

THE MOUNT SCHOOL

COMPLAINTS POLICY AND PROCEDURE

2026-2027

Version	2.0
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Last updated	August 2026
Effective from	1 September 2026
Review date	August 2027
Approval	Approved by Chris Sellers - Director / Proprietor

This procedure deals principally with complaints from parents/carers of current pupils, as required by Part 7 of the Independent School Standards.

1. Aims

The Mount aims to respond to complaints fairly, promptly and proportionately, while preserving the welfare of pupils and the rights of those involved.

- be impartial and non-adversarial;
- enable concerns to be resolved informally where appropriate;
- provide a full and fair formal process where informal resolution is unsuccessful;
- address the points at issue and explain decisions;
- respect confidentiality subject to safeguarding, legal and inspection requirements;
- treat all parties with courtesy;
- make reasonable adjustments where required;
- keep complainants appropriately informed; and
- use complaints to identify learning and improve practice.

The School will not disadvantage a pupil because a parent/carers has made a complaint in good faith.

2. Legal and regulatory framework

This policy is designed to meet Schedule 1, Part 7 of the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014. The April 2026 DfE Independent School Standards guidance confirms that the procedure must be written and available to parents; contain clear timescales; provide informal, formal written and panel stages; include a panel of at least three people not directly involved in the matters complained of; include at least one person independent of the management and running of the School; allow a parent to attend and be accompanied; provide findings and recommendations; and maintain the required confidential written records.

It also reflects the EYFS statutory framework for group and school-based providers applying from 1 September 2026. EYFS providers must investigate written complaints about fulfilment of EYFS requirements, notify the complainant of the outcome within 28 days, and make the complaints record available to Ofsted on request.

Relevant data protection, equality, safeguarding and contractual obligations also apply.

3. Definitions

A concern is an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered important for which reassurance or clarification is sought.

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

A complaint does not have to use the word 'complaint' to be treated as one where the substance clearly amounts to dissatisfaction requiring a response.

4. Scope and who may use this procedure

The Part 7 statutory complaints procedure applies to complaints from parents/carers of pupils at the School. The School may also respond to concerns from others, including former parents or members of the public, using an appropriate process, but they do not acquire the same Part 7 procedural entitlement merely by making a complaint.

Prospective parents should normally use the admissions process for admissions concerns. Complaints about services delivered by independent third-party providers using School premises should normally be directed to that provider.

The following matters may be governed wholly or partly by separate procedures:

- admissions decisions;
- suspension and permanent exclusion;

- safeguarding concerns and allegations about adults;
- whistleblowing;
- staff grievances and disciplinary matters;
- data protection rights/complaints; and
- matters for which another statutory or contractual route applies.

Where a complaint contains safeguarding information, the safeguarding response takes priority and must not wait for the complaints process. The existence of a safeguarding process does not automatically prevent the School from considering other complaint issues when it is safe and appropriate to do so.

5. Accessibility and reasonable adjustments

The School will make reasonable adjustments for disabled complainants and will consider communication, literacy, language and accessibility needs. A parent who has difficulty putting a complaint in writing may ask the School for reasonable assistance to record it, while ensuring that the substance remains the parent's complaint.

6. Roles and responsibilities

6.1 The complainant

- raise concerns promptly and explain the outcome sought where possible;
- follow the published stages and timescales;
- co-operate reasonably with the process;
- provide relevant information/evidence;
- treat staff and others respectfully; and
- protect the privacy of children and other families, including when using social media.

A complainant will not lose access to the procedure merely because they have criticised the School publicly. However, threatening, abusive or harassing conduct may be managed separately.

6.2 Complaint coordinator / investigator

The Headteacher, Director/Proprietor or delegated person will appoint an appropriate investigator where investigation is needed. The investigator will establish relevant facts, review records/evidence, interview appropriate people and produce a fair account or report.

The investigator and the chair of a Stage 3 panel are distinct functions unless the circumstances make combining roles appropriate and there is no prior involvement or conflict. No panel member may have been directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint.

6.3 Headteacher

The Headteacher normally oversees formal complaints about the School and ensures actions arising from complaints are implemented.

