ST DOMINIC'S GRAMMAR SCHOOL

PARENTAL COMPLAINTS

POLICY AND PROCEDURE

2026–27

OUR COMMITMENT

St Dominic's welcomes concerns and complaints as opportunities to listen, put matters right and improve. Complaints are handled fairly, promptly, respectfully and without adverse treatment of a pupil because a parent has raised a concern.

Owner	Approval	Scope
Proprietor	Governing Body	Parents of current pupils, EYFS to Sixth Form

Document control

Field	Controlled record
Policy title	Parental Complaints Policy and Procedure
School	St Dominic's Grammar School
Scope	Parents of current pupils; EYFS to Sixth Form
Policy owner	Proprietor
Operational lead	Headmaster – P McNabb
Complaints Coordinator	Bursar: Mr Paul Tudor – ptudor@sdgschool.co.uk
Safeguarding lead	DSL – Mrs Hastings Smith
Approved by	Governing Body: _Sir M Griffiths_____
Approval date	__30-8-2026_____
Effective from	1 September 2026
Next review	No later than 31 August 2027
Availability	School website; available on request from the School Office

Key contacts

Route	Contact
Headmaster	Mr Peter McNabb – pmcnabb@sdgschool.co.uk
Chair of the Governing Body	Sir Michael Griffiths – sir.michael.griffiths@btinternet.com
Clerk to the Governing Body	Miss Emma Pugh – spugh@sdgschool.co.uk
School address	Bargate Street, Brewood, South Staffordshire, ST19 9BA

SAFEGUARDING EXCEPTION

A complaint that indicates a child may be at risk, or concerns the conduct of an adult towards a child, is referred immediately through the Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy. The complaints procedure must not delay protective action.

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THREE-STAGE PROCEDURE

Stage 1: informal resolution. Stage 2: formal written complaint and decision. Stage 3: hearing before a panel of at least three people, including one person independent of the management and running of the School.

1. Purpose and principles

St Dominic's Grammar School aims to resolve concerns constructively and at the lowest appropriate level. A concern will not be dismissed because it does not use the word "complaint" or legal terminology. Any expression of dissatisfaction by a parent about an action or omission by the School, where the parent seeks a response or action, is treated as a complaint unless another procedure applies.

1.1 Principles

- the pupil's welfare and education remain central throughout;
- the School listens, establishes facts fairly and gives reasons for decisions;
- parents and staff communicate courteously and avoid prejudicing pupils or witnesses;
- no pupil is disadvantaged because a parent makes a complaint in good faith;
- the process is accessible, proportionate and adjusted where reasonably required;
- conflicts of interest and prior involvement are identified and managed;
- privacy is respected, subject to safeguarding and legal disclosure duties; and
- complaints data is used to improve provision, not merely to close cases.

1.2 Outcomes

The School may uphold, partially uphold or not uphold a complaint. It may acknowledge an error, apologise, explain a decision, take corrective or preventive action, review a policy or practice, provide support or make another proportionate recommendation. The procedure does not generally determine employment sanctions, award damages or disclose confidential action concerning another person.

2. Legal and regulatory framework

- Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, Schedule, paragraphs 32 and 33, and Part 8;
- Education and Skills Act 2008;
- Childcare Act 2006 and the EYFS statutory framework for group and school-based providers effective from 1 September 2026;
- Equality Act 2010, including reasonable-adjustment duties;
- UK GDPR, Data Protection Act 2018 and Data (Use and Access) Act 2025;
- Human Rights Act 1998;
- Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026 and Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026;
- Independent School Standards guidance (DfE, April 2026); and
- the current ISI inspection framework and evidence expectations.

INDEPENDENT SCHOOL STANDARD

This will be available to parents; provide informal, formal and panel stages; ensure at least three panel members with one independent member; allow the parent to attend and be accompanied; provide findings and recommendations to the parties and for inspection; and preserve confidentiality subject to specified legal access.

3. Scope and definitions

3.1 Who may use this procedure

This statutory parental procedure is for parents of pupils currently registered at the School. A parent includes a person with parental responsibility. A parent of a former pupil may use it only where the complaint was raised while the pupil remained registered. The School may respond to other correspondents as a matter of discretion, but the statutory panel entitlement does not normally apply to them.

