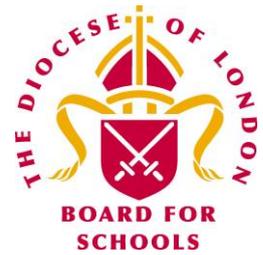


LONDON DIOCESAN BOARD FOR SCHOOLS



COMPLAINTS POLICY AND PROCEDURE

Guidelines for Governors

June 2019

CONTENTS

- 1 Introduction**
 - 1.1 Aims of these guidelines
 - 1.3 Why have a policy and procedure for complaints?
 - 1.5 What is a complaint?
 - 1.9 What is not covered?
- 2 Managing complaints**
 - 2.1 Principles
 - 2.2 Data Protection and confidentiality
 - 2.3 Equalities Implications
 - 2.4 Recording Devices
 - 2.5 Legal Representation
 - 2.6 Mediation
 - 2.7 Training for staff
 - 2.8 Complaints against members of staff
 - 2.12 Safeguarding
 - 2.13 Time-limits
 - 2.15 Pupils as witnesses
 - 2.16 Complaint form
 - 2.17 Forms of redress
 - 2.18 Anonymous complaints
 - 2.19 Serial and unreasonable complaints
 - 2.20 Dealing with complaints on social media
 - 2.22 Complaints about parental responsibility
 - 2.23 When to stop responding
 - 2.28 Complaints against governors
 - 2.29 Monitoring complaints
- 3 Roles in complaints procedures**
 - 3.1 Complainant
 - 3.2 Investigator
 - 3.3 Complaints committee / panel
 - 3.4 Clerk
 - 3.5 Committee chair
 - 3.6 Committee members
 - 3.7 LDBS
- 4 Stages in a complaints procedure**
 - 4.3 Informal
 - 4.8 Formal Stage 1
 - 4.10 Investigation process
 - 4.12 Formal Stage 2
- 5 Further Rights of Appeal**
 - Annex A** Model Complaints Procedure
 - Annex B** Complaints Form
 - Annex C** Model policy on serial and unreasonable complaints
 - Annex D** Procedural advice -conducting interviews with complainants
 - Annex E** Outline of the Procedure for a Complaints Panel Hearing
 - Annex F** Model Letters

PREFACE

Governors of Church of England schools and academies are responsible for the conduct of their schools and must have in place a complaints procedure to hear any concerns or complaints from parents and others. Complaints procedures must be clear and easily understood and should reflect the Christian values of the school.

These guidelines aim to assist governors in drawing up a policy and procedure and provide practical advice for headteachers and governors when dealing with complaints. They have been revised to reflect current (March 2019) DfE guidance

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-complaints-procedures>

June 2019

1 INTRODUCTION

Aims of these guidelines

- 1.1** These guidelines will assist governors, staff and parents to review and implement their school's complaints policy and procedure. They also aim to reaffirm the partnership between governors, staff and parents as they work together for the good of the pupils.
- 1.2** It is not intended that these guidelines should replace the normal discussion on day-to-day problems and concerns which take place as they arise. It is only where a complainant remains dissatisfied that further steps may need to be taken.

Why have a policy and procedure for complaints?

- 1.3** A complaints procedure is a legal requirement under section 29 of the Education Act 2002 for maintained schools and under the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2010 for academies.

The governing body is responsible for ensuring that a complaints procedure is in place, that it is communicated clearly, published on the website and reviewed regularly. Throughout this document "governing body" refers to the responsible body – ie the governing body in a maintained school and the designated body in an academy. This may differ according to the Funding Agreement. In a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) responsibility will be set out in the Scheme of Delegation and may rest with the Trust Board or the LGB / LAC (local governing body / local academy committee)

Complaints procedures in academies differ only in having specific monitoring requirements and in the membership of the complaints panel; these differences are noted in the text.

- 1.4** Every complaint is a matter of concern and should be investigated properly. A key sign of quality in an organisation is its willingness to listen to criticism and to respond positively. Whenever a complaint is upheld, every effort should be made to rectify the issue and take action to prevent a recurrence. Good communication plays a key role in the effective handling of a complaint. The benefits of a clear policy are
- parents and others will have a clear understanding of the way the school deals with complaints, saving time and minimising confusion and frustration
 - staff will be able to respond in a consistent way
 - feedback from the school community and others can help to improve the school
 - pupils learn best if there is a constructive partnership between the school and parents.

What is a complaint?

- 1.5** From time-to-time parents will raise concerns about their child's education; they may be worried and seek reassurance. These are dealt with as a matter of routine and are not generally regarded as 'complaints'. However, taking concerns seriously at an early stage and dealing with them quickly can reduce the number of formal complaints. Occasionally a concern may develop into a complaint. This may relate to a variety of issues including the way in which the initial contact was handled, for example the impression that it was not taken seriously.
- 1.6** The subject of complaints varies, but common issues include
- the conduct of other pupils eg bullying, disruption or misbehaviour
 - the action or lack of action of members of staff

- inappropriate / inconsistent discipline
- lack of consultation or information on changes to school organisation.

1.7 Pupils too may wish to express a concern where they feel they have been treated unfairly. They should be encouraged to speak to an appropriate adult who should investigate the concern and seek to resolve the matter informally. If the investigation raises serious issues, these should be dealt with through the appropriate channels.

1.8 Visitors to the school may make verbal complaints or allegations. These should be investigated and responded to in accordance with the school's procedure.

What is not covered?

- 1.9** A complaints procedure covers those aspects of school life for which there is no other statutory or separate procedure. It does not therefore apply to:
- statutory assessment of Special Educational Needs (SEN)
 - pupil admissions
 - pupil exclusions
 - staff discipline, grievance, capability or pay
 - school re-organisation proposals
 - matters likely to require a Child Protection investigation
 - whistleblowing allegations eg of financial impropriety or criminal activity
 - a third party who hires or uses the school premises or facilities. Governors should ensure that these organisations have their own complaints procedure in place.

2 MANAGING COMPLAINTS

Principles

- 2.1** An effective complaints procedure will:
- encourage resolution by informal means wherever possible
 - be easily accessible, well publicised and easy to understand and use
 - allow the subject of the complaint equal rights with the person making the complaint
 - respect confidentiality
 - provide clear assurances that there will be no victimisation as a result of the complaint
 - be non-adversarial
 - ensure that a full, fair and impartial investigation takes place
 - allow for speedy handling, with established time limits for each stage of the procedure
 - allow for meetings to be minuted, if possible, by a third party
 - ensure all parties are kept informed of progress
 - address all the points in the complaint and, where applicable, provide redress and/or information about any positive changes which have resulted
 - ensure consistency of action by all handling complaints
 - ensure that complaints are monitored by governors and provide information on any trends or issues so that services can be improved.

