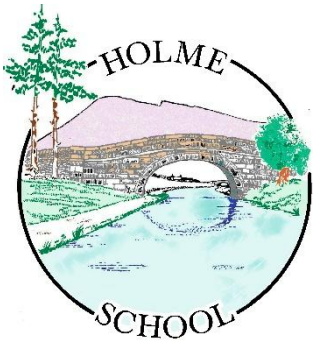
Westmorland & Furness Council

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School Complaints Policy

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1. Introduction

We very much hope that you and your child will be happy at our school, and that any concerns that may arise are dealt with in a timely manner through communication with our staff. However, we recognise that there may be occasions when the formality of a complaints process is required. We believe that it is in everyone's best interests to resolve matters at the earliest possible stage and preferably informally.

This policy provides a fair, transparent and accessible process for resolving concerns and complaints. We value complaints as an opportunity to improve practice and services. Schools Decisions must be lawful, rational, proportionate and evidence-based.

Our school aims to meet its statutory obligations when responding to complaints from parents/carers of pupils at the school, and others.

When responding to complaints, we aim to:

- Be impartial and non-adversarial
- Facilitate a full and fair investigation, where necessary
- Address all the points at issue and provide an effective and prompt response
- Respect confidentiality, where necessary
- Treat complainants with respect and courtesy
- Make sure that decisions we make are lawful, rational, reasonable, fair and proportionate, in line with the principles of administrative law
- Keep complainants informed of the progress of the complaints process
- Consider how the complaint can feed into school improvement evaluation processes

We try to resolve concerns by informal means wherever possible. Where this is not possible, the formal complaints procedures will be followed.

The school will aim to give the complainant the opportunity to complete the complaints procedure in full.

To support this, we will make sure we publicise the existence of this policy and make it available on the school website.

Throughout the process, we will be sensitive to the needs of all parties involved, and make any reasonable adjustments needed to accommodate individuals.

2. Legal Framework

This document meets the requirements of section 29 of the Education Act 2002, which states that schools must have and make available a procedure to deal with all complaints relating to the school and to any community facilities or services that the school provides. Other relevant legislation includes Equality Act 2010, Data Protection Act 2018, UK GDPR. It is also based on guidance for schools on complaints procedures from the DfE, including the model procedures for complaints and for managing serial and unreasonable complaints.

All early years providers add:

In addition, it addresses duties set out in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) statutory framework with regards to dealing with complaints about the school's fulfilment of Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) requirements.

3. Definitions

Department for Education (DfE) guidance explains the difference between a concern and a complaint:

- A **concern** may be defined as "an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought"
- A **complaint** may be defined as "an expression or statement of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action"

In most cases, a concern can be resolved through informal means. A complaint will follow formal procedures.

This complaints policy 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 provision of facilities or services that are provided.

4. Who May Complain

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 about any provision of facilities or services that we provide. If you wish to raise a concern or a complaint on someone else's behalf, the school will only deal with this if the person on whose behalf you are complaining is unable to do so for themselves (for example, they are too young or they have a disability that prevents them from complaining themselves) and you have the appropriate consent.

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

Unless complaints are dealt with under separate statutory procedures (such as appeals relating to exclusions or admissions), we will use this complaints procedure.

5. Scope

This procedure covers all complaints about any provision of community facilities or services by [school name], other than complaints that are dealt with under other statutory procedures, including those listed below.

Exceptions	Who to contact
• Admissions to schools • Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs	Concerns about admissions, statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs, or school re-organisation proposals should be raised with Westmorland and Furness Welcome to Westmorland and Furness | Westmorland and Furness Council

• School re-organisation proposals	
• 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). How to report a concern | Westmorland and Furness Safeguarding Children Partnership
• Exclusion of children from school*	Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at: www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions. **complaints about the application of the behaviour policy can be made through the school's complaints procedure. [link to school behaviour policy].*
• Whistleblowing	We have an internal whistleblowing procedure for all our employees, including temporary staff and contractors. 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. 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 Department for Education (see link above), depending on the substance of your complaint.
• Staff grievances	Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the school's internal grievance procedures.
• Staff conduct	Complaints about staff 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.
• Complaints about services provided by other providers who may use school premises or facilities	Providers should have their own complaints procedure to deal with complaints about service. Please contact them direct.

• National Curriculum - content	Please contact the Department for Education at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus
• Data protection complaints	Complaints relating to data protection will be dealt with under the data protection process with a right to recourse to the ICO.

