



Ministry
of Defence

DCS Directive 3.2.8

Complaints Procedure for DCS Schools & Settings Overseas

DCS Jan 24 v 1.0

Authorisation	Head Defence Children Services (Hd DCS)
Senior Responsible Owner	HQ DCS Chief Education Officer (CEdO)
Points of Contact	DCS Policy Risk and Assurance Officer (POLRA)
Review Date	Sep 2027
Related Policy or Guidance	Section 29 The Education Act 2002 DfE (Department for Education,) 'Best Practice Guidance for School Complaints Procedures 2020' Joint Service Publication (JSP) 834: Safeguarding JSP 441: Information Management JSP 831 Redress of Individual Grievances Service Complaints MOD Civilian Policy for Misconduct and Discipline MOD Civilian Policy for Grievance and Dispute Resolution DCS Directive 3.2.9 Pupil Exclusion DCS Directive 7.1.2 Records Management DCS Directive 3.2.23 MOD Overseas Schools and Settings Admissions
Annex A	Formal Complaint Form Stage 2
Annex B	Formal Complaint Form Stage 3
Annex C	Template Letter For Reporting The Outcome Of A Formal Complaint
Annex D	Appeal Template Form
Annex E	Complaint Appeal Investigation Report Template
Annex F	Letter For Reporting The Outcome Of A Formal Complaint Appeal

General

Introduction

1. The procedures laid out in this document mirror the statutory requirements placed upon Schools and Settings in England's maintained education sector¹.

¹ Section 29 of the Education Act 2002, requires maintained Schools and Settings to provide a procedure for managing internal complaints.

2. As directed by Head of Diversity & Inclusion and in accordance with JSP 887, this policy directive has been considered against the Public Sector Equality Duty and an Equality Analysis Impact Assessment (EQIA) has been conducted and is available via this [link](#).

Aim

3. This Directive outlines the procedures that DCS Schools and Settings overseas are to follow in the management of complaints relating to their establishments.

Scope

4. Due to its location, Queen Victoria School (QVS) follows Scottish National statutory requirements. The QVS policy is accessed on the QVS website². Please note that it is a statutory requirement within Scotland for all boarding Schools to make their complaints log available to the Care Inspectorate as part of an annual inspection.
5. Where a concern or complaint indicates that a child is at risk of harm, DCS School staff are to follow the procedures directed through JSP 834: Safeguarding, the DCS Safeguarding Policy Directive and DCS Policy Directive 3.2.2 Managing Allegations relating to Children in MOD Schools and Settings Overseas.
6. This Directive does not cover complaints procedures relating to:
 - a) **Special to Type Process.** Service Complaints see JSP 831, DBS Complaints process ([People Portal](#)),
 - b) **Admissions.** DCS personnel are directed to follow guidance contained in the DCS Directive 3.2.23 MOD Overseas Schools and Settings Admissions.
 - c) **Safeguarding.** DCS personnel are directed to follow policy contained in JSP 834: Safeguarding and the DCS Safeguarding Policy Directive.
 - d) **Pupil Exclusion.** DCS direction on appealing against decisions on pupil exclusion is contained in DCS Directive 3.2.9: Pupil Exclusion.
 - e) **Whistleblowing.** DCS personnel are to follow MOD Civilian policy for whistleblowing.
 - f) **Grievance.** DCS personnel are to follow MOD Civilian policy for grievance and dispute resolution or the Bullying, Harassment and Discrimination Policy.
 - g) **Misconduct and Discipline.** The MOD Civilian policy for discipline and misconduct applies to all DCS personnel. In addition to this, Soulbury and Teaching grades employed by DCS are subject to separate standards of conduct governed by England's National Teaching Standards.

Identifying a Complaint

7. It is important to understand the difference between a complaint and a concern. A concern is defined as 'an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for

² Please note that it is a statutory requirement within Scotland for all boarding Schools to make their complaints log available to the Care Inspectorate as part of an annual inspection.

which reassurances are sought.³ DCS Schools and Settings will resolve concerns through day-to-day communication as far as possible. Early and informal resolution will reduce the likelihood of a concern developing into a complaint.

