



### Rationale

This policy applies to any matter which has been raised with the school as a matter of concern, but which has not been capable of resolution informally and which the complainant or the school consider should be dealt with on a formal basis.

The school will publish guidance on how matters of concern should be raised on an informal basis. Generally, it is expected that where the matter relates to a student it will have been raised with the student's learning mentor and director of studies and the assistant or deputy headteacher, before a request is made to deal with it under this policy. The school is a very different forum from a court of law, with different requirements.

The Governing Body has adopted this policy. It is based on an earlier model published by Worcestershire Children's Services.

The School publishes details of its Complaints Procedure and any out-of time limits the Governors have prescribed in the following way:

- School website

There are other specific complaints procedures available for certain specialist areas (as listed below). **If the complaint relates to any of the following areas, the appropriate procedure should be followed as they are NOT COVERED under this policy:**

- the National Curriculum
- collective worship
- religious education
- pupil admissions
- pupil exclusion
- special educational needs
- child protection
- employee grievances and disciplinary proceedings

### General Principles

This procedure contains advice for resolving complaints; flowcharts to indicate time limits; and advice on the conduct of meetings.

Every attempt will be made to adhere to the time limits specified in the flow charts and detailed procedures which follow, but these may in exceptional circumstances be exceeded. In such cases the school/governors will advise the reasons and set a new time-scale.

A complaint will usually be considered as 'out-of-time' if it is raised more than three months after the matter is known to the complainant.

Anonymous complaints will not be investigated, except in exceptional circumstances – such as child protection issues.

**The aim of this policy is to resolve concerns at the earliest opportunity, and effect reconciliation if there has been friction.** If the complaint needs to be formalised, the complainant will be asked to

write down the substance of the complaint on a form, an example of which is found in Annex C. This form will also invite a view about what actions might be felt to resolve the problem.

### **Possible Resolutions**

Many concerns may be resolved by explanations, others by a simple apology. An apology is always undertaken as a point of human value/interest and is not in any way an admission of guilt. A suggested letter template is with the Headteacher's PA and should be sent at the earliest possible moment. Other complaints may result from a school procedure which could have been handled differently. Such an acknowledgement would be an appropriate resolution, as would assurances that events complained about, (if justified) will not recur. Others may be resolved by an undertaking to review school policies in the light of a complaint.

### **Later Stages**

Where concerns are not resolved on an early timescale, the procedure allows for formal consideration by the Headteacher, and later still, by a Governors' Complaints Panel.

### **Unresolved Complaints**

Occasionally, a complainant may remain dissatisfied, even though this procedure has been used through all its stages. However, it will not normally be possible to re-open the same issue. In such circumstances, the Chair of Governors will inform the complainant that the procedures have been exhausted and that the matter is closed.

**It is a precondition to the operation of this policy that the complainant shall have made reasonable attempts to seek an informal resolution and shall have acted in relation to the matter in a reasonable and measured way. The Chair of Governors shall have discretion and not allow a complaint to be pursued until this precondition has been met; complaints deemed vexatious will not be allowed (see below for definition).**

### **Vexatious/ Malicious Complaints**

There may be occasions when the complainant is deemed to be "vexatious". This could be because it is clear that the complainant has insufficient grounds for complaint, or that a previous complaint has been investigated and is found not to be justified, but the complainant persistently engages in making further accusations relating to the same or connected issues.

Any such case will be dealt with on an individual basis but the headteacher and Chair of governors, the Vice Chair of the governing body or a designated appeals/complaints officer Governor reserve the right to close the complaint if the complainant is deemed to be "vexatious", and to determine that the matter is now concluded.

### **School Complaints Stages in Detail**

This school will monitor and record parents/carers compliments, concerns and complaints. This will endorse and ensure the continuation of our good practice.

It is acknowledged that, where concerns are raised, they are more often than not raised with a more senior person, for example, a Key Stage Co-ordinator or Deputy Head, or the Headteacher in a small school, rather than a more junior teacher. The first stage, therefore, could if appropriate, be dealt with informally by one of a number of possible people.

### **So is it a complaint, or is it a concern?**

1. In any community, misunderstandings arise or actions are taken which might be felt to militate against the spirits of fairness and common sense established in the school. A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about school policies or procedures, the conduct, actions or omissions of members of staff or Governors at the school and the standards of teaching and learning. On such occasions, it is important to move swiftly to prevent the escalation of a minor problem into a major incident.

