

WEST HATCH HIGH SCHOOL



THE BEST THAT I CAN BE

Complaints Policy

Policy Date October 2023

Policy to be reviewed on October 2024

Signed

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. O'Connell', is written over a horizontal line.

Headteacher

General

The School's Complaints Policy allows parents or carers complaints about the School to be dealt with efficiently and sensitively and at the appropriate level.

The Policy is not only 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 provision of facilities or services that we provide.

A concern may be defined as *'an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurance is sought.'*

A complaint may be defined as *'an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or lack of action.'*

Legislation and Guidance

This document meets the requirements set out in part 7 of the schedule to [the Education \(Independent School Standards\) Regulations 2014](#), which states that we must have and make available a written procedure to deal with complaints from parents of pupils at the school.

It is also based on guidance published by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) on [creating a complaints procedure that complies with the above regulations](#), and refers to [good practice guidance on setting up complaints procedures](#) from the Department for Education (DfE).

Aims

It is in everyone's interest that concerns and complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. Many issues can be resolved informally, without the need to use the formal stages of the complaints procedure. The School takes concerns seriously and will make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible. Doing so is good practice, fair to those concerned and helps to promote parents' and students' confidence in the school's ability to safeguard and promote welfare. The school will try to resolve every concern, difficulty or complaint in a positive way with the aim of putting right a matter which may have gone wrong and, where necessary, reviewing the school's systems and procedures in the light of the matters raised.

This Complaints Policy applies to all concerns and complaints of the parents of students at the school, other than those involving child protection issues, or relating to Admissions, Exclusions and SEN, for which there are separate statutory procedures. Where a complaint is made against a member of staff, depending upon the nature and seriousness of the complaint, the matter may be dealt with under separate HR procedures which are strictly confidential, rather than under this Complaints Policy.

This Complaints Policy distinguishes between a concern and difficulty, which can usually be resolved informally, and a formal complaint which will require further investigation.

The School will ensure that all concerns, difficulties or complaints are dealt with in accordance with the following principles:

- All parties will be provided with all information and documentation pertinent to the matters raised;

- All parties will be given the opportunity to prepare and present their case and respond to the other parties involved;
- All persons investigating and making decisions in relation to the matters raised will be impartial and investigator only;
- All decisions will be based upon logical conclusions and not on mere speculation or suspicion;
- All decisions will be supported by detailed reasons which will be disclosed to all parties involved.

Terms

For the purpose of this Complaints Policy, a “parent” includes the natural or adoptive parent of a student, irrespective of whether they are or ever have been married, whether they are separated or divorced, whether the student lives with them, whether the father has parental responsibility for the student or whether they have contact with the student.

A “parent” will also include a non-parent who has parental responsibility for a student, an adult non-parent with whom the student lives, and an adult who is involved in the day to day care of the student, (i.e. collecting or dropping off the student from school).

Any reference to a “student” will also include a prospective or former student of the school.

A person making a complaint will be referred to as a “Complainant” throughout this Complaints Policy.

Procedure

The School complaints procedure consists of four stages:

Stage 1 – concerns and difficulties, dealt with informally;

Stage 2 – complaints formally investigated by the Headteacher

Stage 3 – complaints formally reviewed by the Chair of Governing Body

Stage 4 – Complaint Panel Hearing

Time Limits

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.

The School aims to resolve concerns, difficulties and complaints in a timely manner. Time limits for each stage of the procedure are set out under each individual stage. For the purposes of this Complaints Policy, a “school day” is defined as a weekday during term time, when the school is open to students. The definition of “school day” excludes, weekends, school holidays, bank holidays and staff training days. For the avoidance of doubt, term dates are published on the school’s website, and information about term dates is made available to parents and students periodically. We will consider complaints made outside of term time to have been received on the first school day after the holiday period.

Although every effort will be made by the School to comply with the time limits specified under each stage of the procedure, it may not always be possible to do so, for example due to the complexity or number of matters raised, or due to the unavailability of the Complainant to attend a meeting, if offered. In all cases, where a time limit cannot be complied with, the school will write to the Complainant within the specified time limit, setting out the reasons

why the time limit cannot be complied with, and confirming the new time limit which will apply.