If other bodies are investigating aspects of the complaint, for example the police, local authority (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 [school name] in relation to their complaint, we will consider whether to suspend the complaints procedure in relation to their complaint until those legal proceedings have concluded.

During any stage of this process a complaint can be withdrawn and the process will stop. If a complainant wants to withdraw their complaint, we will ask them to confirm this in writing.

6. General Principles

At all stages, those handling concerns and complaints will:

- Act sensitively, independently, and fairly.
- Deal with concerns and complaints on their merits and have an open mind.
- Take measures to address any actual or perceived conflict of interest.
- Consider all information and evidence carefully.
- Keep the concern or complaint confidential, as far as possible, with information only disclosed if necessary to properly investigate the matter.

If you or a particular staff member have difficulty discussing a concern or complaint, views of the parties will be respected, and we will refer you to another staff member who may be more senior but does not have to be. The ability to consider the issue objectively and impartially is more important. Reasonable adjustments, interpreters, alternative formats and advocacy support will be offered.

7. Confidentiality

All complaints will be handled in confidence by the school and data protection principles will be applied in line with the Data Protection Policy.

It is expected that complainants will also keep their complaint private and confidential, in particular, complainants are not expected to discuss complaints publicly via any form of social media or with third parties.

Due to privacy rights under data protection legislation, information disclosed relating to an outcome if it relates to a third-party individual i.e. disciplinary action of a member of staff or another pupil, may be limited.

Our school will record the progress of all complaints, including information about actions taken at all stages, the stage at which the complaint was resolved, and the final outcome. The records will also include copies of letters and emails, and notes relating to meetings and phone calls. Records of complaints will be kept securely, only for as long as necessary and in line with data protection law and our privacy notices.

This material will be treated as confidential and stored securely and will be viewed only by those involved in investigating the complaint or the panel hearing.

This is except where the secretary of state (or someone acting on their behalf) or the complainant requests access to records of a complaint through a freedom of information (FOI) request or through a subject access request under the terms of UK GDPR the Data Protection Act 2018, or where the material must be made available to Ofsted with regard to complaints from parents of pupils at the school

8. Timescales

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 if exceptional circumstances apply.

For complaints made during school closure periods we will consider complaints made outside of term time as though they have been received on the first school day after the holiday period.

If at any point we cannot meet the timescales we have set out in this policy, we will:

- Set new time limits
- Send the complainant details of the new deadline and explain the delay

9. Informal Resolution

Our school will take informal concerns seriously and make every effort to resolve the matter quickly. It may be the case that the provision, or clarification of information will resolve the issue.

The complainant should raise the concern as soon as possible.

The concern should be addressed either in person or by letter, telephone or email. Concerns can also be raised by a third party acting on behalf of the complainant, if they have the complainant's consent to do so.

If the complainant is unclear who to contact or how to contact them, they should contact the school office.

If your concern/complaint involves:	You should raise it with:
A staff member	The staff member, or, if that is not appropriate, with the Headteacher.
Policy/practice	The Headteacher.
The Headteacher	The Headteacher directly, or, if that is not appropriate, the Chair of the governing body

The governing body	The Clerk to the governing body, who will then liaise with either the school office or the Chair of the governing to support a resolution.

The school will acknowledge informal concerns within 5 school days, which will confirm how the school intends to proceed, including an indication of the anticipated timescale.

The informal stage will involve a meeting between the complainant and the headteacher and/or the subject of the concern if appropriate. Sometimes further enquiries or investigation is required before matters can be resolved at the informal stage. This will normally be undertaken by the person to whom you have raised your concern, but that person may delegate investigatory steps, if appropriate.

At the conclusion of any investigations, the appropriate person to whom the complaint has been addressed will provide an informal written response, usually by email. This will normally be within 10 school days of the date of receipt of the complaint, unless otherwise notified to you.

If matters cannot, or have not, been resolved informally to your satisfaction, you should follow Stage 2 of the Complaints Procedure.

10. Stage 1: Formal Investigation

Formal complaints must be made in writing, stating you wish to raise a formal complaint. For ease of use, a template Complaint Form is provided at Appendix B. If you require help in completing the form, please contact the school or the Trust. You can also ask a third-party organisation, for example, Citizens Advice, to help you.

The headteacher will record the date the complaint is received and will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 5 school days.

