



### Mission Statement

*“A Caring Christian Family Where We Grow Together”*

## COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE (EXTERNAL)

**Effective Date:** 01/01/2018

**Review Date:** September 2026 Biennial

Review Date	Signed Principal	Signed Director RCSAT
25/07/2018	<i>J. L. J. J. J.</i>	<i>P. B. B.</i>
25/10/2020	<i>J. M. Badger</i>	<i>P. B. B.</i>
28/04/2021	<i>J. M. Badger</i>	<i>P. B. B.</i>
23/08/2024	<i>J. M. Badger</i>	<i>P. B. B.</i>

Persons Responsible for Policy:	Executive Headteacher RCSAT
Approval Date	01/01/2018
Signed:	Director RCSAT
Signed:	Executive Headteacher RCSAT



## 1. Scope of this Procedure

- 1.1 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 about any facilities or services that the school provides. Unless complaints are dealt with under separate statutory procedures (such as appeals relating to exclusions or admissions), the school will use this complaints procedure. Any complaints which subsequently lead to staff conduct actions will be considered under Allegations against Staff procedure, RCSAT-PR-012-02, if appropriate, but outcomes of this will be confidential and will not be shared with the complainant.
- 1.2 The scope of this complaints procedure is covered in more detail in Appendix A.

## 2. Timescales

- 2.1 Complaints must be raised within three months of the incident or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within three months of the last of these incidents. The school will consider complaints made outside of this timeframe only if the chair of governors and Principal, having taken advice, are of the view that exceptional circumstances apply.
- 2.2 All timescales in this procedure refer to school working days, for this school, excluding school holidays, in- service training (INSET) days and bank holidays.
- 2.3 Any complaints made outside of term time will be considered to have been received on the first school day after the holiday period.

## 3. Anonymous complaints

- 3.1 Anonymous complaints will not normally be investigated, unless the EHT or Chair of Trust, if appropriate, determines that the complaint warrants an investigation.

## 4. Serial, Abusive, Malicious or Unreasonable Complaints

- 4.1 Where the school judges a complaint to be malicious, unreasonable or where a complainant is making serial complaints or raising issues again that have previously been addressed under the any stage of the school's complaints procedure, the sanctions outlined at Appendix D may be invoked.

## 5. How to Raise a Complaint

- 5.1 A concern / informal complaint can be made initially in person, in writing or by telephone. It may also be made by a third party acting on someone else's behalf, as long as they have appropriate consent to do so.
- 5.2 In the first instance parental concerns should normally be raised with the class teacher or, if the concern is about the class teacher, with a member of the senior leadership team or the Principal. If the issue remains unresolved, the next step is to make a formal complaint under Formal Stage 1 of this procedure.
- 5.3 Complainants **shall not** approach individual governors/directors to raise concerns or complaints. Governors/Directors have no power to act on an individual basis and this may also prevent them from considering a complaint if it reaches Stage 2 of this procedure.
- 5.4 A formal complaint against a member of school staff (except the EHT or Principal) should be made in the first instance in writing to the Principal via the school office and should be marked as private and confidential.



- 5.5 A formal complaint that involves or is about the EHT or Principal should be addressed to the chair of Trust in writing, via the school office, and should be marked as private and confidential.
- 5.6 A formal complaint about the chair of Trust, any individual governor/director or the whole governing board shall be addressed to the clerk to the governing board in writing, via the school office, and should be marked as private and confidential.
- 5.7 For ease of use, a template complaint form is included at the end of this procedure (Appendix B). Help in completing the form can be accessed via the school office.
- 5.8 In accordance with equalities law, the school will consider making reasonable adjustments if required, to enable complainants to access and complete this complaints procedure. This may include providing information in alternative formats, assisting individuals in raising a formal complaint or holding meetings in accessible locations.
- 5.9 Complaints about the aggressive or inappropriate behaviour of parents/carers or visitors to the school shall be referred to the Principal and shall be dealt with under this procedure (see appendices A, D and E3).

## 6. Resolving complaints

- 6.1 At each stage in the procedure, the school will hope to be able to resolve the complaint. If appropriate, it will be acknowledged that the complaint is upheld in whole or in part. In addition, one or more of the following may be offered:
  - an explanation;
  - an admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better;
  - an assurance that the school 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.

## 7. Withdrawal of a Complaint

- 7.1 If a complainant wishes to withdraw their complaint, they will be asked to confirm this in writing. Once a complaint has been withdrawn the same issue cannot be raised again.