Complaints against the Headteacher

If a complaint is about the conduct of the Headteacher, the Chair of the Governing Body will investigate the complaint under Stage 2 of this Complaints Policy instead of the Headteacher.

Late Complaints

Where a complaint is submitted more than three months after the incident or event (or where the complaint relates to a series of incidents or events, more than three months from the date of the latest incident or event), the School reserve the right to refuse to investigate the complaint under this Complaints Policy. If it appears reasonable and fair to do so, having regard to the circumstances surrounding the complaint.

Where the School decides that a complaint which was submitted late will not be investigated, the School will write to the Complainant notifying them of the decision within five school days of the complaint being received.

If the Complainant is unhappy with the decision not to investigate a complaint which was submitted late, the Complainant may write to the Chair of the Governing Body asking for the decision to be reviewed. The Chair of the Governing Body will be provided with all documentation relating to this complaint, together with the letter from the school to the Complainant, and will review the decision not to investigate the complaint. The Chair of the Governing Body will NOT investigate the complaint itself during this review.

The Chair of the Governing Body will write to the Complainant with the outcome of the review within ten school days of the date that the letter from the Complainant seeking the review was received, and provide the school with a copy of the letter.

If the Chair of the Governing Body quashes the decision not to investigate the complaint, it will be referred to the school to be dealt with under this Complaints Policy in the usual way.

In exceptional circumstances, the Chair of the Governing Body can delegate the responsibility for the review to the Vice Chair of the Governing Body.

Vexatious or Repeated Complaints

There may be occasions when, despite a complaint being considered under all stages in this Complaints Policy, the Complainant persists in making the same complaint to the School. There may also be occasions when a Complainant raises unreasonable persistent complaints or raises complaints about matters which do not affect them. There may also be occasions when a complaint is made about a matter which is clearly so trivial that it would be a waste of the school's resources to deal with it under the formal stages of the procedure.

In all of these cases, the school reserves the right to regard the complaint as vexatious and/or repeated and to refuse to investigate it under the procedure in this Complaints Policy, if it appears reasonable and fair to do so, having regard to the circumstances surrounding the complaint.

Where the school decides that a complaint is vexatious and/or repeated and will not be investigated, they will write to the Complainant within five school days of the complaint being raised to notify them of the decision

If the Complainant is unhappy with the decision not to investigate a vexatious and/or repeated complaint, the Complainant may write to the Chair of the Governing Body asking for the decision to be reviewed. The Chair will be provided with all documentation relating to this complaint, together with the letter from the school to the Complainant, and will review the decision not to investigate the complaint. The Chair will NOT investigate the complaint itself during this review.

The Chair of the Governing Body will write to the Complainant with the outcome of the review within ten school days of the date that the letter from the Complainant seeking the review was received, and provide the school with a copy of the letter.

If the Chair quashes the decision not to investigate the complaint, it will be referred to the school to be dealt with under this Complaints Policy in the usual way.

If the Chair of the Governing Body upholds the decision not to investigate the complaint, the Complainant may refer the concern or complaint to School. If the School decides not to investigate, the complainant may refer the concern or complaint to the Education Funding Agency using the procedure stated towards the end of this Complaints Policy.

In exceptional circumstances, the Chair of the Governing Body can delegate the responsibility for the review to the Vice Chair of the Local Governing Body.

Resolution Principles

It is in everyone's interest that concerns, difficulties and complaints are resolved to the satisfaction of all parties at the earliest possible stage. The way in which the concern, difficulty or complaint is dealt with after the matter is first raised by the Complainant can be crucial in determining whether the complaint will escalate. To that end, members of staff will be periodically made aware of the procedure in this Complaints Policy, so that they will know what to do when a concern or difficulty is raised with them.

At each stage of the complaints procedure, the investigator will consider how the complaint may be resolved. In considering how a complaint may be resolved, the investigator will give due regard to the seriousness of the complaint. It may be appropriate in order to bring the complaint to a resolution for the investigator to offer:

- An explanation;
- An apology;
- Reassurance that steps have been taken to prevent the recurrence of events which led to the complaint;
- Reassurance that the school will undertake a review of its policies and procedures in light of the complaint.