3.2 Pupil concerns

Pupils may raise concerns through trusted staff, form/tutor and pastoral systems, the DSL, pupil voice arrangements or the pupil complaint form. Staff respond in an age-appropriate way and consider safeguarding. Where a parent adopts the matter as a complaint, this procedure applies. A pupil may be supported to express their views without being made responsible for conducting the parent's complaint.

3.3 Working days

"Working day" means Monday to Friday when the School is open to pupils during term time, excluding bank holidays. Complaints received in holidays are logged and acknowledged as soon as practicable, normally on the next working day. The School may progress urgent safeguarding or welfare matters during a closure. Published timescales may be extended for good reason; the parent will be told why and given a revised date.

3.4 Anonymous complaints

Anonymous information is assessed according to seriousness, credibility and safeguarding risk. It may be investigated even though the full procedure and response cannot be provided to an unidentified complainant.

4. Matters using another procedure

Matter	Primary route
Safeguarding concern about a child	Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy; immediate referral to the DSL.
Allegation or low-level concern about an adult	KCSIE 2026 allegations/low-level-concerns procedures; Headmaster, Chair/Proprietor or LADO route as applicable.
Expulsion or required withdrawal	Relevant contractual review procedure, where provided; general process issues may fall under this policy.
Admissions decision	Admissions Policy and parent contract; no complaint can compel admission.
Data protection	Data Protection and Privacy procedure and DPO/ICO route; mixed complaints are coordinated.
Exam result or malpractice	Awarding-body/JCQ review, appeal or malpractice process within its deadlines.
Employee grievance	Staff grievance or whistleblowing procedure.
Criminal allegation or immediate danger	Police/999 and safeguarding procedures.

Where a complaint has several elements, the Headmaster identifies the correct route for each, coordinates communication and ensures that statutory or external deadlines are not displaced by this policy.

5. Roles and reporting routes

Role	Responsibilities
Proprietor	Ensure the School has and implements a compliant procedure; secure resources, independence and oversight.
Governing Body	Approve the policy; monitor anonymised themes, timeliness, outcomes, recurrence and action; do not reopen or substitute its own decision for a completed panel finding.
Headmaster	Oversee fair implementation; appoint investigators; decide Stage 2 complaints unless conflicted; protect pupils; secure action and learning.
Chair of the Governing Body	Manage a Stage 2 complaint about the Headmaster and arrange a conflict-free panel where required.
Complaints Coordinator	Log, acknowledge and triage complaints; track deadlines, records and actions; provide procedural support without determining the merits when conflicted.
Clerk	Organise Stage 3; check conflicts; circulate papers; minute the hearing; issue the panel's findings.
DSL	Assess safeguarding content, protect pupils, make referrals and advise what can safely be shared or investigated.
Staff	Listen respectfully; record and pass concerns promptly; preserve evidence; maintain confidentiality; cooperate with investigations.
Panel	Review the Stage 2 decision fairly and independently; make findings and recommendations; give clear reasons.

5.1 Complaints about senior office-holders

- about the Headmaster: write to the Chair of the Governing Body via the Clerk;
- about the Chair: write to the Proprietor, who appoints a person with no conflict to manage Stage 2 and, if required, to convene Stage 3;
- about the Proprietor: write to the Chair, who appoints an appropriate independent decision-maker;
- about two or more of the above: the unconflicted office-holder appoints an independent person and records the rationale.

NO CONFLICTED DECISION-MAKER

A person who is the subject of the complaint, materially involved in the events, or responsible for the decision challenged does not investigate, decide or sit on the panel.

6. Accessibility, equality and support

- The School accepts complaints by email, letter or another agreed accessible method. It may arrange assistance to reduce a disability, language, literacy or communication barrier.
- Reasonable adjustments may include accessible formats, extra time, breaks, remote attendance, an interpreter or communication support.
- Parents should explain any adjustment needed as early as possible; lack of a request does not prevent the School acting where a need is apparent.
- A parent may be accompanied at Stage 3 by one friend, relative or supporter. Legal representation is not normally necessary; advance notice is required if the companion is legally qualified.
- The process must not discriminate because of a protected characteristic, SEND, socioeconomic circumstances or a parent's manner of communication arising from disability.