6.4 Director / Proprietor

Chris Sellers, Director/Proprietor, handles formal complaints about the Headteacher or appoints an appropriate investigator. The Director/Proprietor also appoints or arranges the Stage 3 panel and monitors compliance with Part 7.

7. Principles for investigation

The School will clarify what happened, who was involved, the evidence available, the complainant's concerns and the outcome sought. Findings will be based on the information reasonably available.

The School is not required to disclose confidential information about another child, family or employee simply because it is relevant to a complaint. Responses will explain the School's consideration as fully as possible without breaching confidentiality or data protection.

Pupils will only be interviewed where necessary and appropriate. Their age, understanding, SEND, safeguarding needs and the potential impact of repeated questioning will be considered.

8. Timescales

Complaints should normally be raised within three months of the incident, or within three months of the last incident in a connected series. The School may accept a later complaint where there is good reason and it remains possible to consider it fairly.

For this procedure, a 'working day' means a day on which the School is open to pupils for normal teaching, unless the School expressly agrees otherwise. Complaints received during School closure periods will normally be treated as received on the next working day.

Where a published timescale cannot reasonably be met, the School will explain the reason and provide a revised date. Extensions will not be used simply to frustrate or delay a complaint.

The 28-day EYFS statutory response period is a calendar-day requirement and is not displaced by the School's working-day definitions or School holidays.

9. EYFS complaints

Written complaints relating to the School/Nursery's fulfilment of EYFS requirements will be investigated and the complainant notified of the outcome within 28 days of receipt. A written record of the complaint and outcome will be retained and made available to Ofsted on request.

Parents/carers may contact Ofsted where they believe EYFS requirements are not being met. Current contact routes should be obtained from Ofsted/GOV.UK rather than relying on historic telephone numbers printed in older versions of this policy.

Where an EYFS complaint raises a safeguarding concern, allegation of harm, serious accident or other separately notifiable matter, leaders will also follow the relevant EYFS notification and safeguarding requirements.

10. Stage 1 - Informal resolution

It is hoped that most concerns can be resolved quickly and informally. Parents should normally raise a concern with the child's Form Teacher/key person or relevant member of staff.

If the matter cannot be resolved at that level, the member of staff may involve SLT. A complaint sent directly to the Headteacher may be referred to the appropriate member of staff for informal resolution unless the Headteacher considers that inappropriate because of seriousness, previous involvement or the nature of the concern.

The School will aim to address Stage 1 within 7 working days. Where this is not possible, the parent will be told why and given a revised timescale.

If the parent remains dissatisfied, they may proceed to Stage 2. They should normally do so within 7 working days of the Stage 1 response, although a reasonable late escalation may be accepted.

The Independent School Standards require written records of formal complaints made under Stage 2 onwards. The School may additionally record informal concerns for safeguarding, operational or learning purposes, but this is distinguished from the statutory Part 7 formal-complaints record.

11. Stage 2 - Formal written complaint

A Stage 2 complaint must be made in writing to the Headteacher and should identify the complaint, relevant facts and, where possible, the outcome sought. Email is sufficient.

The Headteacher will acknowledge the complaint and normally indicate how it will be handled within 5 working days.

The Headteacher or appointed investigator will consider relevant evidence and may meet/interview those involved. Written notes/records will be retained.

The School will normally provide the Stage 2 decision within 10 working days of receipt. If more time is reasonably required, the parent will be told why and given a revised date.

The response will normally state whether each substantive element is upheld, partially upheld or not upheld where it is appropriate to do so, explain the reasons, identify any action or learning that can properly be shared, and explain how to request Stage 3.

12. Complaints about the Headteacher or Director/Proprietor

A formal complaint about the Headteacher should be sent to Chris Sellers, Director/Proprietor, at chris.sellers@themount.org.uk. The Director/Proprietor will investigate or appoint a suitable person who has not been directly involved in the matters complained of.

A complaint about the Director/Proprietor, or a complaint in which the Director/Proprietor is personally and materially involved, must not be determined solely by that individual. The School will arrange an appropriately independent person to manage the formal stage and/or proceed to a properly constituted panel so that the procedure remains fair and Part 7 compliant.

Complaints about the Headteacher will normally be dealt with within 15 working days where practicable, with any necessary revised timescale communicated.