Within this response, the headteacher will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, ask what remains unresolved and what outcome the complainant would like to see. The headteacher can consider whether a face-to-face meeting is the most appropriate way of doing this.

The headteacher may delegate the investigation to another member of the school's senior leadership team, or an independent investigator.

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 their investigation, the headteacher will provide a formal written response within 15 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.

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 headteacher will advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain 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 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 or ([insert Diocese details if appropriate]), usually a governor from another governing body. At the conclusion of their investigation, the independent investigator will provide a formal written response.

11. Stage 2: Complaints Panel

If you have grounds to appeal the outcome at Stage 1, and wish to take the matter further, you can escalate the complaint to Stage 2. A request to escalate to Stage 2 must be made to the Clerk of the governing body, within 10 school days of receipt of the Stage 1 response. Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.

The request must set out clearly the grounds for appeal providing details of how they feel the previous stage of the procedures has not addressed their complaint sufficiently and what they feel would resolve the complaint. The appeal must be based on challenges to the application of facts used to reach the decision or to matters of procedure. If this is not provided the school will not proceed to Stage 2.

The panel will not review any new complaints at this stage or consider evidence unrelated to the initial complaint. New complaints must be dealt with from Stage 1 of the procedure. New evidence which was not provided before the completion of the Stage 2 investigation will not normally be considered, however the Chair shall have discretion to permit new evidence if it is relevant to the matters to be considered as part of the hearing and where they are satisfied it is relevant and fair to do so..

The Clerk to the governing will record the date the Stage 2 request is received and acknowledge receipt of it in writing (either by letter or email) within 5 school days.

Convening the panel

The complaints panel will consist of 3 members of at least three individuals with no prior involvement in the matter, one of whom is independent of the management and running of the school.. The governors will select a panel chair from among themselves.

If not, enough impartial governors are available, we will seek panel members from other schools, the local authority or the diocese [delete if not applicable]. We will make sure the governors we source are suitably skilled and can demonstrate that they are independent and impartial.

The complainant will be given reasonable notice of the date of the panel hearing. The clerk/governance professional will aim to find a date within 30 school days of the request, where possible.

If the complainant rejects the offer of 3 proposed dates without good reason, the clerk/governance professional will set a date. The hearing will go ahead using written submissions from both parties.

At least 10 school days before the meeting, the clerk/governance professional will:

Confirm and notify the complainant of the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that, if the complainant is invited, the dates are convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible

Request copies of any further written material to be submitted to the committee at least 5 school days before the meeting

Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least 3 school days before the date of the hearing.

The committee will not accept, as evidence, recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.

The panel will ensure that the hearing is properly minuted.

At the hearing

The hearing will be held in private. Electronic recordings of meetings or conversations are not normally permitted unless required as part of reasonable adjustments. Prior knowledge and consent of all parties attending will be sought before meetings or conversations take place. Consent will be recorded in minutes taken.

At the panel hearing, the complainant and representatives from the school, as appropriate, will be present. Each will have an opportunity to set out written or oral submissions prior to the meeting.

The complainant will be allowed to attend the panel hearing and be accompanied by a suitable companion if they wish. We don't encourage either party to bring legal representation, but we will consider it on a case-by-case basis. For instance, if a school employee is called as a witness, they may wish to be supported by their union and/or legal representation.

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

At the hearing, each individual will have the opportunity to give statements and present their evidence, and witnesses will be called as appropriate to present their evidence.

The panel, the complainant and the school representative will be given the chance to ask and reply to questions. Once the complainant and school representatives have completed presenting their cases, they will be asked to leave, and evidence will then be considered.

The panel will then put together its findings and recommendations from the case. The panel will also provide copies of the minutes of the hearing and the findings and recommendations to the complainant and, where relevant, the subject of the complaint, and make a copy of the findings and recommendations available for inspection by the headteacher.

The outcome

The panel 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 panel will:

Decide the appropriate action to resolve the complaint

Where appropriate, recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future

The panel will inform those involved of the decision in writing within 10 school days. Where appropriate, this correspondence will include details of the actions that the school will take to resolve the complaint.

If the complainant believes the school did not handle their complaint in accordance with the published complaints policy or they acted unlawfully or unreasonably in the exercise of their duties under education law, they can contact the DfE after they have completed stage 2.

The DfE will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by [school name]. The DfE will consider whether [school name] has adhered to education legislation and any statutory policies connected with the complaint.