None of the above will constitute an admission of negligence or an acceptance of liability on behalf of the School.

Outcome Principles

Examples of outcomes include:

- There was insufficient evidence to reach a conclusion, so the complaint cannot be upheld;
- The investigation did not substantiate the matters raised, so the complaint cannot be upheld;

- The complaint was substantiated in part or in full. A description should be given of the remedial action being taken by the school as a consequence of the complaint. Details of any disciplinary action or sanctions to be taken against a member of staff are strictly confidential and cannot be disclosed;
- The matter has been fully investigated, and, as a consequence, further confidential procedures are being pursued. Details of any disciplinary action or sanctions to be taken against a member of staff are strictly confidential and cannot be disclosed.

Retention of Records

A full written record will be maintained centrally at the school of all complaints resolved under Stages 2 to 4.

Records of complaints will be destroyed when the student to which they relate reaches the age of twenty four years, or, in the case of a student with a statement of special educational needs, when the student reaches the age of thirty years.

Confidentiality

All correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except where access is requested by the Secretary of State, a school inspector or under another legal authority.

Anonymous Complaints

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

Withdrawal of a Complaint

If a complainant wants to withdraw their complaint, we will ask them to confirm this in writing.

Stage 1 –Concerns and Difficulties

1. Informal Complaints

The School expects that most concerns and difficulties, where a parent or student seeks intervention, reconsideration or some other action to be taken, can be resolved informally. Examples might include dissatisfaction about some aspect of teaching or pastoral care, allocation of privileges or responsibilities, a timetable clash, an issue with the school's systems or equipment or a billing error.

2. Notification

The concern or difficulty should be raised as follows:

Education Issues – if the matter relates to the classroom, the curriculum or special educational needs, the Complainant should speak to the Head of Department, Head of House or Assistant Headteacher as appropriate.

Pastoral Care – for concerns relating to matters outside the classroom the Complainant should speak to the Head of House or Assistant Headteacher as appropriate

Disciplinary Matters – a problem over any disciplinary action taken or a sanction imposed should be raised with the member of staff who imposed it in the first place. If not resolved,

the Complainant should speak to the relevant Head of Department, Head of House or Assistant Headteacher as appropriate.

Financial and Administrative Matters – A query relating to fees, extras or other administrative matters should be raised by the Complainant to the Finance Office.

An issue with a specific member of staff – often, the best way to resolve an issue with a specific member of staff is to raise it with that member of staff directly, so that they are given the opportunity to address and resolve the concern or difficulty before it becomes a formal complaint. If the Complainant feels uncomfortable doing this, however, the issue should be raised with the appropriate Head of Department, Head of House or Assistant Headteacher.

Should a concern or difficulty be raised with a member of staff who feels that they are not the best person to be dealing with it, they will refer it to the Head of Department, Head of House, Assistant Headteacher or other designated member of staff as appropriate.

If a concern or difficulty is raised with a member of staff who feels that it raises serious issues which should be dealt with as a formal complaint immediately, the member of staff will tell the Complainant that they should put their complaint in writing to the Headteacher under Stage 2 of this Complaints Policy. If the Complainant would prefer to complete a form instead of writing a letter, the Complainant can complete the Complaint Form contained in Appendix 1 of this Complaints Policy to submit their complaint formally.

Complainants should not approach individual Governors to raise concerns or complaints. They have no power to act on an individual basis and it may also prevent them from considering complaints at Stage 3 of the procedure.

In accordance with Equality Law, we will consider making reasonable adjustments if required, to enable complainants to access and complete this complaints procedure.

3. Unresolved Concerns or Difficulties

The School will aim to resolve a concern or difficulty within fifteen school days of the date that it was raised (this will be the date that the letter is received by the School.) When a concern or difficulty has not been resolved by informal means within this time limit from the date that it was raised, the Complainant can submit the matters raised as a formal complaint under Stage 2 of this Complaints Policy.

4. Record of Concerns and Difficulties

The member of staff dealing with a concern or difficulty will make a written record of the issues raised, the action taken, and if applicable, the resolution reached, which will be retained in a central record. Further information in relation to the retention of records can be found earlier in this Complaints Policy.

Stage 2 – Formal Complaint to the Headteacher

5. Notification

A concern or difficulty raised under Stage 1 of this Complaints Policy which remains unresolved after fifteen school days, or a serious matter which requires formal investigation from the outset, should be set out in writing using the form found at appendix 1, and sent to the Headteacher at the school. The Complainant should clearly set out the matters in dispute, the relevant dates and the full names of the persons involved and what the Complainant believes the School should do to resolve the complaint. Any documentation relied upon by the Complainant should be attached to the formal complaint.

Should a formal written complaint be received by another member of the school's staff, they will immediately pass it on to the Headteacher.

The Headteacher may choose to delegate responsibility to a member of the Senior Team to investigate the matter in the first instance. If the complaint still remains unresolved after delegation, then the Headteacher will follow up any outstanding issues.

6. Acknowledgement

The formal complaint will be acknowledged in writing within five school 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.

7. Investigation

The Headteacher will be provided with the records of the Stage 1 informal procedure (if applicable) within five school days of receipt of the formal complaint, and will then proceed to investigate the complaint or nominate a senior member of the team to investigate on the Headteacher's behalf. This will involve obtaining and considering all documentation held by the School which is relevant to the complaint. If further information is required from the Complainant, this may be requested from them over the telephone or in writing.

The Headteacher or their nominated representative, will speak to the persons who were involved in the matters raised by the Complainant. Where there is an issue about the conduct of a member of staff, that member of staff will be offered the option of having another member of staff present. Other members of staff will be spoken to alone. A written record of the conversation will be made, and the student or member of staff spoken to will be asked to read, sign and date the written record to confirm that it is accurate.

If the Headteacher deems it to be appropriate in relation to the matters raised, the Complainant will be offered a meeting to discuss the issues raised. This may take place at the beginning of the investigation to clarify any matters which are unclear, or after the investigation has taken place with the aim of reaching an amicable resolution.

8. Outcome

The Headteacher will write to the Complainant confirming the outcome of the investigation within twenty school days from the date that the complaint was received. The letter will set out the individual matters raised by the Complainant, the findings made by the Headteacher during the course of the investigation and the conclusion reached.

The letter will inform the Complainant that, if they are unsatisfied with the outcome of the Stage 2 investigation, they should write to the Clerk to the Governing Body within five school days of receipt of the letter asking for their complaint and the Stage 2 investigation to be reviewed by the Chair of the Governing Body under Stage 3 of this Complaints Policy. In respect of complaints against the School, the complainant should write to the Clerk to the School asking that the Chair of the School undertake the Stage 3 review.

9. Delegation

In appropriate cases, the Headteacher may delegate the complaint to a member of the Senior Leadership Team to deal with in accordance with the procedure outlined above.

Stage 3 – Review by the Chair of the Governing Body

10. Notification

If the Complainant is unsatisfied with the outcome of the complaint under Stage 2 of this Complaints Policy, the Complainant may write to the Clerk to the Governing Body asking for the complaint to be reviewed by the Chair of the Governing Body, within five school days of receiving the letter confirming the outcome following Stage 2. In respect of complaints against the School, the complainant should write to the Clerk to the School asking that the Chair of the School undertake the Stage 3 review.

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 Stage 2.

11. Acknowledgement

The Complainant's letter will be acknowledged in writing within five school 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.

12. Review

The Chair will be provided with all documentation relating to the complaint within five school days of receipt of the letter requesting a review under Stage 3, including the record of the Stage 1 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 Stage 2, and the letter of outcome under Stage 2.

The Chair of the Governing Body will review all of the documentation received and consider the matters raised in the complaint and the investigation carried out under Stage 2. The Chair of the Governing Body will only speak to the persons involved in the matters raised to clarify matters which were not confirmed during the Stage 2 investigation, if believed necessary. Where the Chair does speak to a member of staff whose conduct is the issue, they will be accompanied as outlined under Stage 2. Where the Chair does speak to a student an independent member of staff will be there to support them.

If the Chair of the Governing Body deems it to be appropriate in relation to the matters raised, the Complainant will be offered a meeting to discuss the issues raised. If a meeting is deemed appropriate, it will usually take place after the review has been completed with the aim of reaching a mutually acceptable resolution.

13. Outcome

The Chair of the Governing Body will write to the Complainant confirming the outcome of the review within twenty school days from the date that the request for a review was received. The letter will set out whether the Chair agrees with the findings and conclusion under Stage 2, and give reasons, as well as responding to any criticisms of the Stage 2 investigation.

The letter will inform the Complainant that, if they are unsatisfied with the outcome of the Stage 3 review they should write to the Clerk to the School within five school days of receipt of the letter requesting a Complaint Panel Hearing under Stage 4 of this Complaints Policy.

Where the request for a review was received during a school holiday or within twenty days from the end of a term or half term, the Chair will endeavour to expedite the review wherever possible.

14. Delegation

In appropriate cases, the Chair of the Governing Body may delegate the review to the Vice Chair of the Governing Body to deal with in accordance with the procedure outlined above.

Stage 4 – Complaint Panel Hearing

15. Notification

If the Complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of the review under Stage 3 of this Complaints Policy, the Complainant may write to the Clerk to the School requesting a Complaint Panel Hearing. The Complainant should write to the Clerk to the School within five school days of receiving the letter confirming the outcome following Stage 3.

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 Stage 2 and 3.

16. The Complaint Panel

The Complaint Panel will consist of three Governors. None of the three Complaint Panel members will have been involved in the matters which gave rise to the complaint, have been involved in dealing with the complaint previously or have any detailed prior knowledge of the complaint.

17. Attendance

The Complainant may attend the Complaint Panel Hearing, and may be accompanied by another person. For the avoidance of doubt, the Complainant's supporter will be present for moral support only and not play any part in the proceedings, unless invited to do so by the Chair of the Complaint Panel, entirely at his or her discretion and for a good reason. The Complaint Panel Hearing is NOT a legal hearing and it is not appropriate for either the Complainant or the school to be legally represented.

The School will be represented at the Complaint Panel Hearing by the person who dealt with the complaint under Stage 3, which will usually be the Chair of the Governing Body. This person will be referred to as the "School's Representative" for the purposes of Stage 4.

The Complaint Panel Hearing will be minuted by the Clerk to the Complaint Panel, who will usually be the Clerk to the School.

18. Convening and Complaint Panel Hearing

After selecting the Complaint Panel members, the Clerk to the School will write to the Complainant within five school days acknowledging receipt of their request and informing them of the names of the Complaint Panel members. If the Complainant objects to any of the named persons being appointed to the Complaint Panel, they should notify the Clerk within three school days of receipt of the letter. Fair consideration will be given by the Clerk to any bona fide objection to a particular member of the Complaint Panel.

The Clerk will write to the complainant to inform them of the date of the meeting. They will aim to convene a meeting within twenty school days of receipt of the Complainant's request. If this is not possible, the Clerk will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed.

If the complainant rejects the offer of three proposed dates, without good reason, the Clerk will decide when to hold the meeting. It will then proceed in the complainant's absence on the basis of written submissions from both parties.

If the complaint is:

- jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair or
- the entire governing body or
- the majority of the governing body

Stage 4 will be reviewed by a completely independent committee panel.

19. Documentation

The Clerk to the School board will forward a copy of all paperwork relating to the complaint (consisting of the record of the Stage 1 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 Stage 2 with the letter of outcome, all review records under Stage 3 with the letter of outcome, and the Complainant's letter requesting a Complaint Panel Hearing and accompanying documents) to the Complainant, the School's Representative and the three Complaint Panel members.

The names of individuals other than the Complainant, the Complainant's family, members of the school's staff and Local Governors, will be redacted and replaced with a letter relevant to that individual (for example "Jane Brown") will be replaced with "A" throughout, "John Jones" will be replaced with "B" throughout) unless they have provided their written consent for their name to be disclosed.

If the Complainant wishes the Complaint Panel to consider any additional information, they should forward this documentation to the Clerk to the School to arrive at least five school days to enable the documentation to be forwarded to the School's Representative and the Complaint Panel members.

20. Witnesses

The Chair of the Complaint Panel will decide at his or her absolute discretion, which witnesses will be permitted to attend the Complaint Panel Hearing and give a verbal statement rather than relying on a written statement or record of meeting which have been signed by the witness.

If the Complainant wishes to rely on the account of a witness, they should ask the witness to write down, sign and date their account and forward it to the Clerk to the School at least five school days before the Complaint Panel Hearing to enable the Clerk to the School to forward it to the School's representative and the Complaint Panel members.

Witness under the age of eighteen other than the Complainant's own family will only be allowed to attend the Complaint Panel Hearing at the discretion of the Chair of the Complaint Panel, and then only if they are accompanied by one of their parents or carers. Any written

accounts provided by the Complainant relating to witnesses under the age of eighteen must be signed and dated by the witness and one of the witness' parents or carers.

Members of staff of the school involved in the matters which gave rise to the complaint will usually have provided a signed written account or have signed a note of a meeting during the previous stages, which will be forwarded to all parties with the other complaint documentation in the usual way. Members of staff will not usually be required to attend the Complaint Panel Hearing to give a verbal statement unless their conduct is in issue or their account is contentious and the terms outlined earlier in the Complaints Policy dictate that the Complainant should be allowed to ask that member of staff questions.

21. Procedure at the Complaint Panel Hearing

The Complaint Panel Hearing will be conducted as follows:

- The Clerk to the Complaint Panel will greet the Complainant, the Complainant's supporter and the School's Representative and welcome them into the room where the Complaint Panel has convened (any witnesses will remain outside the room until they are called in to give their account);
- The Complainant will be invited by the Complaint Panel to give an account of their complaint;
- The School's Representative will be invited to ask the Complainant questions if any;
- The Complaint Panel will ask the Complainant questions, if any;
- At the discretion of the Chair of the Complaint Panel, the Complainant's first witness will be invited into the room to give an account of what they saw or know;
- The Schools' Representative will be invited to ask the Complainant's witness questions if any;
- The Complaint Panel will ask the Complainant's witness questions, if any;
- The Complainant's witness will be asked to leave the room;
- If the Complainant has any further relevant witnesses, at the discretion of the Chair of the Complaint Panel, they will be invited into the room individually to provide their accounts and be questioned as outlined above;
- The School's Representative will be invited by the Complaint Panel to respond to the complaint and make representations on behalf of the school;
- The Complainant will be invited to ask the School's Representative questions, if any;
- The Complaint Panel will ask the School's Representative questions, if any;
- At the discretion of the Chair of the Complaint Panel, the school's relevant first witness will be invited into the room to give an account of what they saw or know;
- The Complainant will be invited to ask the school's witness questions if any;
- The Complaint Panel will ask the school's witness questions, if any;
- The school's witness will be asked to leave the room;
- If the School has any further relevant witnesses, at the discretion of the Chair of the Complaint Panel, they will be invited into the room individually to provide their accounts and be questioned as outlined above;
- The Complainant will be invited by the Complaint Panel to summarise their complaint;
- The School's Representative will be invited by the Complaint Panel to summarise their response to the complaint and the school's stance;

- The Complaint Panel Hearing will conclude and the Complainant and the School's Representative will be asked to leave.

22. The Complaint Panel's Decision

The Complaint Panel will convene in private, either immediately after the Complaint Panel Hearing or on a subsequent date, and will consider all of the documentation and everything that they have heard at the Complainant Panel Hearing and make:

Findings of Fact:

The Complaint Panel will decide which facts are established to be true, on a balance of probabilities (i.e. more likely than not). If a fact is not deemed relevant, the Complaint Panel will not consider it further. The Complaint Panel will make a written record of the facts that have been established, those which have not been established and those which are not relevant, with their reasons for making these findings.

Recommendations

The Complaint Panel will consider the facts which they have established and will make recommendations based upon them. These recommendations may be aimed at achieving reconciliation between the parties (for example a written apology), improving procedures or preventing a recurrence in the future. The Complaint Panel will keep a written record of their recommendations, with reasons.

23. Notification of the Complaint Panel's Decision

The Clerk to the School will write within ten school days of the Complaint Panel Hearing to the Complainant, The School's Representative and any person complained about.

The letter will identify each of the issues complained about, summarise how the Complaint Panel Hearing proceeded, and confirm each of the Complaint Panel's findings of fact and recommendations, if any, with reasons. The letter will also confirm that, if the Complainant believes that this Policy does not comply with the Regulations or that the School has not followed the procedure outlined in this Complaints Policy, the Complainant may refer their complaint to the Education and Skills Funding Agency for further consideration.

The Clerk to the School will also ensure that a copy of the Complaint Panel's findings and recommendations are made available on the school's premises for inspection by the School, the Local Governing Body and the Headteacher.

24. Factors for the Complaint Panel to Consider

It is important that the Complaint Panel Hearing is independent and impartial, and that it is seen to be so. No person may sit on the Complaint Panel if they have had a prior involvement in the matters which gave rise to the complaint, in dealing with the complaint in the previous stages, or have a prior detailed knowledge of the complaint.

The aim of the Complaint Panel Hearing, which must 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 may not be satisfied with the outcome if the Complaint Panel does not find wholly in their favour. It may only be possible

to establish the facts and make recommendations which will satisfy the Complainant that his or her complaint has been taken seriously.

An effective Complaint Panel will acknowledge that many Complainants feel nervous and inhibited in a formal setting. Parents often feel emotional when discussing an issue that affects their child. The Chair of the Complaint Panel will ensure that the Complaint Panel Hearing is as welcoming as possible, while ensuring that it is procedurally fair to all parties. The layout of the room will set the tone and care is needed to ensure the setting is informal and not substantially adversarial.

Extra care needs to be taken when the Complainant is a child, or there are child witnesses present. Care should be taken to ensure that the child does not feel intimidated. The Complaint Panel should be aware of the views of the child and given them equal consideration to those of the adults present. Where the child's parent is the Complainant, it would be helpful to give the parent the opportunity to suggest which parts of the hearing, if any, the child should attend, with the Chair retaining discretion.

The Complaint Panel should ensure that they are familiar with the complaints procedure in advance of the Complaint Panel Hearing.

The Chair of the Complaint Panel will play a key part in the Complaint Panel Hearing, ensuring that:

- The remit of the Complaint Panel is explained to the parties and each party has the opportunity of making representations without undue interruption;
- All of the issues raised in the complaint are addressed;
- Key findings of fact are made, on a balance of probabilities;
- Each party treats the other with respect and courtesy;
- The Complaint Panel is open minded and acts independently of the school;
- No member of the Complaint Panel has a vested interest in the outcome of the proceedings;
- Each side is given the opportunity to state their case and ask questions;
- All written material is seen by all parties. If a new issue arises during the course of the Complaint Panel Hearing it would be useful to give all parties the opportunity to consider and comment on it.

Referral to the Education and Skills Funding Agency

Once a complaint has been through all the stages in this Complaints Policy, if the Complainant believes that this Complaints Policy does not comply with the Regulations, or that the School has not followed the procedure in this Complaints Policy, the Complainant can refer the complaint to the Education and Skills Funding Agency for consideration.

The ESFA will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints 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 and whether they have followed [Part 7 of the Education \(Independent School Standards\) Regulations 2014](#). The complainant can refer their complaint to the ESFA online at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus, by telephone on: 0370 000 2288 or by writing to:

Academy Complaints and Customer Insight Unit
Education and Skills Funding Agency
Cheylesmore House

5 Quinton Road
Coventry
CV1 2WT

APPENDIX 1 - FORMAL COMPLAINTS FORM

Please complete and return to the School, who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

| |
|---|
| Your Name: |
| Student's Name (if relevant): |
| Student's DOB: |
| Your relationship to the student (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, if any, have you already taken to try and resolve your complaint (for example who did you speak to and what was the response?)

| |
|---|
| <p>What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?</p> |
| <p>Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details.</p> |
| <p>Signature:</p> |
| <p>Date:</p> |
| <p>Official use</p> |
| <p>Date acknowledgement sent:</p> |
| <p>By who:</p> |
| <p>Complaint referred to:</p> |
| <p>Action taken:</p> |
| <p>Date:</p> |