7. Safeguarding and confidentiality

At every stage, the recipient considers whether the information raises a safeguarding concern. Protective action, DSL referral, LADO consultation, Police or children's social care involvement takes priority. The complaints process may be paused, limited or coordinated with an external investigation, but the parent is kept informed so far as lawful and safe.

- Children are not repeatedly interviewed and are not asked to confront another person.
- The School considers the voice, wishes and feelings of the pupil in an age-appropriate way.
- Digital and documentary evidence is preserved securely.
- Information is shared on a need-to-know basis and in accordance with safeguarding and data-protection law.
- Parents are not entitled to confidential information about another pupil, family or staff member, including disciplinary action.
- A confidentiality request cannot override a duty to protect a child, report a crime, comply with a regulator or disclose information required by law.

8. Stage 1 – informal resolution

8.1 Starting Stage 1

A parent should normally raise the matter promptly with the member of staff best placed to respond, such as the form tutor, class/subject teacher, relevant pastoral or curriculum leader, Head of Prep, Head of Senior School or Bursar. The Complaints Coordinator will redirect the matter where necessary. A complaint about the Headmaster follows section 5.1.

8.2 Process and timescale

1. The recipient listens, clarifies the concern and desired outcome, records the date, issues and agreed action, and forwards the record to the Complaints Coordinator.
2. Receipt is acknowledged within two working days.
3. The appropriate staff member considers the matter, speaks to relevant people and checks records proportionately.
4. A substantive response is normally given within ten working days of receipt. If more time is required, the parent is told the reason and revised date before the deadline.
5. The response records the issues considered, outcome and any action, and explains how to proceed to Stage 2.

8.3 Moving to Stage 2

If dissatisfied, the parent should submit a formal written complaint within ten working days of the Stage 1 response. The Headmaster may accept a later request where there is good reason. A serious complaint may be moved directly to Stage 2; this does not remove the right to a panel after the Stage 2 decision.

PROMPT BUT RELIABLE

Informal resolution is not a barrier to a formal complaint. The School will not insist on repeated meetings or mediation where the parent clearly requests formal consideration.

9. Stage 2 – formal written complaint

9.1 Submission

The parent writes to the Headmaster, normally using Appendix B, identifying the pupil, the matters complained of, relevant dates, why the Stage 1 response is unsatisfactory, the outcome sought and any documents relied upon. Assistance is available where a written form creates an accessibility barrier.

9.2 Acknowledgement and scope

The Complaints Coordinator acknowledges the complaint within three working days. The Headmaster confirms the issues to be investigated, the investigator/decision-maker, any other applicable procedure and the target decision date. New issues raised later may be included where fair and manageable, or considered separately.

9.3 Investigation

- The investigator is impartial and has no material prior involvement.
- The parent and relevant staff are given a fair opportunity to provide information. Pupil involvement is proportionate and safeguarding-led.
- Relevant records, correspondence, policies, logs and available evidence are considered; the School is not required to undertake unlimited searches.
- The civil standard—the balance of probabilities—is used for factual findings. A finding may remain inconclusive where evidence is insufficient.
- Accurate notes record evidence, findings, rationale, communication, delay, adjustments and action.
- Parallel safeguarding, disciplinary or legal processes are respected; confidential outcomes from those processes are not disclosed merely because they relate to the complaint.

9.4 Decision and timescale

The Headmaster normally sends a reasoned written decision within fifteen working days of acknowledging the complaint. It identifies each issue, the finding (upheld, partially upheld, not upheld or unable to determine), key reasons, action or recommendation, and the Stage 3 route. If the investigation cannot be completed, the parent receives an update before the deadline and a revised date.

If a parent is dissatisfied with the Headmaster's decision, before requesting a Panel hearing – a parent may write to the chair of the School Advisory Committee and request he conducts an informal review with the Headmaster. The chair will review the existing paperwork and discuss the matter with the Headmaster. The parent will be advised within 7 working days whether there is any change to the Headmaster's original decision. If still dissatisfied the parent should move to Stage 3. If the informal stage has been requested, the chair will not form part of any subsequent panel hearing.