Data Protection, Freedom of Information and Confidentiality

- 2.2** Schools are public bodies and data controllers in their own right. Data Protection and Freedom of Information legislation and principles apply. For example
- relevant school policies and procedures should be made available on request. Many schools publish key policies on their website which makes access easier.

- all parties must receive the same information, eg the pack of documents distributed to a Panel must also go to the complainant and the headteacher / school.
- everyone involved in a complaint should be aware that any information which they provide could be made available to the other parties.
- individuals are entitled to request access to their written or electronic personal records held by the school. This includes email exchanges.
- everyone involved must be assured that the complaint and its investigation will remain confidential within the confines of the procedures.
- records of the complaint must be kept according to the principles of the General Data Protection Regulations (see the Information Commission Office's guidance <https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/guide-to-data-protection/guide-to-the-general-data-protection-regulation-gdpr/>)

2.3 Equalities implications

Complaints procedures and arrangements should allow for reasonable adjustments which ensure that no one is discriminated against because of their age, gender, race, sexual orientation, disability, pregnancy / maternity or religion/belief.

2.4 Recording devices at meetings

Where there are communication difficulties, the school may wish to use recording devices to ensure the complainant is able to access and review the discussions at a later point. All parties should agree in advance to being recorded.

Complainants may also ask if they can record a meeting on mobile phones or other personal devices. However this could cause a difficulty for how the recording is subsequently stored and used. As data controllers, schools have the discretion to decide whether to allow complainants to record meetings, if not required for the purposes of a reasonable adjustment, as there may be various levels of identifiable personal information involved. DfE recommends you consider:

- how any decision to allow recordings may affect any third parties called to act as witnesses
- the impact and consequences on the individuals involved in the complaint if recordings are lost or leaked

DfE also advises that unless exceptional circumstances apply, it will support schools who refuse to accept as evidence, recordings of conversations which are obtained covertly and without informed consent of all parties. This should be made clear in complaints procedures.

2.5 Legal representation

If a complaint progresses to a committee of governors, DfE recommends that neither the complainant nor the school should bring legal representation. These panels are not a form of legal proceedings. Their aim should be:

- reconciliation
- to put right things that may have gone wrong

However there are instances where legal representation may be appropriate – for example if a school employee is involved, they may be entitled to bring union or legal representation.

If a complainant commences legal action against the school in relation to their complaint, you should consider whether to suspend the complaints procedure until those legal proceedings have concluded

2.6 Mediation

Some schools choose to include a mediation stage in their complaints procedures. While this can be useful in reaching an agreement and moving forward, there are times when it may not be the most appropriate course of action. Mediation can:

- provide a helpful mechanism for discussion when a concern is raised
- help to rebuild the relationship between parties once all of the investigative stages of the complaints procedure have been completed

It should not be used as a substitute for an investigation during the formal stages of the complaints procedure. If neither the complainant nor the school considers that mediation will serve any practical purpose, the complainant should not be prevented from moving to the next stage of the complaints procedure.

Training for staff

- 2.7** All staff will benefit from training in how to respond to a concern or complaint. This can help staff to recognise any barriers there may be between themselves and parents and to know how to deal with these. Training is particularly important where staff may face abusive and aggressive parents; as the employer (in voluntary aided schools and academies), the governing body (or Academy Trust) has a particular responsibility to ensure staff have access to support and training.

Complaints against members of staff

- 2.8** It is important that all members of staff understand the school's procedure. If staff are complained against, they should be fully informed of the content of the complaint and have the opportunity to respond.
- 2.9** Complaints about the headteacher should be sent to the chair of the governing body, who will investigate the matter, or name an alternative governor to investigate the matter.
- 2.10** Complaints about staff may be dealt with under the school's internal disciplinary procedures, where appropriate. Complainants will not be informed of any disciplinary action taken against a staff member as a result of a complaint. However, you should notify complainants that the matter is being addressed. You should seek HR advice on potential staff disciplinary issues
- 2.11** Where a complaint has taken on a personal aspect and is unresolved before a governors' hearing, in exceptional circumstances, it may be advisable for the governors' panel to hear each side's evidence separately.

Safeguarding

- 2.12** For any complaint that involves a potential child protection issue, local authority procedures must be followed and the appropriate officer at the LA (LADO) must be contacted immediately. Any associated Complaints investigation must wait until the LA procedure has been completed.

Time-limits

- 2.13** Complaints should be dealt with as quickly as possible. Realistic time-limits should be set for each stage of the process and these may differ according to the complexity of the issue. The time-limits provided in these guidelines are only for guidance, they are not a statutory requirement. If it is better to allocate shorter or longer periods at various stages, the

complainant must be informed of any change and the reasons for it. Satisfaction is sometimes proportionate to the time taken and an acknowledgement of a complaint should not take longer than two school days.

- 2.14** Investigations should be carried out as close to the day of an incident as possible. The DFE advises that three months is an acceptable limit for a complaint, but ideally it should be sooner.

Pupils as witnesses

- 2.15** Only in exceptional circumstances should pupils be interviewed, ie, where there are no adult witnesses and the matter is sufficiently serious to warrant it. Headteachers are advised to seek parental consent before any interview with a child. Children should be accompanied by a responsible adult if the parent has given permission but is not present. The headteacher should ensure that pupils do not participate in any discussion where they might witness confrontation between adults. For child protection issues see 2.11 above.

Complaint form

- 2.16** Some schools provide a simple complaint form. This enables the school to be more systematic in the way it handles and monitors complaints. It may also help complainants who find it difficult to frame a letter (see Annex B). However, schools cannot insist that a form is completed; complaints may be made in person, or by telephone, in which case a written record should be kept in case of subsequent challenge.

Forms of redress

- 2.17** The need for any form of redress will vary considerably. In many cases complainants feel their complaint has been addressed if they receive an apology. Listed below are some of the actions which may satisfy a complainant:
- an apology
 - an explanation of what happened / why things went wrong
 - an admission that things could have been handled better, or differently
 - an undertaking to review policy/practice so that similar actions are not repeated
 - an answer to a specific question
 - an official investigation
 - a meeting with staff
 - an offer of mediation

Anonymous complaints

- 2.18** Anonymous complaints should be considered as they may relate to something serious. The handling of such complaints should be left to the headteacher's or chair's discretion to decide whether the gravity of an anonymous complaint justifies investigation. If the head or chair believes there could be any substance to the complaint, s/he should investigate the matter and record the results of the investigation on file. This will provide evidence that the school took the matter seriously.

