



Complaints Policy

Agreed May 2023

Reviewed May 2024

To be reviewed May 2025

Complaints Policy

“Talk to us...”

Aims

- To resolve concerns through informal discussions at the earliest stage
- To promote confidentiality, sensitivity and discretion
- To be accessible to people with disabilities, special needs or language barriers
- To be speedy with well defined time scales and named contacts
- To focus on resolution and service review rather than blame
- To include fair and transparent investigative processes for staff as well as complainants
- Be forthright in dealing with vexatious, abusive, malicious and anonymous complainants

We recognise that, from time to time, things may occur which cause parents or other stakeholders concern, and that it is important that parents or children know what steps to take to make sure that any problems are resolved. If you have a concern or complaint, we would like you to tell us about it. At Castle Hill Infant School we welcome suggestions and ideas for improving. Be assured that no matter what you want to tell us, our support and respect for you and your child in the school will not be affected in any way. Please tell us of your concerns as soon as possible. It is difficult for us to investigate properly an incident or problem that has happened some time ago.

Who should I talk to?

The majority of concerns and complaints can be resolved informally. There are many occasions where concerns are resolved straight away through the class teacher, the office staff, and the staff member at the door or the Headteacher. The problem is usually resolved by discussion and communication. All staff work hard to ensure that all the children are happy at school and are making good progress. Staff need to know if there is a problem so that they can take action before the problem affects the child's progress. Parents can always see the class teacher after school on any day, the sooner the better to resolve the problem. Most concerns can be dealt with most quickly and effectively through informal discussion with members of staff at school. You are always welcome to come into school to discuss any concerns or problems that have arisen and are encouraged to talk to your child's teacher in the first instance, as the teacher, having knowledge of both your child and events in school, is often the person best placed to help. We will also tell you if there has been a problem at school so that you know what has been going on.

Will what I say be kept confidential?

You can expect that matters you raise will be treated in confidence, but parents also need to understand that to resolve problems and find the best way forward, the teacher may have to make further enquiries. When this is the case, you can expect that this will be done with care, and that teachers will be sensitive to how such circumstances may affect your child. This is true for any investigation undertaken by the school, at any time.

What if it is difficult to talk to my child's teacher about my concern?

Sometimes you may feel that approaching your child's teacher could be awkward, especially if the matter you wish to discuss may affect a member of staff. If this is the

case, or if talking to the teacher on a previous occasion does not seem to have resolved a particular problem, you should seek help from the Headteacher or, in her absence, the Deputy Headteacher. The Headteacher has responsibility for the day-to-day running of the school and will recognise that situations like this can be difficult and sensitive. Write down the problems you want to discuss. A friend, colleague or relation can accompany you to the meeting if you wish. We will make sure that we understand what you feel went wrong and will explain our own actions to you. We will ask you what you feel we could do to help put things right and explain what we intend to do. This will help us all to understand the situation and move towards resolving the problem. It may help to prevent a similar problem happening again. The Headteacher will take notes so that if necessary, an investigation can take place after the meeting. Obviously, some time needs to be allowed for this to take place, but in most cases the Headteacher will contact you again within a relatively short space of time (ideally within 2-3 working days). The teacher/Headteacher will let you know the outcome as soon as possible. If requested, you will receive a written response to your complaint within 5 working days. If more time is required, then you will be notified and a formal response will be given to you within 20 working days.

Can I talk to somebody who is independent of the school staff?

It is always possible to approach a school governor with a concern. However, governors will always encourage you to approach the Headteacher first, if you have not already done so. This is because the Headteacher is responsible for the day-to-day running of the school and is, therefore, best placed to follow up and deal with concerns. If your concern is about the Headteacher, you should contact the Chair of Governors, whose contact details are on the school website or are available via the school office.

What happens if I need to make a formal complaint?

If by this stage you still feel that the problem has not yet been resolved, then you can make a formal complaint **in writing** to the Headteacher. If the complaint itself relates to the Headteacher, then the complaint needs to be made **in writing** to the Chair of the Governing Body. If you have any difficulty writing a complaint, please contact the school office and we can help you with that.

You can expect to receive acknowledgement of your complaint from the school within 5 working days of them receiving your letter. You will also be offered an opportunity to discuss the process, and to provide the school with any further information you think should be considered. If your concern falls outside the areas covered by the Complaints Policy, the school will advise you on who to contact next. For example, complaints about placements for children with special educational needs, school admissions, provision of R.E or Collective Worship and delivery of the National Curriculum are not covered by the School Complaints Policy and would need to be referred to the relevant body.

What happens next?

When you receive the formal acknowledgement of your complaint from the Headteacher, you will also be given the school's complaint procedure (if you haven't already had it) and an estimated date by which you can expect a full response. This should normally be within 10 working days of the original acknowledgement of your complaint. If a delay is anticipated, the school will keep you informed in writing of progress, and when you are likely to receive details of the outcome of the investigation.

