



Cledford
Primary School
a brighter future together

The Sercombe Federation Cledford Primary School and Gainsborough Primary & Nursery School



Cledford Primary School

George VI Avenue, Middlewich, Cheshire, CW10 0DD
Telephone: 01606 663667
E mail: admin@cledford.cheshire.sch.uk
Website: www.cledford.cheshire.sch.uk

Gainsborough Primary & Nursery School

Belgrave Road, Crewe, Cheshire, CW2 7NH
Telephone: 01270 696810
E mail: admin@gainsborough.cheshire.sch.uk
Website: www.gainsboroughschool.co.uk

Local Authority Code: 895
Establishment Number: 3821

Local Authority Code: 895
Establishment Number: 3810

School Principal: Mr C Adlington

Chair of Governors: Mrs J M Sercombe
Federation Headteacher: Mrs A J Booth

School Principal: Mrs J Nurse

Federation Complaints Policy

Reviewed: September 2023

Signed:

Mrs J Sercombe (Chair of Governing Board)

Mrs AJ Booth (Federation Headteacher)

Mrs J Nurse (School Principal GPNS)

Mr C Adlington (School Principal CPS)

Next Review Date: September 2025

Aims

The Cheshire Federation aims to meet its statutory obligations when responding to complaints from parents 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 by an independent person or panel, where necessary
- Address all the points at issue and provide an effective and prompt response
- Respect complainants' desire for confidentiality
- Treat complainants with respect and courtesy
- Ensure that any 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 or complaints by informal means wherever possible. Where this is not possible, formal 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 ensure 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

Legislation and guidance

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 their school and to any community facilities or services that the school provides.

It is also based on [guidance for schools on complaints procedures](#) from the Department for Education (DfE), including the model procedure, and model procedure for dealing with unreasonable complaints.

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

Scope of this Procedure

The school intends to resolve complaints informally where possible, at the earliest possible stage. There may be occasions when complainants would like to raise their concerns formally. This policy outlines the procedure relating to handling such complaints. This policy does **not** cover complaints procedures relating to:

- Admissions
- Statutory assessments of special educational needs (SEN)
- Safeguarding matters
- Exclusion
- Whistle-blowing
- Staff grievances
- Staff discipline

Please see our separate policies for procedures relating to these types of complaint.

Arrangements for handling complaints from parents of children with special educational needs (SEN) about the school's support are within the scope of this policy. Such complaints should first be made to the class teacher/special educational needs co-ordinator (SENDCO). Our SEN policy and information report includes information about the rights of parents of pupils with disabilities who believe that our school has discriminated against their child.

Complaints about services provided by other providers who use school premises or facilities should be directed to the provider concerned.

The scope of this complaints procedure is covered in more detail in Appendix A.

Roles and responsibilities

The complainant

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

- Follow these procedures
- Co-operate with the school throughout the process, and respond to deadlines and communication promptly
- Ask for assistance as needed
- Treat all those involved with respect
- Not publish details about the complaint on social media

The investigator

An individual will be appointed to look into the complaint, and establish the facts. They will:

- Interview all relevant parties, keeping notes
- Consider records and any written evidence and keep these securely
- Prepare a comprehensive report to the school Principal or complaints committee which includes the facts and potential solutions

Clerk to the governing board

The clerk will:

- Be the contact point for the complainant and the complaints committee, including circulating the relevant papers and evidence before complaints committee meetings
- Arrange the complaints hearing
- Record and circulate the minutes and outcome of the hearing

Committee chair

The committee chair will:

- Chair the meeting, ensuring that everyone is treated with respect throughout
- Make sure all parties see the relevant information, understand the purpose of the committee, and are allowed to present their case

Principles for investigation

When investigating a complaint, we will try to clarify:

- What has happened
- Who was involved
- What the complainant feels would put things right

Timescales

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 time frame only if the chair of governors and school Principal, having taken advice, are of the view that exceptional circumstances apply.

All timescales in this procedure refer to school working days, for this school, excluding school holidays, in-service training (Inset) days and bank holidays.

Any complaints made outside of term time will be considered to have been received on the first school day after the holiday period.

Anonymous complaints

Anonymous complaints will not normally be investigated. However, the school Principal or chair of governors, if appropriate, will determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation.

How to Raise a Complaint

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.