8. A complaint is defined as ‘an expression or statement of dissatisfaction, however made, about actions taken or a lack of action’⁴ Complaints will be managed informally where possible and at the earliest possible stage.

The Complaints Policy Process

Informal Stage

9. The informal stage is where complaints and concerns are raised and responded to directly by the School or Setting.
10. Concerns and complaints can be addressed quickly by communicating with the child's class teacher, or in Secondary Schools, the relevant subject teacher or form tutor. The teacher will make every effort to address issues informally.
11. Teachers will normally be teaching and therefore unavailable during the school day, however, it is possible to contact the office to arrange a meeting. Discussions can be an effective way to quickly resolve issues.
12. If concerns and complaints have not been satisfactorily addressed by the member of staff, these should be escalated to a more senior School or Setting leader. This could be the Assistant Head Teacher, Deputy Head Teacher, or Head Teacher, or in a Setting the Deputy Manager or Early Years Manager. The complaint, the action already taken and why it has not been resolved should be clearly explained. The senior leader will informally investigate the matter and respond, if required, with appropriate explanation and action.
13. If the complaint is about the actions of a Head Teacher, Setting Manager, or other whole School or Setting issue, the first step is to attempt to resolve it through informal discussion or correspondence with the Head Teacher or Setting Manager.

Formal Complaint - Stage 1

14. The Formal Complaint Stage requires all complaints and concerns to be raised in writing. Complaints at **Stage 1** will normally be reported to the Head Teacher or Setting Manager. You can expect a response within **3 working days**.
15. If the complaint is about the Head Teacher or Setting Manager, the complaint at **Stage 1** is raised with the Chair of the School Governance Committee (SGC). As the Chair of the SGC is a volunteer, you can expect a response within **10 working days**.

Formal Complaint – Stage 2

16. If the **Stage 1** complaint remains unresolved, the complaint can be escalated at **Stage 2**, to the Chair of the SGC using the form at **Annex A**. The SGC Chair may choose to

³ DfE Best practice guidance for School Complaints Procedures 2020

⁴ DfE Best practice guidance for School Complaints Procedures 2020

convene a panel of SGC members to review the complaint. The Chair of SGC will review the complaint and may wish to speak with you. The Chair of the SGC will consider all evidence and make recommendation for resolution. You can expect a response within **15 working days**. If you remain dissatisfied, then a **Stage 3** complaint may be raised.

17. For complaints referred to the Chair of the SGC at **Stage 1** (those directly related to the Head Teacher or Setting Manager), the complaint must be escalated directly to **Stage 3**.

Formal Complaint – Stage 3

18. A **Stage 3** complaint is raised using the Formal Complaint Form and sent to the mailbox listed on the form at **Annex B**. The Chief Education Officer (CEdO) will appoint a decision manager, to investigate the complaint. The decision manager will consider all evidence and make recommendations for resolution. The decision manager will write to you with the outcome using **Annex C** as a template. You can expect a response within **20 working days**.

Appeal

19. If you remain dissatisfied and there is additional evidence for consideration, an **appeal** can be made in writing to the Chief Education Officer (CEdO) using the Formal Complaint Appeal Form at **Annex D**. The CEdO will consider the appeal, including any additional appropriate evidence, completing the template at **Annex E** or decide upon alternative ways forward. The CEdO will provide a written response to the **Formal Complaint Appeal** outcome using **Annex F**. You can expect a response within **40 working days**. Please note that this is the final stage of the process.