### **Before a concern becomes a complaint**

2. Do not hesitate to contact the school if you are uneasy or dissatisfied about something. It is important not to let little concerns build up into serious mistrust or irritation. We are as keen to see things run smoothly as you are - after all, we all want the best for the children.
3. When you contact the school, begin as informally as possible - say what concerns you and try to find out the facts. You will be in a much better position to know if you have grounds for a complaint when you are in possession of all the facts. We may be able to give an explanation or fill in details which answer your concerns. Do not rely solely on your child's account or on information from other parents.
4. A telephone call is better than a letter, and a calmly worded letter is better than an ultimatum or threat of action. We welcome telephone calls from parents who wish to talk about a problem before it becomes a complaint.
5. If a parent approaches a member of the Governing Body directly, the Governor will direct that person to take the complaint to the Headteacher. In circumstances where the complaint is about the Headteacher, it may be appropriate for the Governor to make contact with the Chair of Governors. Similarly, any complainant who approaches the LA direct will be referred back to the Headteacher.

### **Stage 1 (Informal)**

Where any member of staff becomes aware of a voiced concern, they should deal with it themselves if it is appropriate, and they feel comfortable in doing so. Many concerns can be resolved by simple clarification or the provision of information. It is anticipated that most concerns can be readily resolved at this informal stage. Where the person approached feels uncomfortable with dealing with the matter directly, they should involve, for example, their line manager.

In the case of serious concerns (or where the school deems it more appropriate to do so) it may be necessary to refer these matters directly to the Headteacher.

Where the complaint is specifically about the Headteacher, similarly the parent/carer should discuss this with him/her at this stage first.

It is not appropriate for a complaint to be directed through a Governor. Any Governor receiving a complaint will give advice that there is an established procedure, and refer the complainant to the appropriate person, and must not deal with it themselves. (This is because a Governor acting unilaterally, however well intentioned their actions, could prejudice the involvement of Governors at a later stage)

The concern will be noted (including the outcome) and copied to the Headteacher (or appropriate person in charge of records in larger establishments). Where the subject of the complaint is the Headteacher, he/she will copy the record to the Chair of Governors.

Where informal attempts by the school have failed to bring about a satisfactory resolution for the parent/carer, the parent/carer is entitled to request that the complaint be treated more formally. Unless the complaint directly concerns the Headteacher, it will be him/her who deals with this next stage (Stage Two).

If the complaint is specifically about the Headteacher, and s/he has had the opportunity in Stage one to discuss the matter, the parent/carer can then directly contact the Chair of Governors about Stage 2.

### **Stage 2 (Formal) – Dealt with by Headteacher**

[If the complaint concerns the Headteacher, the Chair of Governors is personally responsible for following the procedures in Stage 2. Otherwise, the Headteacher deals with this Stage].

This stage can be initiated if/ when dissatisfaction with the outcome of stage one is received by the school. At this point, a copy of these Procedures and Policy will be sent to the complainant within 3 school days, together with the formal complaint form (Annex C).

The form is structured so that each party has a common understanding about the complaint. As the main purpose of the process is to achieve reconciliation, parents/ carers are also asked what actions might resolve the problem.

After the formal complaint form is returned, it will be acknowledged within 3 school days and the investigation will commence.

This is the first stage of the formal complaints process and as a result, all communications between parties will be recorded.

Before proceeding with a formal investigation, the Headteacher may wish to meet with the individual and discuss his/her concerns and wishes. It may still be appropriate and satisfactory to reach an informal resolution at this point. If not, the Headteacher will decide whether the individual's complaint will be dealt with by this policy or another statutory procedure. In the latter case, the Headteacher will advise the complainant on what will need to be done.

The Head /Chair of Governors may delegate the task of collating the information to another staff member, ( or designated Complaints Governor) but not the decision on the action to be taken. The investigation should involve the review of any relevant documentation and information. If necessary, witnesses will need to be interviewed and statements taken from those involved. If the complaint centres around a pupil, the pupil will also usually be interviewed.