9.5 Requesting Stage 3

A dissatisfied parent should request a panel hearing in writing to the Chair via the Clerk within ten working days of the Stage 2 decision, stating the grounds for review and desired outcome. A late request may be accepted where there is good reason.

10. Stage 3 – panel hearing

10.1 Purpose

Stage 3 is a review of the complaint and the Stage 2 handling and decision. It is not a court or disciplinary hearing. The panel may consider procedural fairness, factual findings, proportionality, policy application and appropriate recommendations. It will not normally consider wholly new complaints that have not been through Stage 2, but may remit them for consideration.

10.2 Convening the panel

- The Clerk acknowledges the request within three working days.
- The hearing is arranged as soon as reasonably practicable and normally within fifteen working days of receipt. It may be in person, remote or hybrid where fair and accessible.
- The panel comprises at least three people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint. At least one is independent of the management and running of the School.
- A person is not independent merely because they are not a governor; the convenor records why the independent member is suitably independent.
- Panel members declare conflicts and prior knowledge. A replacement is appointed where impartiality could reasonably be questioned.

10.3 Papers and attendance

6. The Clerk gives the parent and School reasonable written notice of the date, format and procedure.
7. The parent may attend and be accompanied by one person. The School normally attends through the Headmaster and/or investigator.
8. Each party submits relevant papers by the deadline set by the Clerk, normally at least five working days before the hearing.
9. The Clerk circulates the same indexed bundle to the panel and parties normally at least three working days before the hearing, subject to lawful redaction.
10. Witness attendance is at the panel Chair's discretion. Written statements may be considered. Recording is prohibited unless agreed in advance as a reasonable adjustment or by all parties.

10.4 Conduct

The Chair explains the procedure, issues and confidentiality. The parent and School may explain their positions, answer panel questions and make a closing statement. Questions are managed through the Chair to maintain fairness and dignity. The panel may adjourn for further information or advice. Courtesy is required; proportionate steps may be taken to manage disruption without unfairly terminating the parent's right to be heard.

11. Panel findings and completion

11.1 Decision

The panel considers the matter privately and reaches findings on the balance of probabilities. It may uphold the complaint in whole or in part, not uphold it, or state that an issue cannot be determined. It may make recommendations to the School. It cannot award compensation, direct employment sanctions or disclose confidential personal information.

11.2 Written outcome

Normally within five working days of the hearing, the Clerk sends the panel's findings, reasons and recommendations to the parent and, where relevant, the person complained about. They are also sent to the Proprietor, Chair and Headmaster and made available for inspection on the School premises. This concludes the School's complaints procedure.

PANEL FINALITY

The panel—not the full Governing Body—makes the Stage 3 findings and recommendations. The Governing Body ensures recommendations and wider actions are considered, but it does not replace the panel's decision with a new merits decision.

11.3 Action after the panel

The Headmaster or unconflicted office-holder records responsibility and deadlines for agreed action, reports completion to the Proprietor/Governing Body, and communicates relevant completion to the parent without disclosing confidential information.

12. EYFS complaints

This policy applies throughout EYFS. In addition, the School meets the specific EYFS complaints requirements in force from 1 September 2026.

- A written complaint about how the School is fulfilling the EYFS requirements is investigated.
- The complainant is notified of the outcome within 28 calendar days of receipt. Internal staging or School holidays do not displace this maximum period.
- A written record of the complaint and outcome is kept and made available to Ofsted and ISI on request.
- Parents are given details of how to contact Ofsted if they believe EYFS requirements are not being met: 0300 123 4666 and the current route at GOV.UK.
- Safeguarding concerns are referred immediately and are not held until the complaints process concludes.

EYFS DEADLINE

The Complaints Coordinator flags every EYFS complaint on receipt and tracks the 28-day calendar deadline separately from the working-day targets in this policy.

13. Records, retention and publication

13.1 Complaint record

The School keeps a written record of all complaints and their outcomes. The formal register identifies whether each complaint was resolved at Stage 2 or proceeded to Stage 3 and records action taken regardless of whether it was upheld. As good practice and for reliable ISI evidence, material Stage 1 concerns are also logged with their response and closure.