12. Serial, Persistent and Unreasonable Complaints

Most complaints raised will be valid, and therefore we will treat them seriously.

However, we reserve the right to reject an unreasonable complaint. Unreasonable complaints may be characterised (but are not limited to) the following:

- Refusal to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcomes sought by raising the complaint, despite offers of assistance
- Refusal to co-operate with the complaints investigation process
- Refusal to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of the complaints procedures
- Insistence on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the complaints procedures, or with good practice
- Introduction trivial or irrelevant information that they expect to be considered and commented on
- Raising large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions, and insists they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales
- Making unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues, and seeks to have them replaced
- Changing 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)
- Refusal to accept the findings of the investigation into that complaint where the school's complaints procedures have been fully and properly implemented and completed, including referral to the DfE
- Seeking an unrealistic outcome

- Making excessive demands on school time by frequent, lengthy and complicated contact with staff regarding the complaint in person (either in writing, by email, phone or text) while the complaint is being dealt with
- Using threats to intimidate
- Using abusive, offensive or discriminatory language or violence
- Knowingly providing falsified information
- Publishing unacceptable information on social media or other public forums

Please note: the above list is not intended to be exhaustive and is for guidance purposes only. It is at the discretion of the school what is deemed to be unreasonable.

Complainants should try to limit their communication with the school while the complaint is being progressed. It is not helpful if repeated correspondence is sent (either in writing, by email, phone or text), as it could delay the outcome being reached.

Steps we will take

We will take every reasonable step to address the complainant's comments and give them a clear statement of our position and their options. We will maintain our role as an objective arbiter throughout the process, including when we meet with individuals. We will follow our complaints policy as normal (as outlined above), wherever possible.

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, refer them to this policy and remind them to act in accordance with it. For complainants who excessively contact the school causing a significant level of disruption, we may:

- Give the complainant a single point of contact via an email address
- Limit the number of times the complainant can make contact, such as a fixed number per term
- Ask the complainant to engage a third party to act on their behalf, such as Citizens Advice
- Put any other strategy in place as necessary

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 premises and ensuring appropriate measures of support are provided to staff where they are the subject of aggression and/or violence.

If the complainant contacts the school again on the same issue, the correspondence may then be viewed as 'serial' or 'persistent'. We may stop responding to the complainant when the following conditions are met:

- We have taken every reasonable step to address the complainant's concerns
- The complainant has been given a clear statement of our position and their options
- The complainant contacts the school repeatedly, making substantially the same points each time
- The case to stop responding is stronger if:
- The complainant's communications are often or always abusive or aggressive
- The complainant makes insulting personal comments about or threats towards staff

- We have reason to believe the individual is contacting the school with the intention of causing disruption or inconvenience

Where we decide to stop responding, we will inform the individual that we intend to do so. We will also explain that we will consider any new complaints they make provided the concerns raised are materially different to those raised previously and/or are unconnected to the previous concern.

13. Complaint Campaigns

Where the school receives a large volume of complaints about the same topic or subject, especially if these come from complainants unconnected with the school, we may respond to these complaints by:

- Publishing a single response on the school website
- Sending a template response to all of the complainants

If complainants are not satisfied with our handling of the situation, they can contact the DfE as per section 9 of this policy.

14. Learning Lessons

The governing body will review any underlying issues raised by complaints with the headteacher where appropriate, and respecting confidentiality, to determine whether there are any improvements that the school can make to its procedures or practice to help prevent similar events in the future.

15. Monitoring and Review

The Chair of Governors will monitor the effectiveness of the complaints procedures in making sure that complaints are handled properly. The governing board will track the number and nature of complaints, and review underlying issues as stated in section 15.

The complaints records are logged and managed by the headteacher.