The outcome of the investigation should be communicated to parents/carers, either at a meeting (followed up in writing) or as a written response. This response should explain the outcome and should be supported by reasons for reaching this decision and what action, if any, will be taken. (If management action is subsequently required against an employee of the school, the parents/carers will not have access to this information). **This response should be provided within 10 school days of acknowledging the complaint.**

If the complainant is still dissatisfied with the response given and would like to take the complaint further, they should make this clear in writing to the Headteacher. On receipt, s/he will send on the complaint form and all associated information to the Chair of Governors. [In the case of the Headteacher, if the complainant is still dissatisfied, and wishes to take it further, the Chair should be so advised, and Stage 3 initiated]

**Stage 3 (Formal) – Dealt with by Governors' Panel** (who will include an independent member if available)

On receipt of the information from the Headteacher, the Chair of Governors will verify that the parent/carer has properly exhausted all stage 2 procedures. If not satisfied, the Chair will refer the matter back to the Headteacher. When satisfied, the Chair will contact the Clerk and liaise with him or her to make preparatory arrangements for the Governors' Complaints Panel Meeting.

The Clerk may be the Clerk to the Governing Body, or, in exceptional circumstances, another Governor acting as Clerk, (over and above those selected for the Panel).

The Chair of Governors will identify three governors chosen from an agreed pool of governors to form the Complaints Panel, and the Panel will appoint its own chair.

The Chair of Governors or Clerk to the Governors' Complaints Panel will acknowledge (to the complainant) receipt of the information from the Headteacher within 5 school days.

This letter will inform the parent/carer that the complaint will be heard by the Complaints Panel within 15 school days. In exceptional circumstances, the parent/carer will be notified where this timed period will need to be extended and the reasons for this.

The Clerk of the Panel will convene a meeting of the Complaints Panel, (as identified by the Chair of Governors), and arrange a time and date for the meeting. All relevant documentation from the Headteacher and the parent/carer will be distributed to all parties, (including the Panel members) in advance of the meeting. The Governors' Panel will deal only with the original complaint. It will not deal with fresh complaints or material. If complainants seek to raise new issues they should be reminded these should first be addressed through the less formal procedures available at stage 1.

The Panel has discretion as to how it will carry out its duties, some of which are itemised in Annex B. As part of this, parents /carers will be asked to attend a meeting of the Panel (with accompanying relative or friend if desired).

The Chair of the Panel needs to ensure that the parent/carer is notified of the Panel's decision in writing **within 5 school days** of the meeting. The response will include action (if any) that needs to be taken and where appropriate, suggest changes to, or review of, the school's systems or procedures to ensure that similar problems do not happen again.

If the parent/carer is dissatisfied with the response they have been given, and would like to take the complaint further, they should be referred to stage four of this procedure.

Equally, if the Headteacher perceives due process has not been followed, s/he may wish to refer the matter to Stage 4 for adjudication by the EFA.

#### **Stage 4 (Formal) –Complaint heard by EFA**

If the matter has not been resolved at Stage 3, the complainant can complain to the EFA and the complaint will be considered in accordance with their complaints procedure. The involvement of the EFA will only commence once the complainant has exhausted all of the school-based stages.

Initial complaints about institutions funded by the EFA can be made on the 'Contact Us' form on their website:

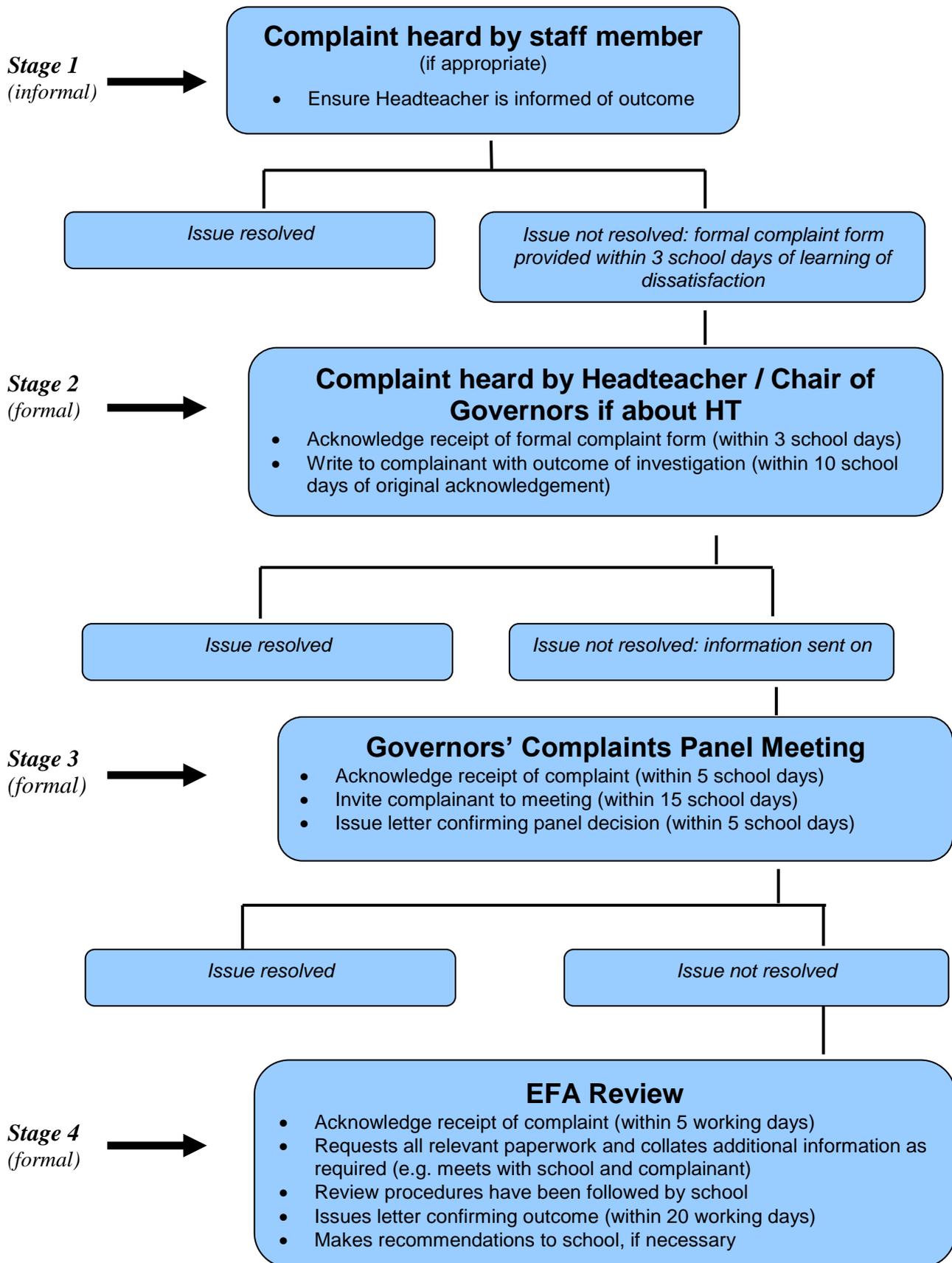
<https://www.education.gov.uk/help/contactus/efa>

They can also be made in writing to:

EFA Institution Complaints  
Young People's Programme Management  
Education Funding Agency  
Earlsdon Park  
55 Butts Road  
Coventry  
CV1 3BH