Serial and persistent and duplicate complaints

- 2.19** There may be occasions when a complainant remains dissatisfied despite all stages of the procedure being followed. If s/he tries to re-open a complaint on the same issues the chair of governors should write informing them that the procedure has been exhausted and that the matter is now closed.

2.20 Where matters escalate despite the complaints procedure being followed and there is prolific correspondence making substantially the same points which have already been addressed, a school may inform the complainant in writing that their behaviour is now considered to be unreasonable / unacceptable and seek to limit contact / correspondence
eg

- any future meetings with a member of staff will be conducted with a second person present and notes may taken in the interests of all parties;
- except in emergencies, all routine communication by the complainant to the school should be by letter only or restricted to a single point of contact via an email address
- a suggestion that the complainant asks a third party to act on their behalf, such as the local Citizen's Advice.

In the case of physical, or verbal aggression the school should seek advice from the LA, Diocesan Board or Academy Trust and consider warning the complainant about being banned from the school site. In some cases, injunctions and other court orders have been issued to individuals preventing them from contacting schools direct.

Schools may find it useful to establish a policy for managing serial and unreasonable complaints, to be included with the school's published procedure. DfE has published non-statutory model policies that you can use See Annex C

2.21 After closing a complaint, you may receive a duplicate complaint from a third party eg a spouse, a partner, a grandparent. If the complaint is about the same subject, you can inform the person that the school has already considered that complaint and the local process is complete. However care should be taken not to overlook any new issues. You will need to ensure these are investigated and dealt with to the full extent of the complaints procedure.

Complaints about parental responsibility

2.22 Conflict between estranged parents over the application of parental responsibility is a common cause of complaints to schools. DfE has issued some advice - Understanding and dealing with issues relating to parental responsibility contains specific advice about how to approach issues concerning parental responsibility.

When to stop responding (source DfE advice 2019)

2.23 A decision to stop responding should never be taken lightly. You need to be able to say yes to all of the following:

- you have taken every reasonable step to address the complainant's concerns
- the complainant has been given a clear statement of your position and their options
- the complainant contacts you repeatedly, making substantially the same points

2.24 The case to stop responding is stronger if you agree with one or more of these statements:

- their letters, emails, or telephone calls are often or always abusive or aggressive
- they make insulting personal comments about or threats towards staff
- you have reason to believe the individual is contacting you with the intention of causing disruption or inconvenience

2.25 You should not stop responding just because an individual is difficult to deal with or asks complex questions. You also need to make sure that you act reasonably and consider any new complaint. Schools must also continue to provide parents and carers with the

information they are entitled to under The Education (Pupil Information) (England) Regulations 2005, within the statutory time frame.

Complaints on Social Media (source – Kent County Council KELSI advice)

- 2.26** The increasing number of people using social networking sites has positive and negative aspects. Many schools use social media for parental engagement, eg to forward information through Facebook and Twitter. However, in some cases, parents bypass official complaints procedures and take to social networking sites to criticise a school and in some cases, to make malicious comments about individuals. Where in the past a parent may have spoken to others in the playground or even approached a local paper, today, their complaints can easily be shared in the public domain and a post on a social networking site can reach thousands of users instantly, damaging reputations and giving a misleading slant to any issue. Often, schools will only become aware of an issue when it is brought to their attention by someone who has access to the comments.
- 2.27** Kent County Council (KELSI) has issued comprehensive advice on **Dealing with Complaints against Educational Settings on Social Networking Sites** which we recommend that schools consider. The guidance gives several approaches to deal with any problems as well as preventative approaches to help ensure that parents and carers follow the appropriate complaints procedures
https://www.kelsi.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0008/73835/Complaints-on-Social-Networking-Sites.pdf

Complaints about governors DfE recommends

- 2.28** Complaints against the chair or any individual governors should be made to the clerk who should then arrange for the complaint to be heard following the school complaints procedure. This can be done through an investigation by a suitably skilled and impartial member of the governing body and then a committee of members of the governing body. Complaints against the entire governing body or complaints involving both the chair and vice chair should also be sent to the clerk, who should then determine the most appropriate course of action. This will depend on the nature of the complaint and may involve sourcing an independent investigator and co-opted governors from other schools. Any subsequent sanction eg suspension or removal should then follow the procedures in the School Constitution or Roles Procedures and Allowances Regulations (maintained schools) or Articles of Association (academies)

Monitoring complaints

- 2.29** Governors should monitor complaints to ensure that their procedure is effective in dealing with concerns. Some of the areas to monitor are:
- (a) the number and nature of the complaints;
 - (b) whether the complaints were dealt with within agreed time limits;
 - (c) the stage at which complaints were ended satisfactorily.
- 2.30** **Academies:** Under *The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2014*, academies are required to log the number of complaints lodged under their formal procedures each year and whether they are resolved at the preliminary stage, or proceed to a panel hearing.

3 ROLES IN COMPLAINTS PROCEDURES (see DfE advice 2019)

3.1 Complainant: The complainant will receive a more effective response if they

- explain the complaint in full as early as possible
- co-operate with the school in seeking a solution
- 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 details on social media and respect confidentiality.

3.2 Investigator: An investigation may be conducted by the headteacher, chair of governors or another designated governor or member of staff. The investigator's role is to establish the relevant facts by

- providing a comprehensive, open, transparent and fair consideration through:
 - sensitive and thorough interviewing of the complainant to establish what has happened, who has been involved and what would put things right.
 - interviewing other people relevant to the complaint
 - consideration of records and analysing other relevant information

The investigator should:

- conduct interviews with an open mind and be prepared to persist with questioning
- keep notes or arrange for an independent note taker to record the meeting
- ensure that any papers are kept securely pending any appeal
- be mindful of the timescales to respond
- prepare a comprehensive report that sets out the facts, identifies solutions and recommends courses of action to resolve problems.