Complaint window

20. To enable appropriate investigation, complaints must be raised as soon as possible and no later than **3 months** after an incident. Where there are valid reasons, exceptions will be considered.
21. A breakdown of timeframes can be seen in the table below:

Complaint Window Timeframe			
Stage	Whom to report to	Response Time	Remarks
Formal Complaint - Stage 1	Head Teacher / Setting Manager	3 working days	
Formal Complaint - Stage 1	Chair of the School Governance Committee (SGC)	10 working days	If a complaint involves Head Teacher or Settings Manager
Formal Complaint - Stage 2	Chair of the School Governance Committee (SGC)	15 working days	Using Annex A
Formal Complaint - Stage 3	Chief Education Officer (CEdO) will appoint a Decision Manager	20 working days	Using Annex B and emailed to: RC-DCS-SS-Complaints@mod.gov.uk
Appeal Stage	Chief Education Officer (CEdO)	40 working days	Using Annex D

Responsibilities

22. To avoid jeopardising an investigation when making a formal complaint, it is important to maintain confidentiality.

23. To maintain impartiality, the SGC Chair **should not** be directly involved with the complaint at Stage 1, unless involving the Head Teacher or Setting Manager. The Chair of the SGC may delegate actions related to the complaint, but retains accountability for response to the complainant. All matters concerning the complaint should be retained confidentially.
24. At each stage in the procedure, it is important to identify ways in which a complaint can be resolved and the issue successfully concluded.
25. If conduct, performance, or other HR Civilian procedures are invoked because of the complaint, the details of the actions and outcomes will remain confidential. While this may be frustrating for a complainant, it is important for the integrity and application of these processes that confidentiality is maintained. However, it is permissible for the complainant to be informed that appropriate action is being taken under DCS procedures.
26. Although it is anticipated that all parties involved in the complaint will maintain effective working relationships, it is possible to request mediation. For this to be effective, all parties must agree to participate.

Financial Compensation

27. DCS Schools and Settings does not pay financial compensation as a response to any complaints.

Record Keeping and Reporting

28. All Formal Complaints and Appeals will be stored in the DCS Schools and Settings Complaints management system and managed in accordance with Directive 7.1.2 Records Management.

Serial and Unreasonable Complaints

29. DCS are committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, and to providing a high-quality service to those who complain. There will not normally be limits to the contact complainants have with Schools and Settings. However, DCS staff will not tolerate unacceptable behaviour and action will be taken to protect staff from conduct, which is abusive, offensive or threatening. DCS follows the Department for Education guidance on serial and unreasonable complaints, defining unreasonable behaviour as that which hinders consideration of complaints because of the frequency or nature of the complainant's contact.
30. All DCS personnel are entitled to dignity at work and any complaints made should not involve abuse, intimidating behaviour, or defamation of character through any method, including online. In the event of abuse or threatening behaviour on the school premises, the complainant may be asked to leave. While DCS personnel are directed to follow the MOD Civilian policy for grievance and dispute resolution or similar local employment policies, the local military Chain of Command can be involved at an earlier stage to help resolve matters and take appropriate action. Depending on the nature of the unacceptable behaviour, support from the Police and other appropriate agencies may be requested.
31. There may be occasions when, despite all stages of the procedures having been followed, the complainant remains dissatisfied. If the complainant tries to reopen the same issue, DCS will inform them in writing that the procedure has been exhausted and that the matter is closed.

DCS Schools and Settings **Formal Complaint Form Stage 2**

Please complete this form with as much detail as is relevant and attach any additional documentation. Once complete, please send to DCS HQ using the following email address:
RC-DCS-SS-Complaints@mod.gov.uk

Section 1: Personal Details

Your Name:	
Child's Name:	
School or Setting:	
Class/Year:	
Relationship to Child:	
Address:	
Telephone:	
Email:	

Section 2: Complaint

A - Please provide details of the complaint, including dates and other key information.

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B - What action, if any, have you already taken to try and resolve your complaint?

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C - What response, if any, has there been to your complaint?

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D – Please list any additional paperwork you include to support your complaint.

Section 3: Outcome

Please specify the desired actions and outcomes that you seek to resolve your complaint.

Section 4: Complainant's Signature

By adding my electronic signature, or typing my name, I am signing this form as confirmation of my understanding of Section 5. I am confirming, to the best of my knowledge, the information in this form is correct.

Signature:			
Full Name:		Date:	

Section 5: Information sharing and data protection.