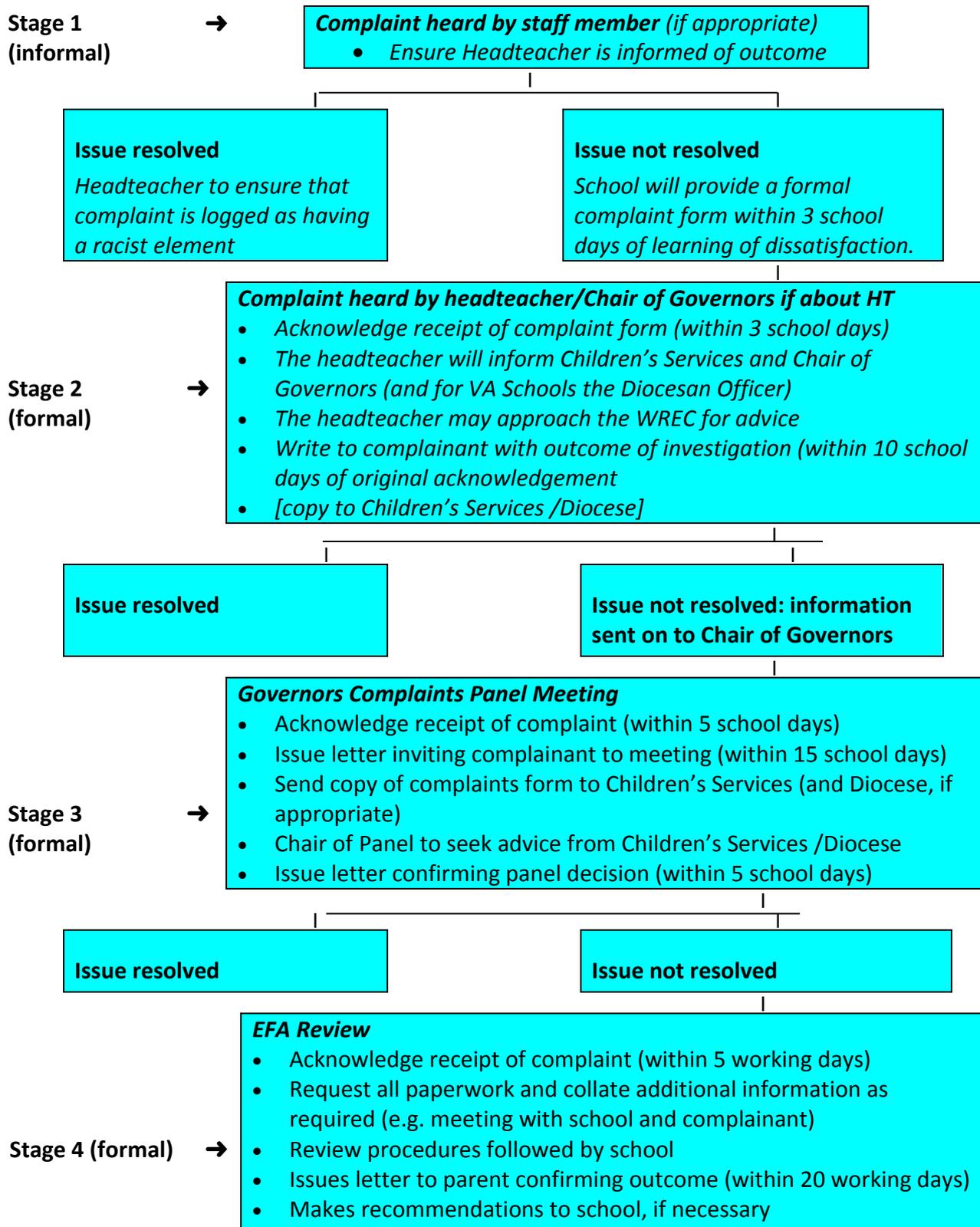
Annex A1

School Complaints Procedure/Policy Flowchart



School Complaints Procedure/Policy Flowchart – Race

Summary of Dealing with Complaints



### **Model Procedure for the Conduct of a Governors' Panel Hearing to Consider a Complaint**

It is important that the members of the Governor Panel are impartial and independent, and seen to be so. The Panel members should have no prior involvement with the case, and be sensitive to the constitution of the Panel with regard to issues of equality.

It may be the case that parents/carers feel anxious that they will not be provided with opportunities for them to be heard or that the procedure is not seen to be fair (i.e. parents may perceive the Governors' view to be weighted in the school's favour). Panel members need to be aware these perceptions may exist and endeavour to demonstrate openness and objectivity in their actions.

#### **The Hearing**

Reports and statements submitted to the Panel should be made available to all parties in advance of the hearing. The panel will not hear new complaints or issues raised at this stage, If complainants seek to put these forward the Chair will direct the complainants to attempt to resolve those through the earlier informal stages (stage 1) separate to this hearing of the original complaint. Serial and potentially vexatious complaints maybe set aside as noted at page 2 point E above.

The Chair of the Panel must determine in advance the most appropriate method of conducting the hearing into the complaint so that the Panel may achieve 'best evidence'. The decision will be influenced by the contents of the Complaints Form and other information to hand. Some possibilities are listed below, but they are not exhaustive:

#### **Option One**

To consider the written statements, reports and evidence provided in advance, and to question the originators about their substance.

This approach is likely to be least effective, as it might result in a time-consuming search for additional information and cross-referencing.

#### **Option Two**

Interviewing separately the complainant and the school representative, and other parties deemed relevant by the Chair, in order to hear statements and collect additional directly related evidence.

#### **Option Three**

With the agreement of all parties, to hold a hearing with both sides present and available to respond to questions put by the Panel, and through the Chair. Such a meeting should be non-adversarial.