3.3 Complaints committee: The governing body must appoint a complaints committee (see Annex D) to consider any complaints which have not been resolved at an earlier stage. In a maintained school this panel can be formed of three impartial governors, some of whom may be sourced from other schools. In an academy, the complaints panel must include one member who is independent of the management and running of the academy, ie, s/he cannot be a governor, employee, volunteer, or member of the Academy Trust. An academy may ask a governor of another school to serve on its complaints panel. Maintained schools may also wish to include an outside governor. Parental complaints seldom reach this stage. Nonetheless, it is important that governors do not become prejudiced by taking part in discussion of a complaint, either during a meeting or outside the governing body as they would then be unable to serve on a complaints committee.

3.4 Clerk to the committee: This is usually, but not always the clerk to the board. 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 school 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 and that the venue and proceedings are accessible
- collate any written material relevant to the complaint 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.

3.5 Committee Chair The committee chair, who is nominated in advance, should ensure that:

- 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.
- 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.
- both the complainant and the school 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 co-ordinator, if the school has one).

3.6 Committee Member Committee members should be aware that:

- the meeting must be independent and impartial, and should be seen to be so. No governor 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 the school and the complainant (who may not be satisfied 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.
- If a child/young person is the complainant, the committee should ask in advance if any support is needed to help them present their complaint. If a 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 this might not always be possible if the committee considers it is not in the child's best interests.
- the welfare of the child/young person is paramount.

3.7 LDBS The Diocesan Board acts in an advisory capacity to headteachers and governing bodies, it does not have any power to investigate complaints in schools. Complainants who contact LDBS will be referred to the school/academy's procedures. Support for schools in dealing with complaints is included in the LDBS HR service and schools should contact their HR adviser in the first instance.

4 STAGES IN A COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

4.1 It is usual for each stage in the complaints procedure to be completed before moving to the next stage. In exceptional circumstances the headteacher, usually in consultation with the chair of the governing body, may decide to omit a stage. The complaints procedure is formed of three stages:

Informal

Formal Stage 1 - written complaint to headteacher (or chair of governors, if complaint is about the headteacher)

Formal Stage 2 – complaint heard by Governors' Complaints Committee

- 4.2** The headteacher, or member of staff investigating a complaint, should always be aware of the possibility of referral to the Complaints Committee. It is therefore essential that clear, concise written notes of discussions and incidents are made and kept for every stage of the procedure.

Informal

- 4.3** Most concerns can be resolved informally by the class teacher, or other member of staff by:
- (a) responding to the complainant courteously;
 - (b) handling the issue seriously;
 - (c) taking action quickly.
- 4.4** It is essential to give time to complainants and to be patient, so that they feel they have been heard properly.
- 4.5** Sometimes parents might wish to raise concerns but do not do so because they fear that this will be held against them or their child. Parents need to be reassured, both in the school's written policy and by individual members of staff that this will not happen.
- 4.6** When a parent is making an informal approach there is usually no need to ask for the detail to be put in writing. To insist on this could result in an issue not being resolved due to fear or lack of confidence on the part of the parent. If parents are pushed into writing down their concerns, this can also lead to them taking an entrenched position from which it can be difficult to achieve a resolution.
- 4.7** Some headteachers find it helpful to inform parents of the times during the week when they are available for informal discussions about any concerns or topic of the parents' choice.

Formal Stage 1

- 4.8** If an issue cannot be resolved informally by a member of staff, the parent should be advised to make their complaint to the headteacher; this may be in writing (preferably on the complaint form) or in person, or by telephone. The following procedure should be followed:
- (a) the complaint is acknowledged within three school days (see model letters Annex E) and the complainant is told that the matter will be investigated
 - (b) the headteacher and staff keep notes of any discussions held with complainant. It is advisable to have a separate note-taker present at meetings
 - (c) where the headteacher, or designated member of staff, undertakes an investigation, it is important that clear written statements are taken and that every statement is signed and dated
 - (d) a formal written response given within 10 school days of receipt of the complaint. If there is likely to be a change to the published timescale the complainant should be informed.
- 4.9** If the chair receives a written complaint direct from a parent s/he should consult with the headteacher to ensure that the earlier stages of the procedure have been exhausted. If this is not the case, the chair would normally advise the complainant to follow the procedure. If

the complaint is against the headteacher, the chair* normally investigates through the procedures above.

* Unless s/he has been party to information which compromises his/her position in which case the investigation may be handled by the vice-chair, or another designated governor.

Investigation process:

- 4.10** The following process should be followed:
- (a) there should be a clear understanding of the complaint and clarification should be sought if necessary;
 - (b) the complainant and relevant staff should be given an opportunity to provide documentation and identify potential witnesses.
 - (c) interviews should be held as soon as possible after the incident to minimise the possibility of evidence becoming tainted
 - (d) strict attention should be paid to confidentiality
 - (e) separate discussions should be held with all parties involved, and with any witnesses
 - (f) careful written notes should be made of all discussions
 - (g) the complainant's desired outcome and any possibilities of redress discussed
 - (h) written statements should be obtained where appropriate, and be signed and dated
 - (i) if pupils are to be interviewed, see section 2.15
 - (j) efforts should be made to resolve the complaint, if possible, to the satisfaction of the complainant;
- 4.11** After completing the investigation, a written summary of the findings must be sent to the complainant saying that the investigation has been completed (see Annex E). Some of the following points may be included:
- (a) all appropriate steps have already been taken and no further action is needed
 - (b) as a result of the investigation the following arrangements have been made which it is hoped the complainant will find satisfactory;
 - (c) the following recommendations will be made to the governing body
 - (d) a statement to the effect that if the complainant is not happy with the response, s/he may write to the clerk to the governing body at the school address within 10 school days of receipt of the response requesting that the complaint be considered by the complaints panel of the governing body.