The Headteacher will also provide you with an opportunity to discuss the process, and to add any additional information you feel is important. If you wish you may be accompanied to any meeting by a friend, relative, representative, or advocate who can speak on your

behalf, and you will be asked if you have any special requirements the school needs to be aware of e.g. wheelchair access, signing etc.

The Headteacher will also take the appropriate steps to investigate the matter and will keep written records of meetings, telephone conversations and other documentation relevant to the investigation. If necessary the Headteacher will interview the witnesses and take statements from those involved. If the complaint centres around a pupil, the pupil should also be interviewed. The pupil and his/her parents will then be interviewed together.

In certain circumstances where the interview would seriously delay the investigation of a serious/urgent complaint or where particular circumstances mean that the pupil has specifically said they would prefer that parents/guardians were not involved, then another member of staff with whom the pupil feels comfortable should be asked to attend the interview.

As soon as the relevant facts have been established a summary of the main points will be drawn up by the Headteacher who will meet with the complainant to discuss/resolve the issues directly. You will receive a written response from the Headteacher, which includes an explanation of the decision that has been reached, the reasons for the decision, and the actions that need to be taken to resolve your complaint.

If complaints were to be made about the actions of a Headteacher, it would be normal for the Chair of the Governing Body to carry out the investigation at this stage.

I still feel that matters have not been resolved. What should I do?

It is very rare that a complaint will reach this stage, but if it does, the next step in the process will involve an independent and impartial review by a Panel from the Governing Body. You should write to the Chair of the Governing Body, requesting that your complaint proceeds to this stage. The clerk will acknowledge receipt of your complaint within 3 working days, and will explain that the complaint will be discussed between the Chair and Headteacher. This offers an opportunity for achieving conciliation between all parties. Informal discussions between Chair and Headteacher are key to resolving a complaint and agreeing a way forward. For matters that are the Headteacher's responsibility, the Chair is only empowered to look at whether the Headteacher's decision or action was reasonable in the light of the information available at the time. In the rare circumstances that a parent is unhappy with the outcome, the Chair of Governors may offer a right of appeal to the Governing Body's Complaints Panel.

Once a written request to the Chair requesting to proceed to a Complaints Panel is received, the Panel will meet to review your complaint within 20 working days. The Panel will consist of three governors **who have had no prior involvement in the matter in question**. All relevant documents relating to the complaint will be provided to the Panel beforehand.

You will receive notification of the date on which the Panel will meet, 5 working days in advance of the meeting. You will also be informed that you have the right to go to the meeting, and to be accompanied by a friend, representative or interpreter. The Headteacher will also be invited to attend the meeting.

Whilst discussions at the meeting will be documented (usually by the Clerk), the meeting will be as informal as possible, with the main aim being to resolve the problem raised, and to achieve reconciliation between you and the school. It provides an opportunity for you to explain your complaint and concerns, for the Headteacher to explain the school's response, and for all people present to seek clarification through questions and discussion. Once the discussion has ended, everyone apart from the Panel will leave the meeting, and the Panel will review matters and reach its decision.

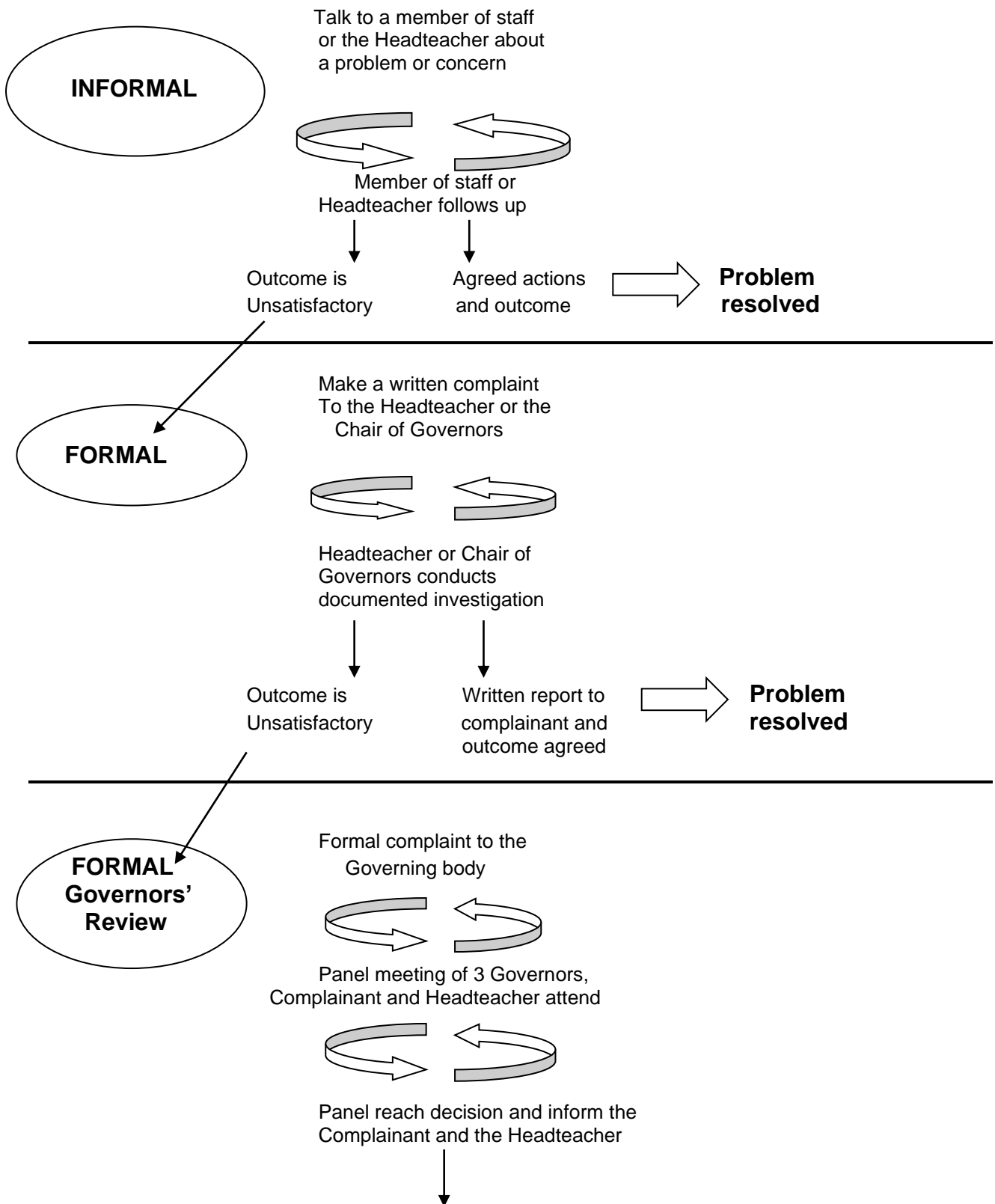
A written decision on the complaint will be provided to you and to the school by the Panel within 15 working days. You will also be advised of what options are open to you to appeal against the decision if you wish to do so. Once the governing body panel has made its decision this is the end of the school process. Complainants who wish to complain about the way the school has handled their complaint can write to the Secretary of State. It is very rare that a complaint will need to progress to these stages.