13. Stage 3 - Panel hearing

If the parent remains dissatisfied following Stage 2, they may request a panel hearing. The request should normally be made in writing within 7 working days of the Stage 2 decision and explain the grounds for dissatisfaction.

The School will acknowledge the request and arrange a hearing as soon as reasonably practicable, normally within 30 working days.

The panel will consist of at least three people appointed by or on behalf of the Director/Proprietor. None will have been directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint. At least one panel member will be independent of the management and running of The Mount.

When selecting the independent member, the School will avoid a person whose relationship with The Mount would reasonably undermine their independence, such as a person routinely involved in managing the School's affairs.

The parent is entitled to attend the hearing and to be accompanied if they wish. The School will not impose a blanket prohibition on legal companions because Part 7 gives the parent the right to be accompanied; however, the panel hearing is not ordinarily a legal proceeding and the chair may set reasonable arrangements to ensure it remains fair, proportionate and focused.

The panel may proceed in a parent's absence where the parent has been offered a fair opportunity to attend and, after considering the circumstances and any request for postponement, the panel concludes it is reasonable to proceed.

14. Stage 3 papers and hearing procedure

The chair may set a reasonable deadline for the complainant and School to provide documents they wish the panel to consider. Papers will be circulated sufficiently in advance, subject to safeguarding, confidentiality and data-protection restrictions.

The chair will explain the procedure, ensure each side has a fair opportunity to present its case, maintain respectful conduct and keep the focus on the complaint. A written note/minute of the hearing will be kept.

Audio/video recording will not normally be permitted. A reasonable adjustment request to record a hearing will be considered individually; the School will not rely on an absolute ban where disability law requires consideration of an adjustment.

15. Panel findings, recommendations and outcome

The panel may make findings on the complaint and recommendations to the School. It may uphold the complaint in whole or part, reject it, and/or recommend action or learning.

The panel will normally issue its written findings and recommendations within 10 working days of the hearing.

A copy of the panel's findings and recommendations will be provided to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about. A copy will also be available for inspection on the School premises by the Director/Proprietor and Headteacher, as required by Part 7.

The Stage 3 decision concludes the School's internal complaints procedure.

16. Safeguarding, allegations and complaints

A complaint about safeguarding practice may contain matters that can be considered through this procedure, but an allegation that a child is at risk of harm or that an adult may have harmed a child must immediately be handled under the Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy and KCSIE 2026.

The complaints process must not be used to investigate an allegation about an adult where doing so could compromise LADO, children's social care or police processes. The complainant may be told that safeguarding procedures have been followed without being given confidential employment or child-protection information.

17. Complaints involving other pupils or families

The School may investigate a complaint involving another pupil but cannot ordinarily tell the complainant confidential details of sanctions, safeguarding action, SEND provision or personal information relating to that child. This does not mean no action has been taken.

18. Unreasonably persistent or unacceptable conduct

Most complaints are raised reasonably and will be treated seriously. The School will distinguish between a persistent complainant and persistent or unreasonable conduct. A person will not be labelled unreasonable simply because they pursue a complaint or disagree with the outcome.

Conduct may become unreasonable where, for example, a person repeatedly raises the same resolved issue without new evidence; knowingly provides false information; refuses to identify the substance of a complaint; repeatedly changes the complaint in a way that prevents fair consideration; makes excessive repetitive contact; uses abusive, threatening or harassing language; or insists on outcomes the School cannot lawfully provide.

Before restricting communication, the School will normally explain the concern, confirm what has already been addressed, identify any remaining route and set proportionate communication arrangements.

Possible arrangements include a single point of contact, agreed communication method, reasonable frequency limits or declining to revisit a completed complaint unless material new information is provided.

Restrictions will be reviewed and will not prevent consideration of genuinely new complaints, safeguarding information or urgent safety concerns.

19. Aggression, threats and site access

Threatening, abusive or violent conduct is unacceptable. Immediate danger will be reported to the police. Other incidents will be assessed proportionately; the previous policy's automatic statement that every serious incident of aggression or violence would immediately be reported to police has been replaced with a risk-based response.

Any restriction on a parent's access to School premises will be considered separately, fairly and proportionately, with the reasons and review arrangements communicated as appropriate.