Formal Stage 2

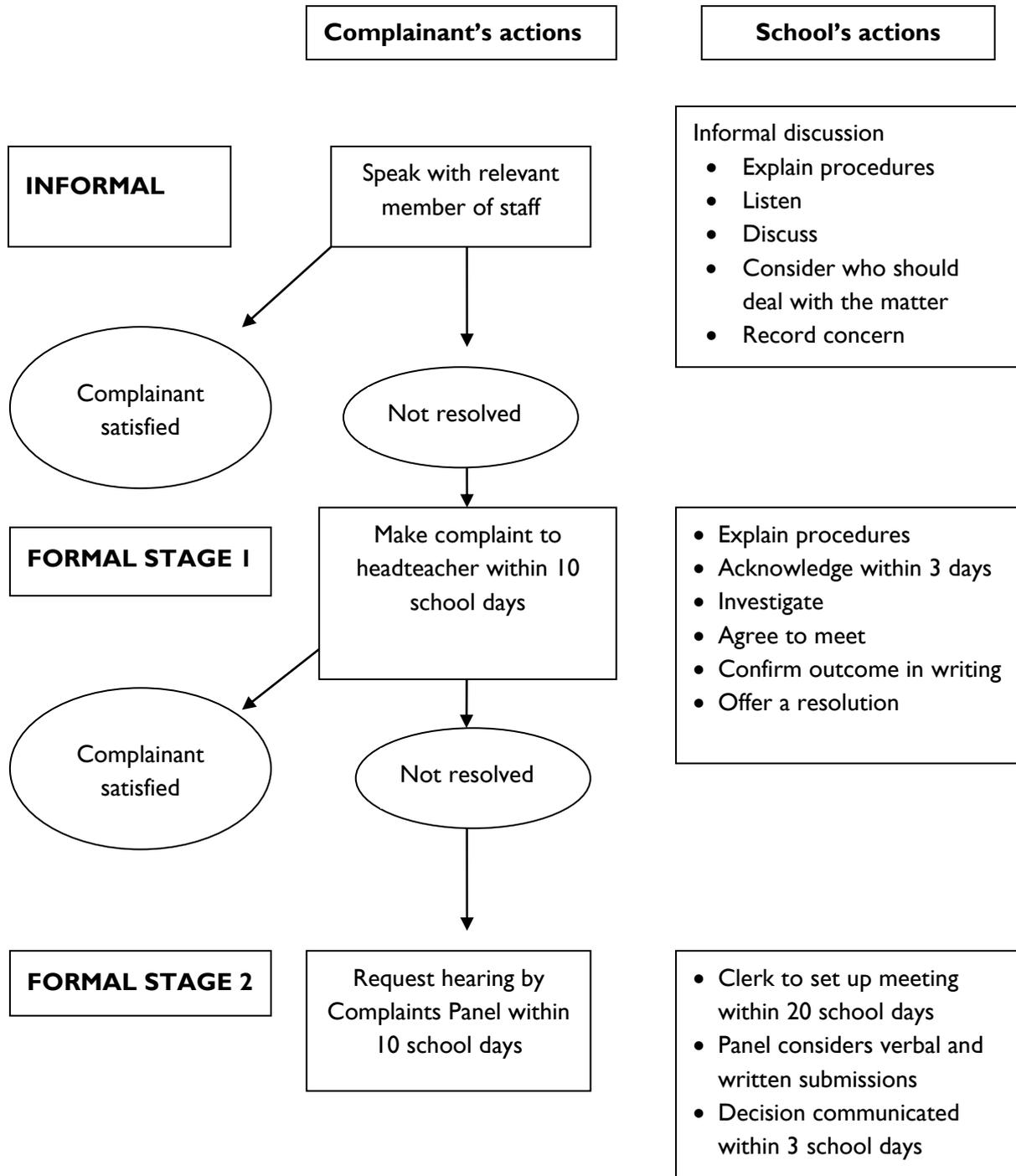
- 4.12** If the complaints committee is to consider the complaint, the clerk should acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing within 5 school days and set up a panel hearing within 20 school days giving 10 school days' notice of the meeting to: the members of the panel, the complainant and the headteacher, sending them the following:
- (a) an invitation to attend the meeting including details of date, time, place of meeting;
 - (b) a request for copies of any written papers which the parties to the complaint may wish to be considered so that they can be distributed to members of the complaints panel and the other party
 - (c) a request for the names of any witnesses who may be called
 - (d) a statement that the complainant may be accompanied by a friend and a request for the name of any such friend
 - (e) an enquiry as to whether arrangements should be made for disabilities
 - (f) a summary of the procedure to be followed at the meeting.

- 4.13** Requests for alternative dates: the clerk should liaise with the complainant, panel and school over convenient dates and times before finalising the arrangements. Once a date is fixed any request for an alteration should be for exceptional reasons and referred to the chair of the panel to consider whether it is reasonable and can be accommodated. Further requests for changes should be considered on their merits, or the complainant should be given a final date and advised that if s/he cannot attend, the meeting will go ahead in their absence.
- 4.14** The hearing by the complaints panel should be held in private and be as informal as possible. The headteacher will present the school's case. The clerk should be present throughout the hearing and after the parties have withdrawn, in order to take notes. A model procedure for the meeting is given in Annex D.
- 4.15** The decision and recommendations of the complaints panel should be sent as soon as possible to all parties. The Panel's decision is final.

5 FURTHER RIGHTS OF APPEAL

- 5.1** Complainants may, if they believe the Complaints Panel has acted unreasonably or unlawfully, or that the governors have not followed their own procedures make a complaint to the Department for Education using an on-line complaints form www.education.gov.uk/contactus, In academies, complaints are made to the Education Funding Agency.
- 5.2** Complainants may also contact OFSTED, but OFSTED will not normally investigate complaints concerning individual pupils, but if there are any child protection concerns they may pass these to social services, or the police and this may trigger an inspection.

SUMMARY COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE



ANNEX A MODEL COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE FOR PUBLICATION

Note: the following complaints procedure is based on the current (2019) DfE model and earlier versions of this guidance.

NAME OF SCHOOL

INTRODUCTION

Insert information about the school's ethos, values etc eg

As a Church of England School, Christian values are at the heart of all we do. We value our relationship with parents and all members of the school and local community. If you have a concern we want to know about it so that it can be dealt with immediately. Most issues can be dealt with easily and quickly, but to ensure all concerns are handled effectively the Governing Body has adopted a complaints policy and procedure.

The school's Complaints Procedure is devised with the intention that it will:

- ◆ usually be possible to resolve problems by informal means;
- ◆ be simple to use and understand;
- ◆ treat complaints confidentially;
- ◆ allow problems to be handled swiftly;
- ◆ inform future practice so that a problem is unlikely to recur;
- ◆ ensure that the school's attitude to a pupil will never be affected by a parental complaint;
- ◆ discourage anonymous complaints;
- ◆ actively encourage strong home-school links;
- ◆ ensure that any person complained against has equal rights with the person making the complaint;
- ◆ reaffirm the partnership between parents, staff and governors as we work together for the good of the pupils in the school;
- ◆ be regularly reviewed

GUIDANCE NOTES

Please read these guidance notes before raising a complaint

Who can make a complaint?

