	

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1. Aims

The aim of the policy is to ensure that all complaints regarding Seven Springs Education are handled in an effective manner, the right conclusions are reached via the appropriate stages, confidentiality is maintained and appropriate records are kept of correspondence, statements and records in accordance with this Procedure. Therefore, Seven Springs Education ('the company') needs to know as soon as possible if someone has any cause for concern and/or complaint.

2. 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 possible stage. Many issues can be resolved informally, without the need to use the formal stages of the complaints procedure. Seven Springs Education takes concerns seriously and will make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.

3. How to raise a concern or make a complaint informally

Before making a formal complaint, you should discuss your concerns clearly with a member of staff such as a tutor.

If you have difficulty discussing a concern with a particular member of staff or with the tutor, we will respect your views. In these cases, you may request to speak to a senior member of staff by stating your request to complaints@seven-springs.co.uk. An appropriate member of staff may then follow up by contacting you by email or phone.

Please be aware that the Complaints Team currently consists of: the Director of Operations and the Managing Director.

We understand, however, that there are occasions when people would like to raise their concerns formally. In this case, Seven Springs Education will attempt to resolve the issue internally, through the stages outlined within this complaints procedure.

4. How to raise a concern or make a complaint formally

A concern or complaint can be made in writing. 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 a member of staff or with the tutor in the first instance. If the issue remains unresolved, the next step is to make a formal complaint.

Formal complaints should be made to the Complaints Team (Director of Operations and Managing Director) at complaints@seven-springs.co.uk. Please mark the email subject as Private and Confidential.

If you would like to make a complaint concerning the Director of Operations or Managing Director, please contact another member of the Senior Leadership Team. (Contact SLT@seven-springs.co.uk requesting a direct email address for Ceri Moss or Joyce Wong.)

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.

5. Anonymous complaints

We will not normally investigate anonymous complaints. However, the Complaints Team, if appropriate, will determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation.

6. Time scales

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 if exceptional circumstances apply.

7. Scope of this Complaints Procedure

This procedure covers all complaints about any provision of services by Seven Springs Education, other than complaints that are dealt with under other statutory procedures, including those listed below.

Exceptions	Who to contact
<ul style="list-style-type: none">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. You may view our child protection and safeguarding policy on our website.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Whistleblowing 	<p>We have an internal whistleblowing procedure for all our employees, including temporary staff.</p> <p>You may view our whistleblowing policy on our website.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff grievances 	<p>Complaints from staff will be dealt with under our internal grievance procedures.</p> <p>You may view our staff grievance policy on our website.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff conduct 	<p>Complaints about staff will be dealt with under our internal disciplinary procedures, if appropriate.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>You may view our staff disciplinary policy on our website.</p>

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 Seven Springs Education 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.

8. Resolving complaints

At each stage in the procedure, Seven Springs Education 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 company policies in light of the complaint
- an apology.

9. Withdrawal of a Complaint

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

10. Stage 1

Formal complaints must be made to the Complaints Team via complaints@seven-springs.co.uk. This may be done in writing using the Complaint Form (appendix 1). The Complaints Team is only able to resolve complaints submitted in this format.

The Complaints Team will record the date the complaint is received and will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (by email) within 1 week.

Within this response, the Complaints Team will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, ask what remains unresolved and what outcome the complainant would like to see. The Complaints Team can consider whether a Zoom meeting is the most appropriate way of doing this.

During the investigation, the Complaints Team 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 Complaints Team will provide a formal written response within two weeks of the date of receipt of the complaint.

If the Complaints Team 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 Seven Springs Education will take to resolve the complaint.

The Complaints Team will advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 1.

If the complaint is about a member of the Complaints Team, a suitably skilled senior member of staff will be appointed to complete all the actions at Stage 1, this is likely a member of the Senior Leadership Team.

If the complaint is about the Senior Leadership Team, then Stage 1 will be considered by an independent investigator appointed by the Senior Leadership Team. At the conclusion of their investigation, the independent investigator will provide a formal written response.

11. Stage 2

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome at Stage 1 and wishes to take the matter further, they can escalate the complaint to Stage 2 – a meeting with the Senior Leadership Team which will be formed of impartial members only. This is the final stage of the complaints procedure.