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

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 Stage 2 of this procedure.

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

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

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.

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.

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.

Resolving complaints

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:

- an explanation
- an admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better
- an assurance that the school 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
- an apology

Withdrawal of a Complaint

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.

Informal Complaints

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 complaints procedure. The school aims to take all concerns seriously and will make every effort to resolve issues raised as quickly as possible.

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.

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 complaints procedure.

Stages of complaint (not complaints against the school Principal or governors)

Formal Stage 1

Formal complaints must be in writing, preferably on the complaints form provided at Appendix B, to the school Principal.

The school Principal 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.

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

The school Principal 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.

During an investigation, the school Principal (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.

At the conclusion of the investigation, the school Principal will provide a formal written response, within twenty school days of the date of receipt of the complaint.

If the school Principal 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 the school will take to resolve the complaint.

The school Principal will advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of Formal Stage 1.

If the complaint is about the school Principal, 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.

Complaints about the school Principal or member(s) of the governing board must be made to the clerk to the governing board, via the school office.

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

Formal Stage 2

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome at Formal Stage 1 and wishes to take the matter further, they can escalate the complaint to Formal Stage 2 – a meeting with a panel of three members of the governing board convened for this purpose. This is the final stage of the complaints procedure.

A request to escalate to Stage 2 must be made to the clerk to the governing board, via the school office, within twenty school days of receipt of the Formal Stage 1 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.

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.

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 Stage 2 request. If this is not possible, the clerk will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed.

The complaints panel will comprise at least three impartial governors with no prior involvement with the complaint. 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.

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 additional, independent governors 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 2.

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.

A suitable venue must be provided for the meeting which includes separate waiting areas for the two parties and refreshments for all involved.

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

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

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.

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. 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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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

The meeting will follow the process outlined in Appendix C.

The governors' panel will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented. 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 on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint
- where appropriate, recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future

The chair of the panel will provide the complainant and the school Principal/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.

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

The outcome

The committee can:

- Uphold the complaint, in whole or in part
- Dismiss the complaint, in whole or in part
- If the complaint is upheld, the committee 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 school will inform those involved of the decision in writing within 10 school days

Complaints against the School Principal, a governor or the governing board

Stage 1: informal

Complaints made against the school Principal or any member of the governing board should be directed to the clerk to the governing board in the first instance.

If the complaint is about the school Principal or one member of the governing board (including the chair or vice-chair), a suitably skilled and impartial governor will carry out the steps at stage 1

Stage 2: formal

If the complaint is jointly about the chair and vice-chair, the entire governing board or the majority of the governing board, an independent investigator will carry out the steps in stage 2. They will be appointed by the governing board and will write a formal response at the end of their investigation.

Stage 3: review panel

If the complaint is jointly about the chair and vice-chair, the entire governing board or the majority of the governing board, a committee of independent governors will hear the complaint. They will be sourced from local schools, the local authority or diocese and will carry out the steps at stage 3

Referring complaints on completion of the school's procedure

If the complainant is unsatisfied with the outcome of the school's complaints procedure, they can refer their complaint to the DfE.

The DfE will not re-investigate the matter of the complaint. It will look at whether the school's complaints policy and any other relevant statutory policies that the school holds were adhered to. The DfE also looks at whether the school's statutory policies adhere to education legislation. It may direct the school to re-investigate the complaint where it is clear the school has acted unlawfully or unreasonably.

For more information or to refer a complaint, see the following webpage:

<https://www.gov.uk/complain-about-school>

We will include this information in the outcome letter to complainants.

Unreasonably persistent complaints

Most complaints raised will be valid, and therefore we will treat them seriously. However, a complaint may become unreasonable if the person:

- Has made the same complaint before, and it's already been resolved by following the school's complaints procedure
- Makes a complaint that is obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific, defamatory or repetitive
- Knowingly provides false information
- Insists on pursuing a complaint that is unfounded, or out of scope of the complaints procedure
- Pursues a valid complaint, but in an unreasonable manner e.g. refuses to articulate the complaint, refuses to co-operate with this complaints procedure, or insists that the complaint is dealt with in ways that are incompatible with this procedure and the time frames it sets out
- Changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation goes on
- Makes a complaint designed to cause disruption, annoyance or excessive demands on school time
- Seeks unrealistic outcomes, or a solution that lacks any serious purpose or value
-

Steps we will take

We will take every reasonable step to address the complainant's concerns, 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 procedure as normal (as outlined above) wherever possible.