This complaints procedure is not limited to parents or carers of children that are registered at the school. Any person, including members of the public, may make a complaint to <School Name> about any facilities or services that we provide. Unless complaints are dealt with under separate statutory procedures (such as appeals relating to exclusions or admissions), we will use this complaints procedure.

The difference between a concern and a complaint

A concern can be defined as '*an expression of worry or doubt 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.

How to raise a concern or make a complaint

A concern or complaint can be made in person, in writing or by telephone. It may also be made by a third party acting on behalf on a complainant, as long as they have appropriate consent to do so. Concerns should be raised with either the class teacher or headteacher. If the issue remains unresolved, the next step is to make a formal complaint.

Complaints against school staff (except the headteacher) should be made in the first instance, to <Name> (the headteacher) via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Complaints that involve or are about the headteacher should be addressed to <Name> (the Chair of Governors), via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Complaints about the Chair of Governors, any individual governor or the whole governing body should be addressed to <Name> (the Clerk to the Governing Body) via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Please do not approach individual governors to raise concerns or complaints. They have no power to act on an individual basis and it may prevent them from considering complaints at a later stage.

For ease of use, a template complaint form is included at the end of this procedure. If you require help in completing the form, please contact the school office. You can also ask third party organisations like the Citizens Advice to help you.

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.

Anonymous complaints

We will not normally investigate anonymous complaints. However, the headteacher or Chair of Governors, if appropriate, will determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation.

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 only in exceptional circumstances.

Complaints received outside of term time

We will consider complaints made outside of term time to have been received on the first school day after the holiday period.

Scope of this Complaints Procedure

Some issues have associated statutory procedures and cannot be dealt with under our Complaints Procedure. These are listed below.

Issue	Who to contact
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Admissions to schools• Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs• School re-organisation proposals	Concerns about admissions, statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs, or school re-organisation proposals should be raised with <insert local authority details>
<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. If you have serious concerns, you may wish to contact the local authority designated officer (LADO) who has local responsibility for safeguarding or the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH). <insert details>.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exclusion of children from school* 	<p>Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at: www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions.</p> <p><i>*complaints about the application of the behaviour policy can be made through the school's complaints procedure.</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whistleblowing 	<p>We have an internal whistleblowing procedure for all our employees, including temporary staff and contractors.</p> <p>The Secretary of State for Education is the prescribed person for matters relating to education for whistleblowers in education who do not want to raise matters direct with their employer. Referrals can be made at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus.</p> <p>Volunteer staff who have concerns about our school should complain through the school's complaints procedure.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff grievances 	<p>Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the school's internal grievance procedures.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff conduct 	<p>Complaints about staff conduct will be dealt with under the school's internal disciplinary procedures, if appropriate. 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>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complaints about organisations who use school premises or facilities 	<p>Providers should have their own complaints procedure. Please contact them direct.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Curriculum - content 	<p>Please contact the Department for Education at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus</p>

Legal considerations

If other bodies are investigating aspects of the complaint, for example the police, local authority (LA) safeguarding teams or Tribunals, this may affect 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 <School Name> in relation to the complaint, we will consider whether to suspend the complaints procedure in relation to their complaint until those legal proceedings have concluded.

Resolving complaints

At each stage in the procedure, <School Name> 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 school policies in light of the complaint
- an apology

- access to mediation.

Withdrawal of a Complaint

If you wish to withdraw your complaint, we will ask you to confirm this in writing.

Stages in the complaints procedure

- **Informal** If you have a concern we would like you to tell us about it so that we can talk with you and see how best to resolve the issue. The majority of concerns can be resolved informally by speaking to a member of staff. Whatever your concern, please know that we shall treat it as strictly confidential and that our support and respect for you and your child will not be affected.

Please contact your child's class teacher/form tutor (*delete as appropriate*), or other appropriate member of staff, and arrange a time when you can discuss the issue. It may be possible for you to see the member of staff straight away but normally it is better to make an appointment so that you can sit and talk things through. It may be possible to give a response immediately, but where any investigation or information is required, a response will be given within five school days.

- **Formal Stage 1**

If you have not resolved your issue by informal means, or you wish to refer it directly to a formal process you should contact the headteacher. If your complaint is about the headteacher you should contact the chair of governors c/o the school. It is helpful if you can give a brief outline of your concern on the school's complaints form.

Note: The headteacher may delegate the investigation to another member of the school's senior leadership team but not the decision to be taken.

During the investigation, the headteacher (or investigator) 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 the investigation, the headteacher will provide a formal written response within <insert number> school days of the date of receipt of the complaint. If the headteacher is unable to meet this deadline, they will provide the complainant with an update and revised response date. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions <School Name> will take to resolve the complaint.

The headteacher will advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint if they are dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 1.

If the complaint is about the headteacher, or a member of the governing body (including the Chair or Vice-Chair), a suitably skilled governor will be appointed to complete all the actions at Stage 1. Complaints about the headteacher or member of the governing body must be made to the Clerk, via the school office.

If the complaint is:

- jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair or
- the entire governing body or
- the majority of the governing body

Stage 1 will be considered by an independent investigator appointed by the governing body. At the conclusion of their investigation, the independent investigator will provide a formal written response.

- **Formal Stage 2**

If following Stage 1 you still have concerns you may ask for your complaint to be considered by a complaints committee of the governing body by writing to the Clerk to the Governors c/o the school. The committee will be formed of three governors with no prior involvement. They will listen to you, to the headteacher and, if appropriate, any others involved and come to a decision. You may bring a friend to the hearing if you wish.

A request to escalate to Stage 2 must be made to the Clerk, via the school office, within <insert number> school days of receipt of the Stage 1 response. Requests received outside this time frame will only be considered in exceptional circumstances. The Clerk will write to the complainant to inform them of the date of the committee meeting. They will aim to convene a meeting within <insert number> school days of receipt of the Stage 2 request. If this is not possible, 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 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 governors 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 governors from <School Name> available, the Clerk will source any additional, independent governors through another local school or through their LA's Governor Services team, in order to make up the committee.

You are entitled to bring someone along to the complaints committee for support. This can be a relative or friend. 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 a school employee is called as a witness, they may be supported by union and/or legal representation. Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least <insert number> school 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 or consider evidence unrelated to the initial complaint. 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 permitted unless a complainant's own disability or special needs require it. In this case the school will make appropriate arrangements and prior knowledge and consent of all parties must be sought. 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 school's systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future.