## 8. Informal Complaints

- 8.1 It is in everyone's interest that concerns, and complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. Many issues can be resolved without the need to use the formal stages of the complaints procedure. The school aims to take all concerns seriously and will make every effort to resolve issues raised as quickly as possible.
- 8.2 If an individual has difficulty discussing a concern with a particular member of staff, the school will respect this. In this case the complainant will be referred to another staff member. Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels unable to deal with a concern, the complainant will be referred to another staff



- member. The member of staff will usually be more senior but does not have to be. The ability to consider the concern objectively and impartially is more important.
- 8.3 At the conclusion of their investigation, the appropriate member of staff investigating the complaint will provide an informal written response within 10 school days of the date of receipt of the complaint.
  - 8.4 The school would hope and expect to be able to deal with most concerns raised on an informal basis, and a complainant should not raise a formal complaint before discussing their concerns informally with an appropriate member of staff.
  - 8.5 It is understood that there are occasions when people remain dissatisfied and would like to raise their concerns formally. In this case, every attempt will be made to resolve the issue through the formal stages outlined within this complaints procedure.

## 9. Formal Stage 1

- 9.1 Formal complaints must be in writing on the complaints form provided (Appendix B) to the Principal/EHT, other than in the circumstances referred to in paragraphs 11 and 12.
- 9.2 The Principal/EHT shall record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within five school days.
- 9.3 Within this response, the Principal/EHT will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, ask what remains unresolved and what outcome the complainant would like to see. The Principal/EHT can consider whether a face-to-face meeting is the most appropriate way of doing this.
- 9.4 The Principal/EHT may delegate any investigation to another member of the school's senior leadership team but will not delegate the decision about the merits of the complaint.
- 9.5 During an investigation, the Principal/EHT (or designated member of staff) will, if necessary, interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish, and will keep a written record of any meetings/interviews in relation to the investigation. Staff members may be accompanied at these meetings by a colleague or trade union representative if they wish.
- 9.6 At the conclusion of the investigation, the Principal/EHT will provide a formal written response, within twenty school days of the date of receipt of the complaint.
- 9.7 If the Principal/EHT is unable to meet this deadline, they will provide the complainant with an update and revised response date.
- 9.8 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 the school will take to resolve the complaint.
- 9.9 The Principal/EHT will advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of Formal Stage 1.
- 9.10 If the complaint is about the Principal/EHT, or a member or members of the governing board (including the chair and/or vice-chair), a suitably skilled governor/trustee will be appointed to complete all the actions at Formal Stage 1.
- 9.11 If the complaint is about significant members, proportions or indeed the entire governing board Formal Stage 1 will be considered by an independent investigator appointed by the governing board/LA /Diocese/MAT. At the conclusion of their investigation, the independent investigator will provide a formal written response.



## 10. Formal Stage 2

- 10.1 If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome at Formal Stage 1 and wishes to take the matter further, they can escalate the complaint to Formal Stage 2 – a meeting with a panel of three members of the governing board convened for this purpose. This is the **final** stage of the complaints procedure.
- 10.2 A request to escalate to Stage 2 must be made to the clerk to the governing board in writing, via the school office, within twenty school days of receipt of the Formal Stage 1 response. Requests received outside of this timeframe will only be considered if the clerk to the governing board, having taken appropriate advice, considers that exceptional circumstances apply.
- 10.3 The clerk to the governing board shall record the date the request to escalate the complaint is received and acknowledge receipt in writing (either by letter or email) within five school days.
- 10.4 The clerk to the governing board shall aim to convene a meeting of the governors' complaints panel within twenty school days of receipt of the Stage 2 request. If this is not possible, the clerk shall provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed.
- 10.5 The complaints panel shall comprise at least three impartial members with no prior involvement with the complaint. **In academies there is a statutory requirement for there to be at least one panel member that is entirely independent of the complaint and the management and running of the academy.**
- 10.6 The complainant shall be informed in advance of the meeting of the membership of the panel and asked whether they wish to raise any objections to individual members. If objections are raised the panel shall give them reasonable consideration. If the ability of a panel member to give the case a fair hearing is called into question, the reasons given shall be considered and that panel member may be replaced.
- 10.7 If there are fewer than three governors from this school available, the clerk to the governing board, or the minute clerk for the hearing, shall seek to source additional, independent governors through another local school or academy, in order to make up the panel. Alternatively, an entirely independent panel may be convened to hear the complaint at Formal Stage 2.
- 10.8 If the complainant rejects the offer of three proposed dates, without good reason, the clerk to the governing board, or the minute clerk for the hearing, shall decide when to hold the meeting, in consultation with the governors' panel. The panel shall then proceed in the complainant's absence on the basis of written submissions from both parties.
- 10.9 A suitable venue shall be provided for the meeting which includes separate waiting areas for the two parties and refreshments for all involved.
- 10.10 At least ten school days before the meeting, the clerk to the governing board, or the minute clerk for the hearing, shall:
  - confirm and notify the complainant of 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;
  - request copies from both parties of any further written material to be submitted to the panel at least five school days before the meeting;
  - request that both parties provide names of any witnesses to be called and the nature of the evidence which they will be providing, at least five days in