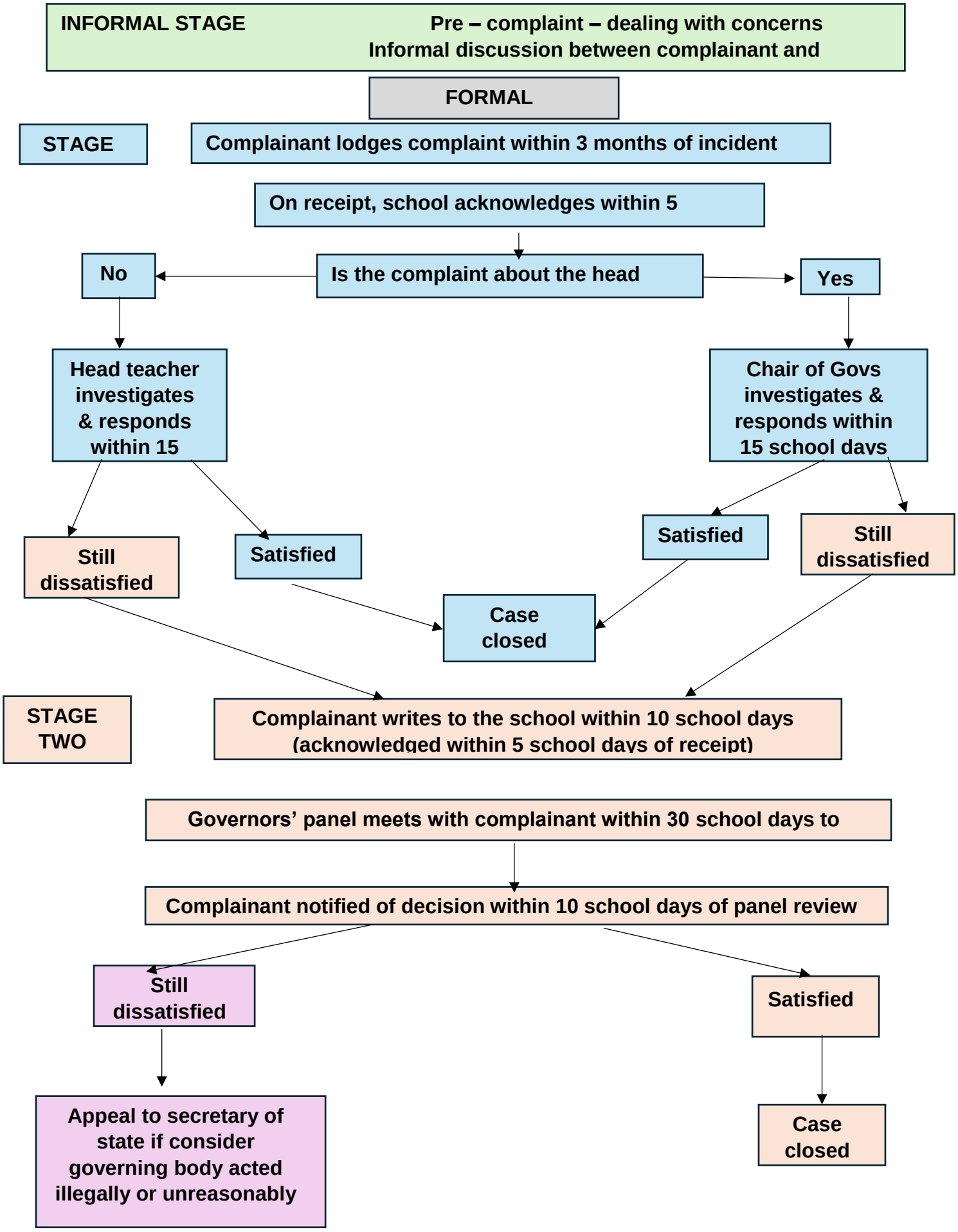
This policy will be reviewed by the governing body annually.

Appendix A – Complaint Form

Your name:
Pupil's name (if relevant):
Your relationship to the pupil (if relevant):
Address: **Postcode:** **Day time telephone number:** **Evening telephone number:** **Email address:**
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:

Appendix B – Complaints Flowchart



Appendix C – Roles and Responsibilities

The complainant

The complainant will get a more effective and timely response to their complaint if they:

- Follow these procedures
- Explain the complaint in full as early as possible
- Co-operate with the school throughout the process, and respond to deadlines and communication (for example, requests for information or meetings) promptly
- Ask for assistance as needed
- Treat all those involved with respect
- Respect confidentiality
- Do not approach individual governors about the complaint
- Do not publish details about the complaint on social media

The investigator

The investigator dealing with the complaint must understand the extent of the complaint, liaise with the complainant to determine the scope of the complaint and investigation, and understand the complainants desired outcome. The investigator may be an impartial internal person, or an external investigator.

The investigator's role is to establish the facts relevant to the complaint by:

- Providing a comprehensive, open, transparent, and fair consideration of the complaint through:
- Sensitive and thorough interviewing of the complainant to establish what has happened and who has been involved;
    - Interviewing staff and children/young people and other people relevant to the complaint;
    - Consideration of records and other relevant information; analysing information.
    - Liaising with the complainant, as appropriate, to clarify what the complainant feels would put things right.