The personal data collected will be processed by DCS in accordance with the MOD Privacy Notice and DCS Directive 7.1.2 Records Management. DCS will hold, and use, your personal data under the public duty of the MOD to provide support to its personnel regarding the educational and welfare requirements of their children. When required, DCS may share your data with appropriate external organisations and individuals who are required to be involved to investigate and resolve your complaint.

Once complete, please attach any relevant documentation and send to DCS HQ using the following email address: RC-DCS-SS-Complaints@mod.gov.uk

DCS Schools and Settings **Formal Complaint Form Stage 3**

Please complete this form with as much detail as is relevant and attach any additional documentation. Once complete, please send to DCS HQ using the following email address:
RC-DCS-SS-Complaints@mod.gov.uk

Section 1: Personal Details

Your Name:	
Child's Name:	
School or Setting:	
Class/Year:	
Relationship to Child:	
Address:	
Telephone:	
Email:	

Section 2: Complaint

A - Please give details of the complaint, why this has not been resolved and what new evidence you would like to be considered.

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B - Please give details of any additional paperwork you include to support your complaint and submit with this form. Please include the Formal Complaint and the outcome of this.

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Section 3: Outcome

Please specify the desired actions and outcomes that you seek to help resolve your complaint.

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Section 4:

Complainant's Signature

By adding my electronic signature, or typing my name, I am signing this form as confirmation of my understanding of Section 5. I am confirming, to the best of my knowledge, the information within this form is correct.

Signature			
Full Name		Date	

Section 5: Information sharing and data protection

The personal data collected will be processed by DCS in accordance with the MOD Privacy Notice and DCS Record Management Directive. DCS will hold, and use, your personal data under the public duty of the MOD to provide support to its personnel regarding the educational and welfare requirements of their children. When required, DCS may share your data with appropriate external organisations and individuals who are required to be involved to investigate and resolve your complaint.

Once complete, please attach any relevant documentation and send to DCS HQ using the following email address: RC-DCS-SS-Complaints@mod.gov.uk

Template Letter For Reporting The Outcome Of A Formal Complaint

(Please insert on headed paper, with the classification ‘Official-Sensitive-Personal’ once completed)

Dear Parent,

FORMAL COMPLAINT ABOUT IN SCHOOL OR SETTING

Thank you for your complaint which I received on From your correspondence, it is clear that you are dissatisfied with the actions taken so far to resolve your complaint at the informal stage. As a result, I have investigated your concerns following DCS formal complaints procedure.

You complain that:

Summary of complaint to be stated. State each point separately.

To investigate this complaint, I commissioned an Investigating Officer who *(list the activities undertaken such as the following which can be deleted/amended as appropriate)* contacted you as complainant to ensure full understanding of the complaint, interviewed the class teacher, Learning Support Assistant, your child, and other children who were witnesses. The Investigating Officer reviewed the DCS policy to check for compliance and the written notes and e-mails exchanged between you and the class teacher.

The investigation has now been completed and I have worked together with the School Governance Committee panel to review and consider the complaint, taking appropriate advice where required. The outcomes of this are outlined below:

- 1) Concerning your complaint thatthis complaint has been upheld/partially upheld/is not upheld. The reason for this decision is *(list detail behind the investigation and decision making)*.
- 2) Concerning your complaint that this complaint has been upheld/partially upheld/is not upheld. The reason for this decision is..... *(list detail behind the investigation and decision making)*.

**Add additional information or delete as appropriate)*

As a result of this investigation and decision making, the following actions will be taken / no actions will be taken *(depending on the outcome)*.

Action	Who	Timeline
<i>List action to be undertaken</i>	<i>By whom</i>	<i>Indicative timeline</i>
<i>List action to be undertaken</i>	<i>By whom</i>	<i>Indicative timeline</i>

**Add or delete as appropriate*

The Formal Complaint you raised has been investigated thoroughly and I would like to re-assure you that any actions identified will be taken. Although you may not agree with all the findings and actions agreed by the Complaint's Panel, I am hopeful that you will appreciate the time dedicated to investigating and considering your complaint and that this helps address your concerns.

If you are not satisfied with the outcome from this complaint and have additional evidence which you would like to have considered, there is a further and final stage of the complaints procedure that you can follow. This is the Appeal process and details are provided in the DCS Complaints policy.

Finally, I would like to express my *(edit as appropriate)* apologies for the distress this has caused you and your family and hope that some positives will emerge going forward through the actions which are being addressed/hope that my investigations have provided re-assurance on your concerns and that *School and/or Setting* can move forward in partnership with you to provide an excellent education for your child.

Yours sincerely

Chair of the Complaint's Panel

DCS Schools and Settings **Formal Complaint Appeal Form**

Please complete this form with as much detail as is relevant and attach any additional documentation. Once complete, please send to DCS HQ using the following email address:
RC-DCS-SS-Complaints@mod.gov.uk

Section 1: Personal Details

Your Name:	
School or Setting:	
Class/Year:	
Relationship to Child:	
Address:	
Telephone:	
Email:	

Section 2: Complaint

A - Please provide details of the complaint, and the outcome

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B – Please state why you are dissatisfied with the outcome and detail further information you wish to be considered

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Complaint Appeal Investigation Template*(Please insert on headed paper, with the classification 'Official-Sensitive-Personal' once completed)*

Complaint Subject:	
School or Setting:	
Complaint Ref No:	
Complaint Submitted by:	
Date Submitted:	
A – Investigation activities completed by the investigating officer	

Complaint 1:

List complaint detail
Detail of the findings

Complaint 2:

List complaint detail
Detail of the findings

Complaint 3:

List complaint detail

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Detail of the findings		
Recommended Actions For The Consideration Of The Complaint Panel:		
Action	Who	Timeline

Report completed by:

Name			
Role			
Signature		Date	

Template Letter For Reporting Outcome Of A Formal Complaint Appeal

(Please insert on headed paper, with the classification ‘Official-Sensitive-Personal’ once completed)

Dear Parent,

FORMAL COMPLAINT APPEAL ABOUT IN SCHOOL OR SETTING

Thank you for your complaint which I received on From your correspondence, it is clear you remain dissatisfied with the actions taken so far to resolve your complaint and that you have additional evidence which you would like to have considered. As a result, I commissioned an investigation into your concerns following DCS formal complaints procedure.

You complain that:

Summary of complaint to be stated. State each point separately.

The investigation of the complaint included *(list the activities undertaken such as the following which can be deleted/amended as appropriate)* contacting you as complainant to ensure full understanding of the additional evidence in the complaint, reviewing the Joint Service Publication for compliance and interviewing the Headteacher and Assistant Headteacher. The prior communications at the Informal and Formal Complaint Stage were also reviewed.

The investigation has now been completed and I have reviewed and considered the complaint, taking appropriate advice where required. The outcomes of this are outlined below:

- 1) Concerning your complaint that this complaint has been upheld/partially upheld/is not upheld. The reason for this decision is.....*(list detail behind the investigation and decision making)*.
- 2) Concerning your complaint that this complaint has been upheld/partially upheld/is not upheld. The reason for this decision is.....*(list detail behind the investigation and decision making)*.
- 3) *Add additional or delete as appropriate*

As a result of this investigation and decision making, the following actions will be taken:*(or no actions will be taken, depending on the outcome)*

Action	Who	Timeline
<i>List action to be undertaken</i>	<i>By whom</i>	<i>Indicative timeline</i>
<i>List action to be undertaken</i>	<i>By whom</i>	<i>Indicative timeline</i>

(Add or delete as appropriate)

This complaint has been investigated robustly and I would like to re-assure you that any actions identified will be taken. Although you may not agree with all the findings and actions I have concluded, I am hopeful that you will appreciate the time dedicated to investigating your complaint

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and hope that this helps address your concerns. As outlined in the DCS Complaints policy, this is the final stage and there is no further appeal.

Finally, I would like to express my (*edit as appropriate*) apologies for the distress this has caused you and your family and hope that some positives will emerge going forward through the actions which are being addressed/hope that my investigations have provided re-assurance on your concerns and that *School or Setting* can move forward in partnership with you to provide an excellent education for your child.

Yours sincerely,

Chief Education Officer,
DCS