The process for a formal complaint to the Governing Body Complaints Panel

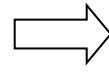
1. Complainant should describe in writing the issues in detail, say why they are dissatisfied with the outcomes of the previous stages and request a formal complaints hearing.
2. The clerk to the Governing Body will write to the complainant to acknowledge receipt of the written request. It will state that the complaint is to be heard by 3 members of the Governing Body within 20 working days of receiving the complaint. The complainant has the right to submit any further documentation relevant to the complaint, which must be received before the end of the 20 day period.
3. The panel may RECONSIDER or REVIEW the issue:
 - a. Reconsideration (considering afresh) - The panel can look at the issue afresh with any new information that the HT may not have been aware of at the time of the original response or action. In the light of additional information the panel may decide to write and ask the HT to give the matter further consideration.
 - b. Review - If the issue falls in the HT's decision making remit by the terms of employment then the panel will only have the power to review the decision not to consider the matter afresh. It may look at a decision to see if it is unreasonable. An unreasonable decision may be one that is irrational. The panel will need to consider the facts as they were known to the HT at the time and then consider whether the HT
 - Failed to take account of a relevant consideration and /or
 - Took into account an irrelevant consideration, and /or
 - Made a "perverse" decision in the light of the evidence available at the time.If new evidence comes to light the panel should refer the issue back to the HT who may consider amending the decision in the light of the new information.
4. The clerk will arrange and facilitate the meeting.
5. The panel should consist of 3 governors with no prior involvement in the matter and the chair designated before the meeting. The meeting is held in an informal atmosphere but should follow a formal agenda. The meeting will allow for: -
 - ◆ The complainant to explain their complaint and the Headteacher to explain the school's response

- ◆ The Headteacher to question the complainant about the complaint and the complainant to question the Headteacher and/or other members of staff about the school's response
 - ◆ Panel members to have the opportunity to question both the complainant and the Headteacher
 - ◆ Any party to have the right to call witnesses (subject to the approval of the Chair)
 - ◆ All parties having the right to question all the witnesses' final statements by both the complainant and the Headteacher
6. The Chair of the Panel will explain to the complainant and the Headteacher that the panel will now consider its decision and a written decision will be sent to both parties within 15 working days. The complainant, Headteacher, other members of staff and witnesses will then leave.
 7. The panel will then consider the complaint and all the evidence presented and a) reach a unanimous or at least a majority, decision on the complaint and b) decide upon the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint and c) where appropriate, suggest recommended changes to the school's system or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not happen again.
 8. The clerk will inform the complainant of the panel's decision as soon as possible after the meeting. The letter will contain:
 - Summary of the issue
 - An outline of the main points of discussion
 - The reasons for the decision
 - Proposed actions or outcomes
 9. The panel can suggest that the parents meet the HT again to agree a way forward if needed.

The full Complaints policy is in school and a copy can be seen at any time. It is also available on the school's website www.castlehillinfantschool.org



Satisfactory outcome
Reached



**Problem
resolved**