Minimum record	Examples
Identity and stage	Parent/pupil; date received; Stage 1, 2 or 3; responsible person; deadlines.
Issues and evidence	Complaint scope; records checked; accounts; adjustments; safeguarding triage.
Decision	Finding on each issue; evidence and rationale; date communicated.
Action	Remedy, recommendation, owner, deadline and completion evidence.
Governance	Anonymised theme; recurrence; equality/SEND consideration; review and learning.

13.2 Confidentiality and access

Correspondence, statements and records are kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or an inspection body acting under sections 108 or 109 of the Education and Skills Act 2008 requests access, or where disclosure is otherwise required by law. Records are available on School premises for inspection by the Proprietor and Headmaster. Data-subject rights are managed under data-protection law; third-party and safeguarding information may be withheld or redacted lawfully.

13.3 Retention

Core complaint records are retained securely for seven years after closure, unless the School's retention schedule, safeguarding requirements, litigation hold, insurance or another legal basis requires longer. Safeguarding and allegations records are retained under the Safeguarding Policy and KCSIE rules, not destroyed merely because the complaint file reaches its ordinary retention date.

13.4 Publication and annual number

The policy is published on the School website and supplied on request. The School makes available to parents the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year. The figure means Stage 2 formal complaints, with Stage 3 shown separately where useful; it is updated annually and must not identify individuals.

Academic year	Stage 2 formal complaints	Stage 3 panel hearings
2025–26	0	0

14. Persistent or unreasonable complainant behaviour

The School distinguishes persistent contact from a persistent complaint. A parent may communicate firmly or repeatedly because a matter is serious, complex, unresolved or affected by disability. Restrictions are exceptional, proportionate, time-limited and do not prevent a new, materially different complaint or safeguarding report.

14.1 Examples

- repeatedly raising the same concluded matter without material new evidence;
- refusing to identify the issues while demanding investigation;
- excessive, duplicative contact that materially obstructs School operations;
- abusive, discriminatory, threatening or knowingly false communications;
- contacting numerous staff to bypass the published route; or
- covert recording, publication or harassment that risks pupils, staff or procedural fairness.

14.2 Fair management

11. Check whether the complaint is concluded, whether new evidence exists, and whether disability, communication need or safeguarding risk explains the contact.
12. Give a clear written warning identifying the behaviour and the communication standard required.
13. If necessary, designate one contact, one channel, reasonable frequency or defined topics, with an alternative route for urgent safeguarding matters.
14. State the reason, scope, duration and review date; keep the measure under review.
15. Continue to meet legal duties and consider genuinely new complaints.

Threats, harassment or abuse may be addressed under the parent contract, site-safety procedures or law. A pupil must not be punished for a parent's conduct.

15. Learning, governance and review

- The Complaints Coordinator tracks deadlines weekly and verifies that promised actions are closed.
- The Headmaster reviews material complaints and actions at least termly, including recurrence, delay, communication and policy or training gaps.
- The Governing Body receives anonymised termly assurance on numbers by stage, themes, timeliness, outcomes, repeated concerns, safeguarding links, reasonable adjustments and completion of action.
- Leaders sample records for precise scope, evidence, rationale, stage, outcome and action—areas repeatedly tested in current ISI inspections.
- Patterns are considered by phase and, where lawful and meaningful, SEND and protected characteristic to identify barriers or disproportionate impact.
- The policy is reviewed annually and sooner after legal change, a serious case, an upheld panel complaint, inspection feedback or evidence that implementation is ineffective.

Appendix A – procedure at a glance

Stage	Who / how	Target	Outcome and escalation
1 – informal	Relevant staff member or Complaints Coordinator; oral or written.	Acknowledge within 2 working days; substantive response within 10.	Written/recorded response. Request Stage 2 within 10 working days.
2 – formal	Written to Headmaster; Chair/Proprietor route if conflicted.	Acknowledge within 3 working days; decision normally within 15.	Reasoned findings and action. Request Stage 3 within 10 working days.
3 – panel	At least 3 unconflicted people; 1 independent; parent may attend and be accompanied.	Hearing normally within 15 working days; outcome within 5.	Panel findings and recommendations conclude School procedure.
EYFS overlay	Written complaint about fulfilment of EYFS requirements.	Outcome within 28 calendar days of receipt.	Record available to Ofsted/ISI; Ofsted contact details supplied.