#### **Option Four**

With the agreement of all parties, to hold a meeting with both sides present, to follow an Agenda on the lines of the following Model: Witnesses are only required to attend for the part of the hearing in which they give their evidence

### **Model Agenda**

1. Complainant explains reasons for making the complaint, and calls witnesses if desired.
2. Headteacher and Panel members may ask questions
3. Headteacher invited to explain the school's actions and call witnesses if desired
4. Complainant and Panel members may ask questions
5. Complainant is invited to sum up the complaint
6. Headteacher is invited to sum up the school's actions and response to the complaint
7. The parties leave together, and the Panel considers its decision

It is essential to recognise at all times, that the procedure for any of the above options deals only with establishing the validity of a parental complaint and does not constitute a hearing connected with any disciplinary process.

The complainant is welcome to bring an accompanying relative or friend if desired, and witnesses if appropriate.

The school representative will be the person who dealt with Stage Two

[The Headteacher usually, but the Chair of Governors if the complaint related to the Headteacher]  
S/he may bring a friend if desired.

If other members of staff or other witnesses are needed because of their perceived involvement in the substance of the complaint, each, too, may be accompanied by a friend.

The Clerk to the Governors' Panel will be responsible for inviting participants into the room at the relevant times, and make introductions as necessary.

The Clerk to the Governors' Panel should keep an accurate record of the discussion at the meeting. The Governors may need to refer to this to assist them in their consideration of the case. It may be helpful to the parent/carer for them to be informed if these notes will be made available to them. If, as a result of the complaint being upheld there is any disciplinary action towards a member of staff, the parent/carer is not permitted any knowledge of this. Therefore, if any notes are made available to complainants, any such references should be removed before being sent.

The Chair should explain the Panel's Remit and that the purpose of the hearing is to review the complaint and try to resolve the issues to enable reconciliation between the parent/carer and the school. It may only be possible to establish the facts and recommend future actions.

The Chair should reassure all parties that they will have every opportunity to state their case.

The Chair should explain the procedure decided upon for the hearing. It may be helpful to have printed copies of this available to all parties.

## The Remit of the Complaints Appeal Panel

### The Panel can:

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

### The Panel should consider:

- The evidence (written and oral) from the school representatives and the parent/carer.
- The relevant school policies and procedures (e.g. anti-bullying, race equality, dress code, and discipline).
- The extent to which the school's action is consistent with the appropriate school policy (i.e. have the school managed the issue in the manner defined in their documentation?).
- The response of the Panel to the parent's/carer's complaint, having considered the information made available to them, providing reasons for their decision.
- Areas of agreement identified between the parties.
- Misunderstandings identified, which can be remedied.

### Possible resolutions: (re-printed from adopted Procedure)

Many concerns may be resolved by explanations, others by a simple apology. Other complaints may result from a school procedure which could have been handled differently. Such an acknowledgement would be an appropriate resolution, as would assurances that events complained about, (if justified) will not recur. Others may be resolved by an undertaking to review school policies in the light of a complaint.

Any recommendations to review/ revise school policies and procedures as necessary. This should identify a reasonable timescale and a nominated person who will be responsible for this to be achieved, and progress should be monitored by the Governing Body.

The appropriate action to be taken by the school, if necessary.

Recommendations on changes to school policies and procedures in the light of this experience, if necessary.

**Reminder:** If as a result of the complaint being upheld, there is disciplinary action contemplated towards a member of staff, the complainant is not permitted any knowledge of this.

The Panel's decision, with reasons, should be confirmed in writing to the parent/carer, Headteacher and Chair of Governors within 5 school days.

Annex C

**Complaint Form** to be supplied with a copy of the adopted procedure.

Please complete and return to the Headteacher who will acknowledge receipt.

The Procedure, at Stage 2, explains what action will be taken after receipt.

**PLEASE CHECK THAT WHAT YOU ARE COMPLAINING ABOUT IS COVERED BY THIS PROCESS.** It does NOT cover complaints about ANY of the following issues:

- the National Curriculum
- collective worship
- religious education
- pupil admissions
- pupil exclusion
- special educational needs
- child protection
- employee grievances and disciplinary proceedings

Your name:

Pupil's name:

Your relationship to the pupil:

Address:

Postcode:

Day time telephone number:

Evening telephone number:

Please give details of your complaint. What is your complaint?

The form continues overleaf.....

What action, if any, have you already taken to try and resolve your complaint.  
(Whom did you speak to, when, and what was the response)?

What actions do you feel might resolve the problem?

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

Signature:

Date:

Official use

Date acknowledgement sent:

By whom?

Complaint referred to:

Date: