St John's Catholic Primary School, Bridgnorth

"Let Your Light Shine." – Matthew, 5.

Complaints Policy

Reviewed: Autumn 2026

Reviewed by: Headteacher/OLHOC

Next review date: Autumn 2027

Complaints Policy

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 staff disciplinary procedures, if appropriate, but outcomes of this will be confidential and will not be shared with the complainant. The scope of this complaint 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/Head, 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. However, the CEO/Principal/Head or chair of governors, if appropriate, will determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation.

3.2. Serial or Unreasonable Complaints

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

4. How to Raise a Complaint - Stages of the Complaints Procedure

4.1. The complaints procedure consists of four stages:

4.1.1. **Informal Stage** - usually a meeting with the complainant

4.1.2. **Formal Stage 1** - complaints formally investigated by the Principal/Head (or designate)

4.1.3. **Formal Stage 2** - a Panel Hearing.

4.2. 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.

4.3. 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/Head. If the issue remains unresolved, the next step is to make a formal complaint under Formal Stage 1 of this procedure.

4.4. Complainants should not approach individual governors to raise concerns or complaints. Governors have no power to act on an individual basis and this may also prevent them from considering a complaint if it reaches Formal Stage 3 of this procedure.

4.5. A formal complaint against a member of school staff (except the Principal/Head) should be made in the first instance to the Principal/Head via the school office and should be marked as private and confidential.

4.6. A formal complaint that involves or is about the Principal/Head should be addressed to the chair of governors, via the school office, and should be marked as private and confidential.

4.7. A formal complaint about the chair of governors, any individual governor or the whole governing board should be addressed to the clerk to the governing board via the school office and should be marked as private and confidential.

4.8. 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. Artificial Intelligence (AI) Generated Complaints

5.1. The Trust expects all complaints to be submitted in the complainant's own words and to clearly and accurately describe the concerns they wish to raise.

5.2. Whilst individuals may use technology to assist with drafting correspondence, the Trust may not consider complaints that appear to be wholly or substantially generated by artificial intelligence (AI), automated systems or third-party drafting services where the complaint is excessively lengthy, generic, repetitive, lacks personal knowledge, contains inaccuracies, or does not clearly identify the specific matters being complained about.

5.3. Where the Trust reasonably believes that a complaint has been generated primarily through the use of AI and does not represent the complainant's own account of events, the complaint may not be progressed under this procedure.

5.4. Where the Trust considers that a complaint does not clearly identify the matters being complained about, the complainant will be invited to resubmit their complaint in plain English, setting out:

5.5. the specific concern or incident;

5.6. who was involved;

5.7. when the matter occurred;

5.8. the impact of the issue; and

5.9. the outcome sought.

5.10. The Trust may also require the complainant to attend a meeting with an appropriate Trust representative to discuss and clarify their concerns before any complaint is accepted for consideration.

5.11. The Trust reserves the right to decline to investigate complaints where the complainant refuses to provide a clear, concise and personally authored statement of complaint sufficient to enable a fair and proportionate investigation.

5.12. The complaints process exists to resolve genuine concerns through open dialogue and constructive engagement. The Trust will not commit disproportionate time or public resources to responding to complaints that are mass-produced, largely AI-generated, generic in nature, or

which fail to clearly articulate the complainant's own concerns. Complainants will instead be invited to set out their concerns in plain English and engage directly with the Trust in order that the matter can be considered fairly and effectively.

5.13. 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.

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:

6.1.1. an explanation

6.1.2. an admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better

6.1.3. an assurance that the school will try to ensure the event complained of will not recur

6.1.4. 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

6.1.5. an undertaking to review school policies in light of the complaint

6.1.6. 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 complaint 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. 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. It is understood, however, 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 complaint procedure.

9. Formal Stage 1 Complaint to the Principal/Head

9.1. Formal complaints must be in writing, preferably on the complaints form provided at Appendix B, to the Principal/Head, other than in the circumstances referred to in paragraphs 11 and 12.

9.2. The Principal/Head will record the date the complaint is received and will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within five school days.

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

9.4. The Principal/Head 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/Head (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/Head will provide a formal written response, within twenty school days of the date of receipt of the complaint.

9.7. If the Principal/Head 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/Head 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/Head, 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. Complaints about the Principal/Head or member(s) of the governing board must be made to the Chair of the governing board, via the school office.

9.12. 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/Diocese/MAT. At the conclusion of their investigation, the independent investigator will provide a formal written response.

10. Formal Stage 2 Review by Chair of Governors

10.1. If the complainant is unsatisfied with the outcome of the complaint under Formal Stage 1 of this Complaints Policy, the complainant may write to the Clerk to the Governors asking for the complaint to be reviewed by the Chair of Governors, within 10 working days of receiving the letter confirming the outcome following Formal Stage 1. The complainant should not repeat the matters raised in their original letter or attach documentation already provided but should clearly set out how and why the Complainant does not accept the findings made under Formal Stage 1.

10.2. The complainant's letter will be acknowledged within 5 working days of receipt. The acknowledgement letter will confirm the date that the formal complaint was received, the action to be taken and the specified time limit.

10.3. The Chair of Governors will be provided with all documentation relating to the complaint within 5 working days of receipt of the letter requesting a review under Formal Stage 2, including the record of the informal procedure (if applicable), the original letter of complaint or Complaint Form, any documentation provided by the complainant with their complaint, all investigation records under Formal Stage 1, and the letter of outcome under Formal Stage 1. The Chair of

Governors will review all of the documentation received and consider the matters raised in complaint and the investigation carried out under Formal Stage 1. The Chair of Governors will only speak to the persons involved in the matters raised to clarify matters which were not confirmed during the Formal Stage 1 investigation, if believed necessary.

10.4. The Chair of Governors will write to the complainant confirming the outcome of the review within twenty working days from the date that the request for a review was received. The letter will set out whether the Chair of Governors agrees with the findings and conclusion under Formal Stage 1, and give reasons, as well as responding to any criticisms of the Formal Stage 1 investigation.

10.5. The letter will inform the complainant that, if they are unsatisfied with the outcome of the Formal Stage 2 review, they should write to the Clerk to the Governors within 10 working days of receipt of the letter requesting a Complaint Panel Hearing under Formal Stage 3 of this Complaints Policy.

11. Formal Stage 3 Panel Hearing

11.1. If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome at Formal Stage 2 and wishes to take the matter further, they can escalate the complaint to Formal Stage 3 – a meeting with a panel of three members of the governing board convened for this purpose. This is the final stage of the complaint procedure.

11.2. A request to escalate to Formal Stage 3 must be made to the clerk to the governing board, via the school office, within twenty school days of receipt of the Formal Stage 2 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.

11.3. The clerk to the governing board will 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.

11.4. The clerk to the governing board will aim to convene a meeting of the governors' complaints panel which is within twenty school days of receipt of the Formal Stage 3 request. If this is not possible, the clerk will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed.

11.5. The complaints panel will comprise at least three impartial governors 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.** The complainant will 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 will 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 will be considered and that panel member may be replaced.

11.6. If there are fewer than three governors from this school available, the clerk to the governing board, or the minute clerk for the hearing, will seek to source another governor within the Trust or 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 3.

11.7. 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, will decide when to hold the meeting, in consultation with the governors' panel. It will then proceed in the complainant's absence on the basis of written submissions from both parties.

11.8. A suitable venue must be provided for the meeting which includes separate waiting areas for the two parties.

11.9. At least ten school days before the meeting, the clerk to the governing board, or the minute clerk for the hearing, will:

11.9.1. 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;

11.9.2. request copies from both parties of any further written material to be submitted to the panel at least five school days before the meeting;

11.9.3. 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.

11.10. 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 will not have the right to speak on the complainant's behalf.

11.11. 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 or another colleague. Any such representative will be present in a supportive capacity only and will not be allowed to speak on the member of staff's behalf.

11.12. Minutes of the meeting will be taken by the clerk to the governing board, or a minute clerk appointed specifically for the hearing by the governors' panel.

11.13. There will 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, will be shared with all parties.

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

11.15. The panel will 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 Formal Stage 1 of the procedure.

11.16. The meeting will be held in private and proceedings will be treated as confidential.

11.17. The meeting will follow the process outlined in Appendix C.

11.18. The governors' panel will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented. The panel can:

11.18.1. uphold the complaint in whole or in part

11.18.2. dismiss the complaint in whole or in part.

11.18.3. If the complaint is upheld in whole or in part, the panel will:

11.18.4. decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint

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

11.19. The chair of the panel will provide the complainant and the Principal/Head/chair of governors (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.

11.20. The letter to the complainant will include details of how to contact the ESFA if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled by the school.

12. Next Steps

12.1. 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 the Education & Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) after they have completed Formal Stage 3.

12.2. The 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.

12.3. The complainant can refer their complaint to the ESFA online at:

https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/education-and-skills-funding-agency/about/complaints-procedure,

or by writing to:

ESFA – Academies Complaint and Customer Insight Unit
Cheylesmore House
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.

Exceptions	**Who to contact**
Admissions to schools Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs School re-organisation proposals	Concerns about admissions, statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs, or school re-organisation proposals should be raised with Cheshire East Borough Council, **School Admissions and Organisation** 0300 123 5012 http://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/schools/admissions/admissions.aspx
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. **Safeguarding Children in Education (SCiES)** 01606 275039 http://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/schools/safeguarding_in_education/safeguarding_in_education.aspx
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 this procedure*.
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 ESFA (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

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.

Appendix B: Complaints Form

Please complete and return to the school office marked private and confidential for the attention of the Principal/Head or chair of governors 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 whom:
Complaint referred to:
Date:

Appendix C: Arrangements and Procedure for Governors' Panel Hearing

The governors' panel will agree a chair from amongst their number.

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.

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.

The complainant will outline their complaint and explain why they are dissatisfied with the school's response at Formal Stage 2. 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.

The Principal/Head and/or chair of governors and the governors on the panel will have the opportunity to ask questions of the complainant.

The Principal/Head and/or chair of governors will explain their involvement in the complaint and the reasons for their decisions at the informal and first formal stage. The Principal/Head and/or chair of governors 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.

The complainant and the governors on the panel will have the opportunity to ask questions of the Principal/Head and/or chair of governors.

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.

The governors may decide to adjourn the hearing pending further investigation at any stage, if this seems necessary.

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.

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 aim to reach a decision as soon as possible.

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: Policy for Managing Serial or Unreasonable Complaints

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.

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 complaint investigation process

refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of the complaint procedure

insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the complaint procedure or with good practice

introduces trivial or irrelevant information which they expect to be taken into account and commented on

raises large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions, and insists they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales

makes unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues, and seeks to have them replaced

changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds

repeatedly makes the same complaint (despite previous investigations or responses concluding that the complaint is groundless or has been addressed)

refuses to accept the findings of the investigation into that complaint where the school's complaint procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed including referral to the 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.

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

Whenever possible, the Principal/Head or chair of governors will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying an 'unreasonable' marking.

If the behaviour continues, the Principal/Head 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.

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.

Appendix E

Additional Information outside of the model policy.

Appendix E 1

School Complaints Procedure

Guidance for Governors – on Formal Stage 3

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/Head/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 emotionalwhen 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 ensurethe 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 viewsof 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 inwhich they give their evidence

After introductions, the complainant is invited to explain their complaint, and be followed by their witnesses

The Principal/Head may question both the complainant and the witnesses after each has spoken

The Principal/Head is then invited to explain the school's actions and be followed by the school's witnesses

The complainant may question both the Principal/Head 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/Head 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/ Principal/Head/ 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/Head 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/Head 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.

Appendix E4

Policy on managing aggressive behaviour of parents and visitors to our school.

Statement of principles

The governing board of each school encourages close links with parents and the community. It believes that pupils benefit when the relationship between home and school is a positive one.

The vast majority of parents, carers and others visiting our school are keen to work with us and are supportive of the school. However, on the rare occasions when a negative attitude towards the school is expressed, this can result in aggression, verbal and or physical abuse towards members of school staff or the wider school community.

The governing board expects and requires its members of staff to behave professionally in these difficult situations and attempt to defuse the situation where possible, seeking the involvement as appropriate of other colleagues. However, all members of staff have the right to work without fear of violence and abuse, and the right, in an extreme case, of appropriate self-defense.

We expect parents and other visitors to behave in a reasonable way towards members of school staff. This policy outlines the steps that will be taken where behaviour is unacceptable.

Types of behaviour that are considered serious and unacceptable and will not be tolerated:

shouting at members of the school staff, either in person or over the telephone

physically intimidating a member of staff, e.g. standing very close to them

the use of aggressive hand gestures

threatening behaviour

shaking or holding a fist towards another person

swearing

pushing

hitting, e.g. slapping, punching and kicking

spitting

breaching the school's security procedures.

This is not an exhaustive list but seeks to provide illustrations of such behaviour.

Unacceptable behaviour may result in the police being informed of the incident.

Procedure to be followed:

If a parent/carer behaves in an unacceptable way towards a member of the school community, the Principal/Head or appropriate senior staff will seek to resolve the situation through discussion and mediation. If necessary, the school's complaints procedure should be followed. Where all procedures have been exhausted, and aggression or intimidation continue, or where there is an extreme act of violence, a parent or carer may be barred by the Principal/Head from the school premises for a period of time, subject to review.

In imposing a bar, the following steps will be taken:

The parent/carer will be informed, in writing, that they are barred from the premises, subject to review, and what will happen if the bar is breached,

e.g. that police involvement or an injunction application may follow.

Where an assault has led to a bar, a statement indicating that the matter has been reported to the police will be included.

The chair of governors will be informed of the bar.

Where appropriate, arrangements for pupils being delivered to, and collected from, the school gate will be clarified.

Conclusion

The school may take action where behaviour is unacceptable or there are serious breaches of our home-school code of conduct or health and safety legislation. In implementing this policy, the school will, as appropriate, seek advice from their health and safety and legal advisors, to ensure fairness and consistency.

This Policy will be reviewed annually.