advance of the meeting. The panel has the discretion not to admit a witness if they do not consider their evidence to be relevant to the complaint.

- 10.11 The complainant may bring someone with them to the panel meeting to provide support. This can be a relative or friend. Other than in exceptional circumstances (as agreed in advance with the governors' panel) this should not be a legal representative. This companion shall not have the right to speak on the complainant's behalf.
- 10.12 If a school employee is called as a witness in a complaints meeting, they may wish to be supported by a representative of their trade union. Any such representative will be present in a supportive capacity only and shall not be allowed to speak on the member of staff's behalf.
- 10.13 Minutes of the meeting shall be taken by the clerk to the governing board, or a minute clerk appointed specifically for the hearing by the governors' panel.
- 10.14 There shall be no audio or visual recording of the proceedings by any party unless a complainant's own disability or individual needs require it. Prior knowledge and consent of all parties attending must be sought before recordings of meetings or conversations take place. Consent will be recorded in any minutes taken. A copy of the minutes of the meeting, once approved by the governors' panel, shall be shared with all parties.
- 10.15 The panel shall not normally accept, as evidence, recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.
- 10.16 The panel shall not review any new complaints at this stage or consider evidence unrelated to the initial complaint to be included. New complaints must be dealt with from the start of this procedure.
- 10.17 The meeting shall be held in private and proceedings will be treated as confidential.
- 10.18 The meeting shall follow the process outlined in Appendix C.
- 10.19 The governors' panel shall consider the complaint and all the evidence presented. The panel may:
  - uphold the complaint in whole or in part
  - dismiss the complaint in whole or in part.
- 10.20 If the complaint is upheld in whole or in part, the panel shall:
  - 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.
- 10.21 The chair of the panel will provide the complainant and the Principal/EHT/chair of trust (depending on who conducted Formal Stage 1) with a full explanation of the panel's decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within five school days. The response will also detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and, where appropriate, will include details of actions the school will take to resolve the complaint. The response will be available for inspection on the school premises by written application to the Principal/EHT.
- 10.22 The letter to the complainant will include details of how to contact ESFA (Education and Skills Funding Agency) if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled by the school.



- 10.23 A written record will be kept of all complaints, whether they are resolved at the preliminary stage or proceed to a panel hearing, and of any action taken by the school as a result of those complaints (regardless of whether they are upheld). Correspondence, statements, and records relating to individual complaints shall be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the 2008 Act requests access to them.

## 11. Next Steps

- 11.1 If the complainant believes the school did not handle their complaint in accordance with this complaints procedure or it acted unlawfully or unreasonably in the exercise of its duties under education law, they can contact ESFA after they have completed Formal Stage 2.
- 11.2 ESFA will not reinvestigate the substance of complaints generally, or overturn any decisions made by the school. They will consider whether the school has adhered to education legislation and any statutory policies connected with the complaint.
- 11.3 The complainant can refer their complaint to the ESFA online at: [www.education.gov.uk/contactus](http://www.education.gov.uk/contactus), by telephone at: 0370 000 2288 or by writing to:  
Academy Complaints and Customer Insight Unit  
Education and Skills Funding Agency  
Cheylesmore House  
5 Quinton Road  
Coventry  
CV1 2WT



### **Appendix A: Scope of this Complaints Procedure**

This procedure covers all complaints other than those that are dealt with under other statutory procedures, including those listed below. As noted below, school employees may not use this procedure to raise concerns relating to their employment. Aggressive behaviour of parents/carers and visitors will be dealt with under this procedure.