A request to escalate to Stage 2 must be made to the Complaints Team and the Senior Leadership Team, via email at complaints@seven-springs.co.uk, within 1 week of receipt of the Stage 1 response.

A member of the Senior Leadership Team (the Clerk) will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing by email within 3 working days.

Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.

The member of the Senior Leadership Team (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 working days of receipt of the Stage 2 request. If this is not possible, the member of the Senior Leadership Team (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 member of the Senior Leadership Team (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 members of the Senior Leadership Team with no prior involvement or knowledge of the complaint. Prior to the meeting, they will decide amongst themselves who will act as the Chair of the Complaints Committee. If there are fewer than three members of the Senior Leadership Team available, a member of the Senior Leadership Team (the Clerk) will source any additional, independent investigators from another organisation or through other means, in order to make up the committee. Alternatively, an entirely independent committee may be convened to hear the complaint at Stage 2.

The committee will decide whether to deal with the complaint by inviting parties to a meeting or through written representations, but in making their decision they 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. 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.

For instance, if an employee is called as a witness in a complaint meeting, they may wish to be supported by union and/or legal representation.

Note: Complaints about staff conduct will not generally be handled under this complaints procedure. Complainants will be advised that any staff conduct complaints will be considered under staff disciplinary procedures, if appropriate, but outcomes will not be shared with them.

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

At least ten working days before the meeting, the member of the Senior Leadership Team 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 five working days before the meeting.

Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least two working 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 1 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 company's systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future.

The Chair of the Committee will provide the complainant and Seven Springs Education with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within two working days.

The letter to the complainant will include details of how to contact the National Tutoring Programme (if the complaint is regarding Seven Springs Education's work as an NTP Tuition Partner), ACAS (if the complaint is regarding Seven Springs Education as an employer or is workplace-related) or Citizens Advice (for general advice) if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled by Seven Springs Education.

If the complaint is about the Senior Leadership Team.

Stage 2 will be heard by a committee of independent investigators.

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 Seven Springs Education will take to resolve the complaint.

The response will also advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied.

12. Next Steps

12.1 For school partnerships

If the complainant believes Seven Springs Education did not handle their complaint in accordance with the published complaints procedure or they acted unlawfully or unreasonably in the exercise of their duties, they can contact the child's school to escalate the complaint after they have completed Stage 2.

The child's school will follow their own complaints procedure.

12.2 Others

If the complainant believes Seven Springs Education did not handle their complaint in accordance with the published complaints procedure or they acted unlawfully or unreasonably in the exercise of their duties as an organisation or employer, they may consider contacting Citizens Advice.

The complainant can contact Citizens Advice online at:

<https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/>

Appendix 1: Complaint Form

Please complete and return to the Complaints Team via complaints@seven-springs.co.uk, who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

Your name:
Student's name (if relevant):
Your relationship to the student (if relevant):
Address: Postcode: Day time telephone number: Evening telephone number: Email:
Please give details of your complaint, including whether you have spoken to anybody at Seven Springs Education about it.

What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?

Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details.

Signature:

Date:

Official use

Date acknowledgement sent:

By who:

Complaint referred to:

Date:

Appendix 2: 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 Seven Springs Education 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 of records and other relevant information
 - analysing information
- liaising with the complainant and the complaints co-ordinator 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 Senior Leadership Team or complaints committee that sets out the facts, identifies solutions and recommends courses of action to resolve problems.

The Senior Leadership Team 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 Co-ordinator (this could be a member of the Senior Leadership Team / a member of the Complaints Team or other staff member providing administrative support)

The complaints co-ordinator should:

- ensure that the complainant is fully updated at each stage of the procedure
- liaise with staff members, the Senior Leadership Team and the child's school (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 or where the complainant is a child or young person
- keep records.

Clerk to the Senior Leadership Team

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 company 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 1 paperwork, company 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. This is particularly important if the complainant is a child/young person
- 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 Seven Springs Education 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 relevant).

Committee Member

Committee members should be aware that:

- the meeting must be independent and impartial, and should be seen to be so

No person 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 Seven Springs Education 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 when the complainant is a child/young person and present during all or part of the meeting

Careful consideration of the atmosphere and proceedings should ensure that the child/young person does not feel intimidated.

The committee should respect the views of the child/young person and give them equal consideration to those of adults.

If the child/young person is the complainant, the committee should ask in advance if any support is needed to help them present their complaint. 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.