20. Duplicate, collective and campaign complaints

Where substantially the same complaint has already completed the procedure, the School may explain that the local process is complete unless new material issues or evidence are raised.

Where several parents raise the same underlying issue, the School may coordinate administration or provide common factual information, but it will not use a blanket rule refusing to hear concerns collectively where doing so would prevent a fair response. Individual confidential information will remain protected.

For high-volume complaints from people who are not parents of current pupils, the School may use a proportionate response such as a published statement or template response where appropriate.

21. External escalation after the School procedure

For independent schools, the Department for Education is the regulator for the Independent School Standards. DfE does not ordinarily re-investigate the merits of an individual private-school complaint, but it may consider information indicating a major failure to meet the standards and can commission Ofsted inspection activity.

The appropriate external route depends on the issue and The Mount's inspection/regulatory arrangements at the time. Parents should use the current GOV.UK 'Complain about a school - Private schools' route for current details.

Ofsted remains the relevant contact for complaints about fulfilment of EYFS requirements and for matters within its early-years regulatory remit.

22. Record keeping and confidentiality

The School will keep a written record of all Stage 2 formal complaints, showing whether they were resolved following the formal procedure or proceeded to a panel hearing, and the action taken by the School as a result, regardless of whether the complaint was upheld.

The School will also retain the Stage 3 panel findings and recommendations and sufficient supporting records to demonstrate fair handling.

Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the Education and Skills Act 2008 requests access, or where another lawful disclosure is required.

The Mount is an ordinary independent school and should not imply that FOIA applies to it unless its legal status changes. Subject access and other data-protection rights are dealt with under data-protection law and may be subject to exemptions and third-party rights.

Records will be retained securely in accordance with the School's retention schedule and privacy information. Complaint records must not be destroyed simply because the complaint is closed if the retention schedule requires continued retention.

23. Learning lessons

The Director/Proprietor, Headteacher and SLT will review underlying issues where appropriate and determine whether changes are needed to policy, practice, training, communication, staffing, risk management or quality assurance.

Learning from complaints will be separated from blame and shared appropriately while maintaining confidentiality.

24. Monitoring arrangements

The Director/Proprietor will monitor whether the procedure is being implemented effectively and whether Part 7 requirements are met. Monitoring will include the number/nature of formal complaints, stage reached, timescales, themes, repeat issues, actions and evidence that panel requirements have been satisfied.

Because Ofsted's September 2026 independent-school inspection operating guide specifically identifies Part 7 complaints arrangements for inspection evidence, the School will maintain an inspection-ready complaints file/register showing the required records without exposing unnecessary confidential information.

Appendix A - Formal complaint form

Parent/carer name:

Pupil name/form:

Contact details:

Date:

What are you complaining about?

Relevant dates/people:

What steps have already been taken informally?

What outcome are you seeking?

Documents/evidence attached:

Any reasonable adjustment required?

Signature/name/date:

Appendix B - Complaints register fields

- Reference number
- Date received
- Complainant / pupil
- Stage
- Complaint summary
- Investigator
- Safeguarding issue / DSL referral
- Acknowledgement date
- Outcome date
- Upheld / partly / not upheld

- Action taken regardless of outcome
- Escalated to panel?
- Panel date
- Independent member confirmed
- Findings/recommendations issued
- Closed date
- Learning/actions
- Retention/review date

Appendix C - Stage 3 panel compliance checklist

- At least three panel members
- No member directly involved in matters complained of
- At least one member independent of management and running of School
- Conflicts declared and checked
- Parent invited and told they may be accompanied
- Reasonable adjustments considered
- Papers circulated fairly
- Safeguarding/confidential information protected
- Written record/minute kept
- Panel makes findings and recommendations
- Written outcome sent to complainant
- Outcome sent to person complained about where relevant
- Copy available on School premises to proprietor and Headteacher
- Complaint/action recorded centrally

Appendix D - EYFS complaint check

- Is the complaint in writing?
- Does it concern fulfilment of an EYFS requirement?
- Date received recorded
- 28-calendar-day deadline calculated
- Safeguarding/notifiable-event issue considered separately
- Investigation completed
- Outcome notified within 28 days
- Written complaint/outcome record retained
- Record available to Ofsted on request
- Learning/actions completed