<b>Exceptions</b>	<b>Who to contact</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Admissions to schools</li> <li>• Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs</li> <li>• School re-organisation proposals</li> </ul>	<p>Concerns about admissions, statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs, or school re-organisation proposals should be raised with Cheshire East Borough Council,  <b>School Admissions and Organisation</b>            0300 123 5012  <a href="http://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/schools/admissions/admissions.aspx">http://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/schools/admissions/admissions.aspx</a></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation</li> </ul>	<p>Complaints about child protection matters are handled under our child protection and safeguarding policy and in accordance with relevant statutory guidance.</p> <p><b>The Cheshire East Consultation Service (ChECS)</b>  <a href="https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/livewell/care-and-support-for-children/are-you-concerned-about-a-child/cheshire-east-consultation-service-cheecs/cheecs.aspx">https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/livewell/care-and-support-for-children/are-you-concerned-about-a-child/cheshire-east-consultation-service-cheecs/cheecs.aspx</a></p> <p>Phone ChECS on <b>0300 123 5012 (option 3)</b> Callers will be directed to the appropriate team and relevant personnel more quickly via a range of automated options.</p> <p>If you need to contact someone out of hours and you believe it to be an emergency that can't wait, please call our Emergency Duty Team on <b>0300 123 5022</b>.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exclusion of children from school*</li> </ul>	<p>Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at: <a href="http://www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions">www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions</a>.</p> <p><i>*complaints about the application of the behaviour policy can be made through this procedure.</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Whistleblowing</li> </ul>	<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 whistle-blowers in education who do not want to raise matters direct with their employer. Referrals can be made at: <a href="http://www.education.gov.uk/contactus">www.education.gov.uk/contactus</a>.</p> <p>Volunteer staff who have concerns about our school should complain through the school's complaints procedure. You may also be able to complain direct to the LA or the ESFA (see link above), depending on the substance of your complaint.</p>



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff grievances</li> </ul>	Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the school's internal grievance procedures.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff conduct</li> </ul>	<p>Complaints about staff will be dealt with under the school's internal disciplinary procedures, if appropriate.</p> <p>Complainants will not be informed of any disciplinary action taken against a staff member as a result of a complaint. However, the complainant will be notified that the matter is being addressed.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complaints about services provided by other providers who may use school premises or facilities</li> </ul>	Providers should have their own complaints procedure to deal with complaints about service. Please contact them direct.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National Curriculum - content</li> </ul>	Please contact the Department for Education at: <a href="http://www.education.gov.uk/contactus">www.education.gov.uk/contactus</a>

If other bodies are investigating aspects of the complaint, for example the police, LA safeguarding teams or tribunals, this may impact on our ability to adhere to the timescales within this procedure or result in the procedure being suspended until those public bodies have completed their investigations.

If a complainant commences legal action against the school, the complaints procedure may be suspended until those legal proceedings have concluded.



THIS PAGE IS INTENTIONAL BLANK



**Appendix B: Complaints Form**

Please complete and return to the school office marked private and confidential for the attention of the Principal/EHT or chair of Trust who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

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



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

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

Signature:

Date:

Official use

Date acknowledgement sent:

By who:

Complaint referred to:

Date:



THIS PAGE IS INTENTIONAL BLANK



## Appendix C: Arrangements and Procedure for Governors' Panel Hearing

1. The governors' panel will agree a chair from amongst their number.
2. Although this procedure may appear formal, the hearing should be conducted in as informal a way as possible, and the chair of the panel should make every effort to make all parties feel comfortable.
3. The chair of the panel will introduce all the parties present and explain the procedure to be followed, and that every effort will be made to keep the process as informal as possible.
4. The complainant will outline their complaint and explain why they are dissatisfied with the school's response at Formal Stage 1. The complainant may call any witnesses in support of their complaint who will attend the meeting only for the time that they are providing information and may be questioned by all parties.
5. The Principal/EHT and/or chair of Trust and the governors on the panel will have the opportunity to ask questions of the complainant.
6. The Principal/EHT and/or chair of Trust will explain their involvement in the complaint and the reasons for their decisions at the informal and first formal stage. The Principal/EHT and/or chair of Trust may call any witnesses in support of his/her statement who will attend the meeting only for the time that they are providing information, and may be questioned by all parties.
7. The complainant and the governors on the panel will have the opportunity to ask questions of the Principal/EHT and/or chair of Trust.
8. Both parties will be given the opportunity to sum up their statements, ending with the complainant. No new material may be introduced at this stage.
9. The governors may decide to adjourn the hearing pending further investigation at any stage, if this seems necessary.
10. Both parties will leave the meeting and the governors will consider the information that has been put to them. The clerk will remain for this part of the meeting in order to clarify anything if necessary, but the governors' deliberations will not be minuted.
11. The governors' panel must reach a unanimous or majority decision as to whether or not to uphold the complaint wholly or in part, and what action (if any) the school needs to take to resolve the complaint. This may include referring the matter to another formal process, whether in relation to a complaint against a governor or a member of the school staff. Normally the governors will reach a decision at this point, but they may feel the need to take further advice. Where this is the case, they should endeavour to reach a decision as soon as possible.
12. The governors will communicate their response to both parties in writing as soon as possible but, in any case, within five working days of reaching their decision.



## Appendix D: Managing Serial, Abusive, Malicious or Unreasonable Complaints

1. This school 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.
2. This school 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. For example, 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 upon;
  - 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 ESFA;
  - 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.
3. 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.



4. Whenever possible, the Principal/EHT or chair of Trust will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying an 'unreasonable' marking.
5. If the behaviour continues, the Principal/EHT will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and ask them to change it. For complainants who excessively contact the school 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.
6. In response to any incident of aggression or violence, we will immediately inform the police, where appropriate, and communicate our actions in writing. This may include barring an individual from the school premises.
7. **SANCTIONS** In the event of serial, abusive, malicious or unreasonable and persistent complaints from one or more individuals, the school may determine to apply one or more of the following sanctions to that or those individuals:
  - 7.1 A warning letter to each of the individuals stating that their behaviour is unacceptable, must cease forthwith and failure to do so may result in further sanctions;
  - 7.2 The imposition of a fixed-term barring from the school premises and events, the length of which shall be determined by the Principal in writing, except for pre-planned meetings at which another member of staff will be present and notes of the meeting will be recorded;
  - 7.3 The imposition of a fixed-term barring from the school premises and events, the length of which shall be determined by the Principal in writing, except for pre-planned meetings at which another member of staff will be present and notes of the meeting will be recorded. This barring will only be lifted after a written apology by the individual including a guarantee of future good behaviour;
  - 7.4 A permanent barring from the school premises and school events, which will mean that no meetings will be permitted.
  - 7.5 Appendix E3 defines the rules for barring.





## **Appendix E 1**

### **School Complaints Procedure**

#### **Guidance for Governors – on formal Stage 2**

Our school has a complaints procedure to ensure we respond to complaints as quickly and as effectively as possible. (A copy of the full policy can be obtained from the school).

If the Principal/chair of governors is unable to resolve the matter informally, the complaint can be referred to a Complaints Committee appointed by the governing board. The aim of the hearing is to establish any areas of agreement and identify actions that can be taken to resolve the complaint. The governing board may nominate a number of members with delegated powers to hear complaints at that stage, and set out its terms of reference. These can include:

- drawing up its procedures; hearing individual appeals
- making recommendations on policy as a result of complaints.

The procedure adopted by the committee for hearing appeals is part of the school's complaints procedure. The committee can be drawn from the nominated members and or other governing boards. The usual complement is three governors. The committee may choose its own chair. Academies MUST have at least one member that is independent of the leadership or running of the academy.

#### **The Remit of the Complaints Committee**

The committee has delegated powers to:

- Uphold the complaint in whole or in part
- Dismiss the complaint in whole or in part
- Decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint
- Recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not recur.

There are several points which any governor sitting on a complaints committee needs to remember:

- It is important that the hearing is independent and impartial and that it is 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. In deciding the make-up of the committee, governors need to try and ensure that it is a cross-section of the categories of governor and sensitive to the issues of race, gender and religious affiliation.
- The aim of the hearing, which needs to be held in private, will always be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant. However, it has to be recognised that the complainant might not be satisfied with the outcome if the hearing does not find in their favour. It may not be possible for the panel to establish the facts e.g. if there is insufficient corroborative evidence to enable it to form a view; its only alternative in this case is to make recommendations which will satisfy the complainant that their complaint has been taken seriously.
  - An effective committee will acknowledge that many complainants feel nervous and inhibited in a formal setting. Parents often feel emotional when discussing an issue that affects their child. The committee chair will ensure that the proceedings are as welcoming as possible.
- The layout of the room will set the tone and care is needed to ensure the setting is informal and not adversarial.
- Extra care needs to be taken when the complainant is a child. Careful consideration of the atmosphere and proceedings will ensure that the child does not feel intimidated. The committee needs to be aware of the views of the child and give them equal



consideration to those of adults. Where the child's parent is the complainant, it would be helpful to give the parent the opportunity to say which parts of the hearing, if any, the child needs to attend.