The investigator should:

- Conduct interviews with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning;
- Keep notes of interviews or arrange for an independent note taker to record minutes of the meeting;
- Ensure that any papers produced during the investigation are kept securely pending any appeal;
- Be mindful of the timescales to respond;

- Prepare a comprehensive report for the Headteacher or complaints committee that sets out the facts, identifies solutions, and recommends courses of action to resolve problems;

The complaints co-ordinator

The complaints co-ordinator can be:

- The headteacher
- The designated complaints governor
- Any other staff member providing administrative support

The complaints co-ordinator should :

- Keep the complainant up to date at each stage in the procedure
- Make sure the process runs smoothly by liaising with staff members, the headteacher, chair of governors, clerk/governance professional and local authority (LA) as appropriate

Be aware of issues relating to:

- Sharing third-party information
- Additional support needed by complainants; for example, interpretation support or where the complainant is a child or young person
- Keeping records

Clerk to the governing board

The clerk/governance professional will:

- Be the contact point for the complainant and the complaints panel, including circulating the relevant papers and evidence before the complaints panel hearing
- Ensure that all people involved in the complaints procedures 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 Regulation (GDPR)
- Set the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that the dates are convenient to all parties (if they are invited to attend) and that the venue and proceedings are accessible
- Collate any written material relevant to the complaint (for example, stage 1 paperwork, school and complainant submissions) and send it to the parties in advance of the meeting within an agreed timescale
- Notify all parties of the committee's decision
- Arrange the complaints panel hearing
- Record and circulate the minutes and outcome of the hearing

Panel chair

The complaints panel chair should ensure that:

- Both parties are asked (via the clerk/governance professional) to provide any additional information relating to the complaint by a specified date in advance of the meeting
- 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. This is particularly important if the complainant is a child/young person
- 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 the UK GDPR
- If a new issue arises it would be useful to give everyone the opportunity to consider and comment upon it; this may require a short adjournment of the meeting
- 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 procedures
- The meeting is minuted
- They liaise with the clerk/governance professional (and complaints co-ordinator, if the school has one)

Panel member

Panel 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 panel 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;
- The complainant might not be satisfied with the outcome if the meeting does not find in their favour. It may only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations;
- Careful consideration of the atmosphere and proceedings should ensure that the complainant does not feel intimidated.

Appendix: example decision letters templates/content

Stage 1:

Heading	Content
Introduction	Set out that you are writing in line with the school's complaints procedure to inform parents of the outcome of the Stage 1 investigation.
	Set out background to complaint, including relevant dates and any steps taken at Stage 1.
	Thank parents for efforts made to date to explain their complaint.
	Confirm any meetings held with parents at Stage 1 are in line with the complaint's procedure.
Procedural matters	Confirm steps the school has taken as part of the Stage 1 investigation which may include: a) Consideration of the complaint letter or completed complaints form b) Review of all the relevant documents and reports provided by the parents c) Review of relevant internal school policies and procedures (including content on the school's website as appropriate) d) Review of any documents and reports provided by the school covering the issues raised and processes followed including any informal/Stage 1 review e) Meetings with relevant members of staff (or pupils) f) Review of any representations by the parents at the Stage 2 meeting, and g) Review of any further information / statements as appropriate. If any information is provided by the parents at a late stage or past a stated deadline, it would be helpful to include the date this information was received.
	If appropriate, acknowledge any delay in the Stage 1 process to date and give reasons for this. Refer to any updates given to the parents in this regard.
	Confirm that as part of the complaints process the decision-maker has established the facts on the basis that they consider a given fact to be more likely to be true than not.
	Remind parents that at the centre of deliberations has been the education, safety and well-being of the pupil.