Quick triage

16. Is anyone at immediate risk? If yes, make safe and contact the DSL/999 as required.
17. Is this a complaint seeking action, even if not labelled as one? Log it.
18. Does a specialist procedure or deadline apply? Coordinate routes.
19. Who is unconflicted and best placed to respond?
20. What adjustment or support is required?
21. What is the current stage, deadline and evidence?
22. Has the outcome, rationale, action and closure been recorded?

Appendix B – formal complaint form

Field	Information
Parent / carer	
Pupil and year group	
Contact details and accessible-format needs	
Date submitted	
Stage 1 contact, response and date	
Complaint issue(s)	
Relevant dates, people and evidence	
Why the earlier response is unsatisfactory	
Outcome sought	
Safeguarding, medical, SEND or equality information relevant to handling	
Documents attached	
Signature / confirmation	

Send to the Headmaster. A complaint about the Headmaster should be sent to the Chair via the Clerk. The School will help record the complaint where disability, literacy or communication need makes this form unsuitable.

Appendix C – complaint investigation record

Control	Record
Complaint reference / stage	
Date received / acknowledged / due	
Decision-maker and investigator; conflict check	
Scope agreed	
Safeguarding triage and DSL advice	
Accessibility / reasonable adjustments	
Evidence and people consulted	
Finding on each issue and standard of proof	
Decision rationale	
Action, owner and deadline	
Response date / escalation information	
Action verified and case closed	
Anonymised theme / governance reporting	

Appendix D – Stage 3 panel checklist

Before the hearing

- request acknowledged and grounds identified;
- panel of at least three appointed; one member independent of management and running;
- conflicts and prior involvement checked and recorded;
- reasonable adjustments and companion confirmed;
- date/format notified; evidence deadline set; identical indexed bundle circulated;
- confidentiality, redaction and safeguarding advice checked; and
- clerk and minute format confirmed.

At the hearing

- Chair explains role, scope, order, confidentiality and standard of proof;
- parent has opportunity to attend, be accompanied, present their case and respond;
- School has equivalent opportunity;
- panel questions are neutral and sufficient;
- new issues are remitted rather than decided unfairly;
- adjournment is used where information or advice is genuinely needed; and
- deliberations take place privately without conflicted persons.

After the hearing

- findings address every issue and state upheld/partly upheld/not upheld/unable to determine;
- reasons and recommendations are clear and proportionate;
- outcome is sent within five working days, or delay is explained;
- findings are sent to the required people and available for inspection on premises;
- actions have owners, deadlines and completion evidence; and
- anonymised learning is included in governance assurance.

Appendix E – external routes and reference framework

E1. External routes after or outside the School procedure

Issue	Route
Independent-school regulatory complaint	Department for Education. Parents should normally complete the School procedure first. Use the current "Complain about a school: private schools" service on GOV.UK.
EYFS requirements	Ofsted: 0300 123 4666 and the current childcare/early-years complaints route on GOV.UK.
Safeguarding / child at risk	Staffordshire children's social care or Police; 999 in immediate danger. School staff follow the DSL route.
Data protection	School DPO/Privacy procedure, then Information Commissioner's Office where appropriate.
Discrimination	School procedure; Equality Advisory and Support Service and legal routes may also be available.
Exam decisions	Relevant awarding body, JCQ or Ofqual route within published deadlines.
Serious teacher misconduct	Teaching Regulation Agency, normally after the School process unless urgent.

ISI inspects the School's compliance but is not substituted for the School's panel or the Department for Education's statutory complaint route. Regulatory bodies do not usually determine private contractual disputes or award compensation.

E2. Core references

- Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, Schedule, paragraphs 32–33 and 34;
- DfE, The Independent School Standards: guidance for independent schools, April 2026;
- DfE, Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026, in force 1 September 2026;
- DfE, Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026;
- DfE, EYFS statutory framework for group and school-based providers, effective 1 September 2026;
- Equality Act 2010; UK GDPR; Data Protection Act 2018; Data (Use and Access) Act 2025; and
- current ISI inspection framework and published inspection evidence concerning complaints implementation and records.

Approval

Role	Name	Signature	Date
Chair of the Governing Body	Sir Michael Griffiths		30-8-2026
Headmaster	Mr Peter McNabb		23-8-2026