### **Role of the Chair of the Complaints Committee**

The Chair of the Committee has a key role, ensuring that:

- The remit of the committee is explained to the parties and each party has the opportunity of putting their case forward without undue interruption
- the issues are addressed
- key findings of fact are made
- parents and others who may not be used to speaking at such a hearing are put at ease
- the hearing is conducted in an informal manner with each party treating the other with respect and courtesy
- the committee is open minded and acting independently
- no member of the committee has a vested interest in the outcome of the proceedings or any involvement in an earlier stage of the procedure
- each side is given the opportunity to state their case and ask questions
- written material is seen by all parties. If a new issue arises it would be useful to give all parties the opportunity to consider and comment on it.

### **Checklist for a Complaints Committee Hearing**

The committee needs to take the following points into account:

- The hearing is as informal as possible
- Witnesses are only required to attend for the part of the hearing in which they give their evidence
- After introductions, the complainant is invited to explain their complaint, and be followed by their witnesses
- The Principal/EHT may question both the complainant and the witnesses after each has spoken
- The Principal/EHT is then invited to explain the school's actions and be followed by the school's witnesses
- The complainant may question both the Principal/EHT and the witnesses after each has spoken
- The committee may ask questions at any point
- The complainant is then invited to sum up their complaint
- The Principal/EHT is then invited to sum up the school's actions and response to the complaint
- Both parties leave together while the committee decides on the issues
- The chair explains that both parties will hear from the committee within a set timescale.

### **Notification of the Committee's Decision**

The chair of the committee needs to ensure that the complainant is notified of the committee's decision, in writing, with the committee's response; this usually will be within 5 days of the date of the hearing. The letter needs to explain how to contact the ESFA if they remain unsatisfied.

## **Appendix E2**

### **Investigating Complaints – Interviewing Best Practice Guidance for Schools**

#### **Children and Young People**

Children/young people should be interviewed in the presence of another member of staff, or in the case of serious complaints (e.g. where the possibility of criminal investigation exists) in the presence of their parents/carers. However, it might not always be possible to conduct an interview in case it prejudices a (LADO) Local Authority Designated Officer or police investigation.

Care should be taken in these circumstances not to create an intimidating atmosphere. Children/young people should be told what the interview is about and that they can have someone with them.

#### **Staff / Witnesses**

Explain the complaint and your role clearly to the interviewee and confirm that they understand the complaints procedure and their role in it.

Staff are allowed a colleague to support them at their interview. The colleague must not be anyone likely to be interviewed themselves, including their line manager.

Use open, not leading questions.

Do not express opinions in words or attitude.

Ask single not multiple questions, i.e. one question at a time.

Try to separate 'hearsay' evidence from fact by asking interviewees how they know a particular fact.

Persist with questions if necessary. Do not be afraid to ask the same question twice. Make notes of each answer given.

Deal with conflicting evidence by seeking corroborative evidence. If this is not available, discuss with the complaints co-ordinator/ Principa/ chair of governors the option of a meeting between the conflicting witnesses.

Make a formal record of the interview from the written notes as soon as possible while the memory is fresh. Show the interviewee the formal record, ask if they have anything to add, and to sign the record as accurate.

*Taken from the Department for Education's 'Best Practice Advice for School Complaints Procedures 2016' – Departmental advice for maintained schools, maintained nursery schools and local authorities.*

**Appendix E3**

**Barring from the School Premises**

Although fulfilling a public function, schools are private places. The public has no automatic right of entry. Schools will therefore act to ensure they remain a safe place for pupils, staff and other members of their community.

If a parent’s behaviour is a cause for concern, a school can ask them to leave school premises. In serious cases, the Principal or the LA can notify them in writing that their implied licence to be on school premises has been temporarily revoked subject to any representations that the parent may wish to make. Schools should always give the parent the opportunity to formally express their views on the decision to bar in writing. The decision to bar should then be reviewed, taking into account any representations made by the parent, and either confirmed or lifted. If the decision is confirmed the parent should be notified in writing, explaining how long the bar will be in place.

Anyone wishing to complain about being barred can do so, by letter or email, to the Principal or chair of governors. However, complaints about barring cannot be escalated to the ESFA Once the school’s own complaints procedure has been completed, the only remaining avenue of appeal is through the Courts; independent legal advice must therefore be sought.

**Adopted on:**

**For Review on:**

Signed .....

Chair of Governing Board

Date .....