The Chair of the Committee will provide the complainant and <School Name> with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within <insert number> school days. The letter to the complainant will include details of how to contact the Department for Education if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled by <...School>.

If the complaint is about:

- the Chair and Vice Chair jointly or
- the entire governing body or
- the majority of the governing body

Stage 2 will be heard by a committee of independent governors. 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 <School Name> will take to resolve the complaint. The response will also advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied.

Social Media

In order for complaints to be resolved as quickly and fairly as possible, <insert school name here> requests the complainants do not discuss complaints publically via social media such as Facebook and Twitter. Complaints will be dealt with confidentially for those involved, and we expect complainants to observe confidentiality also.

Staff conduct complaints

If it is determined that staff disciplinary or capability proceedings are necessary in order to resolve the issue, the details of this action will remain confidential to the headteacher and/or the individual's line manager. The complainant is entitled to be informed that action is being taken and the eventual outcome of any such action, but they are not entitled to participate in the proceedings or receive any detail about them.

Serial and unreasonable complaints

We hope that our procedures will enable complaints and concerns to be resolved amicably. Very occasionally schools experience unreasonable and unacceptable behaviour in relation to complaints or repetition of issues after the complaints procedure has run its course. ... school has adopted the DfE model policy for these circumstances, which is attached to this procedure.

Next Steps

If the complainant believes the school did not handle their complaint in accordance with the published complaints procedure or they acted unlawfully or unreasonably, they can contact the Department for Education after they have completed Stage 2. The Department for Education will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by <School Name>. They will consider whether <School Name> has adhered to education legislation and any statutory policies connected with the complaint.

The complainant can refer their complaint to the Department for Education online at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus, by telephone on: 0370 000 2288 or by writing to:

Department for Education
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD.

ANNEX B

COMPLAINT FORM

Name of School

When we receive a written complaint, we aim to acknowledge its receipt within 3 school days and send a full or interim response within 10 school days.

Your name

Name of pupil (if relevant):

Relationship to pupil (if relevant):

Address / email:

Postcode:

Telephone (day):

Telephone (evening):

What is your concern and how has it affected you?

Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please list below:

Have you discussed this matter with a member of staff before filling in this form? If so, who did you speak to and what was the response?

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

Signature:

Date:

Please return this form to

Official use only: Date acknowledgement sent:

By whom:

Complaint referred to:..... on

ANNEX C School policy for managing serial and unreasonable complaints

<School Name> is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, and to providing a high quality service to those who complain. We will not normally limit the contact complainants have with our school. However, we do not expect our staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour and will take action to protect staff from that behaviour, including that which is abusive, offensive or threatening.

<School Name> defines unreasonable behaviour as that which hinders our consideration of complaints because of the frequency or nature of the complainant's contact with the school, such as, if the complainant:

- refuses to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcomes sought by raising the complaint, despite offers of assistance
- refuses to co-operate with the complaints investigation process
- refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of the complaints procedure
- insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the complaints procedure or with good practice
- introduces trivial or irrelevant information which they expect to be taken into account and commented on
- raises large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions, and insists they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales
- makes unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues, and seeks to have them replaced
- changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds
- repeatedly makes the same complaint (despite previous investigations or responses concluding that the complaint is groundless or has been addressed)
- refuses to accept the findings of the investigation into that complaint where the school's complaint procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed including referral to the Department for Education
- seeks an unrealistic outcome
- makes excessive demands on school time by frequent, lengthy and complicated contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with
- uses threats to intimidate
- uses abusive, offensive or discriminatory language or violence
- knowingly provides falsified information
- publishes unacceptable information on social media or other public forums.

Complainants should try to limit their communication with the school that relates to their complaint, while the complaint is being progressed. It is not helpful if repeated correspondence is sent (either by letter, phone, email or text), as it could delay the outcome being reached. Whenever possible, the headteacher or Chair of Governors will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying an '*unreasonable*' marking.

If the behaviour continues, the headteacher will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and ask them to change it. For complainants who excessively contact <School Name> causing a significant level of disruption, we may specify methods of communication and limit the number of contacts in a communication plan. This will be reviewed after six months.

In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, we will immediately inform the police and communicate our actions in writing. This may include barring an individual from <School Name>.

ANNEX D

PROCEDURAL ADVICE - CONDUCTING INTERVIEWS WITH COMPLAINANTS

- 1 In conducting interviews with complainants, headteachers (or chairs of governors, if relevant) should:
 - (a) have regard to confidentiality at all times. The need to treat conversations and correspondence as confidential is of paramount importance; from the outset all parties to a complaint should be made aware of the need for confidentiality.
 - (b) listen attentively and sympathetically to complainants, allowing them to explain their concern/s in their own way. After they have finished, it may be necessary to try to clarify the issue(s) by asking questions and summarising what has been said. It is helpful to ascertain the complainant's desired outcome and possibilities (if any) for redress. Headteachers may wish to ensure that the meeting is minuted by a third party, so that there is a clear record of the meeting.
- 2 At the end of the interview decide if it is possible to:
 - (a) make an immediate response to the concern/s; or
 - (b) delay a response. It is often necessary to say to complainants that their concerns will be carefully considered and when all the facts and circumstances have been ascertained, they will receive a response normally within five school days.
- 3 Avoid passing judgement or coming to conclusions before having spoken to any third parties and having considered all the aspects of the complaint.
- 4 If the complaint is against a third party, ensure that they have an opportunity to explain the situation as they see it, but not usually in the presence of the complainant unless this is deemed desirable by all concerned.
- 5 Examine the general context and constraints of the situation and consider if there are any precedents.
- 6 When all the facts and circumstances relating to the matter have been ascertained make careful notes summarising your investigation. You should then decide how to respond to the complainant.
- 7 The complainant should be clearly informed of the school's response to the complaint/s and of the next stage in the procedure, should s/he wish to proceed further.

E

OUTLINE OF THE PROCEDURE FOR A COMPLAINTS PANEL HEARING**The Panel may:**

- (a) dismiss the complaint in whole or in part;
- (b) uphold the complaint in whole or in part;
- (c) decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint;
- (d) recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not recur.

The Panel members should be aware of the following:

- (a) the school's complaints procedure;
- (b) the appeal hearing is independent and impartial and must be seen to be so;
- (c) no governor may sit on the panel if they have had a prior involvement in the complaint, or the circumstances surrounding it;
- (d) panel members should be drawn from a cross-section of the governing body;
- (e) the hearing is held in private;
- (f) the aim of the hearing is to resolve the complaint and achieve conciliation between the school and the complainant;
- (g) it may not be possible to resolve matters to the complainant's satisfaction, it may only be possible to establish facts and satisfy the complaint that the matter has been taken seriously;
- (h) some parents may feel nervous: the panel chair will make efforts to ensure proceedings are as informal as possible.

The chair of the panel:

- (a) welcomes those present and introduces each person by name;
- (b) stresses that the meeting is strictly confidential to those present;
- (c) checks that mobile phones and other devices are switched off.
- (d) outlines the procedure to be followed;
- (e) asks all attending the Panel, including witnesses, to remain available for approximately 30 minutes after they withdraw, in case the Panel needs to clarify a point;
- (f) ensures that key findings of fact are made and the issues addressed;
- (g) ensures that each party is able to state their case and ask questions without undue interruption;
- (h) ensures that all written material is seen by all parties;
- (i) conducts the hearing in an informal manner and ensures each party treats the other with respect and courtesy.

Order of hearing:

- The complainant is invited to present their case and explain their desired outcome and any possibilities of redress.
- The headteacher may question both the complainant and any witnesses.
- The headteacher is invited to explain the school's actions.
- The complainant may question the headteacher and any witnesses.
- Both parties are invited to sum up.

After the complainant and Headteacher have withdrawn, the Panel decides on its recommendations, including any redress. The decision and recommendations of the Complaints Panel are sent within two school days to all parties. The Panel's decision is final.

Sometimes the Panel will need to respond to unexpected events eg

- a complainant may not arrive for the meeting. The Panel will need to consider any reason given or any request for a postponement and decide whether to proceed in their absence or to reconvene the meeting.
- A party may wish to introduce new written evidence not previously distributed. This should be given to the clerk and the chair will need to consider whether to allow time for all sides to consider the new information or to disallow it. New complaints or allegations will not be considered.

LETTER 1 ACKNOWLEDGEMENT LETTER (SENT WITHIN 3 SCHOOL DAYS)

Dear

Thank you for your letter/telephone call/our meeting* of DATE. The School's policy is to deal with parental concerns as quickly as possible. I will investigate the matters you raise and contact you again by (DATE) to let you know the outcome.

Thank you for bringing this matter to my attention.

Yours sincerely

Headteacher

* delete as appropriate

LETTER 2 NOTIFICATION OF DECISION REGARDING PARENTAL COMPLAINT

CONFIDENTIAL

Dear

Further to your letter of (DATE) and our subsequent meeting, I have given careful consideration to your concerns and considered all the available relevant evidence.

We agreed at our meeting that your concerns related to the following:

(Outline the complaint)

Following my investigation I have concluded that

Include as appropriate:

There is insufficient evidence to reach a conclusion and I cannot therefore uphold your complaint. If you are able to provide additional evidence, I will reconsider this decision.

Or

Your complaint is not substantiated by the evidence in that..... (include reasons for this conclusion).

Or

Your complaint was substantiated in part/full (include reasons for this conclusion). The School will review its practices/procedures in relation to with the intention of avoiding any recurrence. Parents will be informed in due course of the policy changes.

Or

In order to address fully the matters investigated, the school has initiated appropriate internal procedures. Due to the nature of these procedures, their outcome must remain strictly confidential. I am confident however that the circumstance which gave rise to your complaint should not recur.

I hope that you now feel that your concerns have been addressed by the school and that we can work together in the future to ensure that no other issues reach this level of concern. However, if you feel dissatisfied with this response you may proceed to the next stage of the complaints procedure *(outline the process for this)*. If you wish to pursue this option please write to..... by (DATE).

Yours sincerely

Headteacher (or Chair of Governing Body, if complaint is against the headteacher)

LETTER 3 NOTIFICATION OF FORMAL HEARING OF THE COMPLAINTS PANEL

CONFIDENTIAL

Dear

Thank you for your letter of (DATE) indicating your wish to make a formal complaint to the Governors' Complaints Panel. I have been instructed to convene a meeting of the Panel in order to hear your complaint. The Panel will consist of three governors who have had no prior involvement in the complaint.

I write to invite you to a meeting of the Complaints Panel which will be held at (time) on(date) at (location). You are welcome to be accompanied by a friend and/or, if necessary, an interpreter. I would be grateful if you could confirm whether you intend to come to the meeting and, if you bring a friend, and/or if you intend to invite any witnesses, please let me know their names. Please also let me know if we should be aware of any issues regarding access for the disabled.

I enclose copies of the paperwork relating to your complaint. If there is any additional written information in support of your complaint, please send this to me by (DATE) (5 days before the meeting) so that I may circulate this to the Panel and the headteacher. Please note that the Panel will be discussing the issues raised in the attached papers and any further information you submit by the deadline. It will not be possible for you to raise any new issues at the meeting.

I enclose an explanatory sheet summarising the procedure at the meeting. The Panel will consider carefully both your views and those of the school and will make every effort to find a mutually acceptable solution to the situation which has led to your complaint.

Yours sincerely

Clerk to the Governors

LETTER 4 OUTCOME OF HEARING OF THE COMPLAINTS PANEL

CONFIDENTIAL

Dear

Thank you for meeting with me and my fellow governors on the Complaints Panel on (DATE) to discuss your complaint. I am grateful to you for the time and effort you put into presenting your complaint.

I am writing to let you know (or confirm, if outcome announced at end of hearing) the outcome of our consideration of your complaint.

Include here a brief summary of the nature of the complaint and the conclusions reached by the Panel, including particulars of any evidence that was pertinent to reaching a conclusion. It is important that due weight is given to both the complainant's evidence and that of the school. Outcomes will vary, see letter two for possible options). Also include any actions that the school intends to take as a result of the complaint, including any changes or reviews of school procedures.

I and my fellow Panel members hope that you will feel your complaint has been fairly heard and that all the issues you raised have been investigated appropriately. The Governors Panel is the last stage in the School's complaints procedure and the Governors consider that this matter is now closed. *(The wording of this final paragraph will largely depend on the outcome and the wording may need to change appropriately).*

If you are dissatisfied with the way your complaint has dealt with you may contact the School Complaints Unit at the Department for Education (www.education.gov.uk/contactus, or by telephone 0370 000 2288, or by writing to DFE, School Complaints Unit, Piccadilly Gate, Store St, Manchester, M1 2WD.

Yours sincerely

Chair of Complaints Panel

Cc Headteacher
Chair of Governors