Grounds of complaint and findings	Summarise each ground of the complaint in turn, explaining the decisionmaker's understanding of it. This is particularly important if the parent's complaint does not clearly define separate grounds of complaint. If the complaint is wide-ranging and grounds of complaint have been grouped together, explain that the decision-maker has used their discretion to do so.
	Set out any findings and decision in relation to each ground. This may include reference to consideration of any relevant evidence.
	Confirm whether each ground of the complaint is upheld, partially upheld or not upheld.
	Where grounds of complaint are upheld or partially upheld, set out any proposed resolution. Where complaints are not upheld, there may still be some learning points which can be broadly acknowledged possibly in the form of actions and a time frame if appropriate.
Conclusion and right to appeal	Confirm that it is hoped that this decision draws the matter to a close. If appropriate, recognise that this has been a difficult me and offer support to pupil and/or family.
	Advise that, if dissatisfied with the findings, they have the right to proceed to Stage 2 of the complaints procedure and set out how this must be done (in line with the same procedure), i.e. who they must write to, their contact details and a date by when this must be received.
	Confirm that, if requested, a Stage 2 Panel hearing will be held, and that the Panel will consist of at least three persons not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint, one of whom shall be independent of the management and running of the school.
	Provide parents with a (further) copy of the complaints procedure or refer them to the school's website where it can be found.
	Remind parents of the confidential nature of the complaint procedure. Confirm that parents should dispose of any documents provided as part of the Stage 1 process and offer to dispose of the papers securely.
	Thank the parents for bringing the matters to your attention and add any final remarks to end the letter in a cordial manner.

Stage 2:

Introduction	Set out that you are writing in line with Complaints Procedure to inform parents of the Stage 2 panel decision.
	Set out composition of Panel. This should be in line with the school's Complaint Procedure and usually consists of two governors with no prior knowledge of or involvement in the matter, as well as an independent member, who also had no prior knowledge and is separate from the day-to day-management and running of the school.
	Give a summary of the subject matter of the complaint and thank the parents for the efforts made to date to explain their complaint.
Procedural matters	Set out the chronology of the steps taken by the school to investigate the complaint, as relevant:
	• dates of informal complaint; • dates of Stage 1 formal complaint; and • date on which Stage 2 complaint was submitted.
	Give details of any further investigation carried out/requested by the Panel after the Stage 2 complaint was submitted (i.e. any further meetings with relevant members of staff).
	Set out the date of the Stage 2 Panel hearing and a list of attendees and roles (noting whether they were present for all or part of the hearing), including the parents' companion if applicable.
	Note that a bundle of papers was circulated before the hearing and provide the date(s) this happened. Set out details of any further papers considered including the date(s) any parental submissions / evidence were received.
	Provide a copy of the minutes of the Stage 2 Panel hearing and confirm who prepared them. Ideally notes should be shared with the parties prior to any decision being issued to provide an opportunity for any further comments / queries on the accuracy of the notes to be considered by the Panel.
	Remind parents that at the centre of deliberations has been the education, safety and well-being of the pupil.
Findings	Set out each of the grounds of complaint.
	Set out the Panel's findings in relation to each ground of complaint, i.e. whether each ground is upheld/partially upheld or dismissed/partially dismissed. It will usually be appropriate to give reasons.
	Set out any recommendations made by the Panel.
Conclusion	Thank the parents for bringing this matter to the Panel's attention and for attending the hearing.
	Note that the decision of the Panel is final and there is no further right of appeal. Consider including wording on Alternative Dispute Resolution.
	Remind parents of the confidential nature of the complaint proceedings. Confirm that parents should dispose of any documents provided as part of the panel hearing and offer to dispose securely of the papers.
	Wish the parents and pupil all the best for the future and express hope that the issues raised are now resolved.

Confidential: complaints panel outcome

Dear [name of complainant],

Following the complaints panel hearing held on [date], I am writing to inform you of the panel's decision.

Your complaint was [summarise complaint].

The following evidence was considered [summarise evidence].

After reviewing the evidence and questioning those concerned, the panel has:

- Upheld the complaint in whole/in part
- OR
- Not upheld the complaint and no further action will be taken

[Whatever the outcome, clearly state the reason/s for the decision reached and outline any recommendations issued to the school to achieve reconciliation and resolution.]

[If a complaint is upheld in whole or in part, one or more of the following may also be included:]

- 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

If you believe the school did not handle your complaint in accordance with the published complaints procedure or it acted unlawfully or unreasonably in the exercise of its duties under education law, you can refer your complaint to the Department for Education (DfE). The DfE will not normally re-investigate the complaint or overturn the panel's decision but will consider whether the school has adhered to education legislation and any statutory policies connected with the complaint. You can refer your complaint to the DfE online at gov.uk/complain-to-dfe or by writing to: Department for Education, Piccadilly Gate, Store Street, Manchester, M1 2WD.

Yours sincerely,

[Panel chair OR clerk on behalf of the panel]