If the complainant continues to contact the school in a disruptive way, we may put communications strategies in place. 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

Stopping responding

We may stop responding to the complainant when all of these factors are met:

- We believe we have taken all reasonable steps to help address their concerns
- We have provided a clear statement of our position and their options
- The complainant contacts us repeatedly, and we believe their intention is to cause disruption or inconvenience
- Where we stop responding, we will inform the individual that we intend to do so. We will also explain that we will still consider any new complaints they make.
- 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 our school site.

Duplicate complaints

If we have resolved a complaint under this procedure and receive a duplicate complaint on the same subject from a partner, family member or other individual, we will assess whether there are aspects that we hadn't previously considered, or any new information we need to consider.

If we are satisfied that there are no new aspects, we will:

- Tell the new complainant that we have already investigated and responded to this issue, and the local process is complete
- Direct them to the DfE if they are dissatisfied with our original handling of the complaint
- If there are new aspects, we will follow this procedure again.

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, the school 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 the school's response, or wish to pursue the complaint further, the normal procedures will apply.

Record keeping

The 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.

This material will be treated as confidential and held centrally, and will be viewed only by those involved in investigating the complaint or on the review panel.

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 the Data Protection Act, or where the material must be made available during a school inspection.

Records of complaints will be kept securely, only for as long as necessary and in line with data protection law and our privacy notices.

The details of the complaint, including the names of individuals involved, will not be shared with the whole governing board in case a review panel needs to be organised at a later point.

Where the governing board is aware of the substance of the complaint before the review panel stage, the school will (where reasonably practicable) arrange for an independent panel to hear the complaint.

Complainants also have the right to request an independent panel if they believe there is likely to be bias in the proceedings. The decision to approve this request is made by the governing board, who will not unreasonably withhold consent.

Learning lessons

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

Monitoring arrangements

The governing board will monitor the effectiveness of the complaints procedure in ensuring that complaints are handled properly. The governing board will track the number and nature of complaints, and review underlying issues.

The complaints records are logged and managed by the school business manager.

This policy will be reviewed by the governing board every 2 years.

At each review, the policy will be approved by the full governing board.

Next review: March 2025

Links to other policies

Policies dealing with other forms of complaints include:

- Child protection and safeguarding policy and procedures
- Admissions policy
- Exclusions policy
- Staff grievance procedures
- Staff disciplinary procedures
- SEN policy and information report
- Privacy notices

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 relating to their employment.

EXCEPTIONS	WHO TO CONTACT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Admissions to schools ○ Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs ○ School re-organisation proposals 	<p>Concerns about admissions, statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs, or school re-organisation proposals should be raised with Cheshire East Council</p> <p>SCHOOL ADMISSIONS & ORGANISATION</p> <p>0300 123 5012</p> <p>http://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/schools/admissions/admissions.aspx</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Matters like to require a Child Protection Investigation 	<p>Complaints about child protection matters are handled under our child protection and safeguarding policy and in accordance with relevant statutory guidance.</p> <p>THE CHESHIRE EAST CONSULTATION SERVICE (ChECS)</p> <p>https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/livewell/care-and-support-for-children/are-you-concerned-about-a-child/cheshire-east-consultation-service-checs/checs.aspx</p> <p>Phone ChECS on 0300 123 5012 option 3. Callers will be directed to the appropriate team and relevant personnel more quickly via a range of automated options</p> <p>If you need to contact someone out of hours and believe it to be an emergency that can't wait, please call the EMERGENCY DUTY TEAM on 0300 123 5022</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Exclusion of children from school * 	<p>Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at:</p> <p>www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions</p> <p><i>*complaints about the application of the behaviour policy can be made through this procedure</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Whistleblowing 	<p>We have an internal whistleblowing policy for all our employees, including temporary staff and contractors.</p> <p>The Secretary of State for Education is the prescribed person for matters relating to education for whistle-blowers in education who do not want to raise matters direct with their employer. Referrals can be made at:</p> <p>www.education.gov.uk/contactus</p> <p>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 of the DfE (see link above), depending on the substance of your complaint.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Staff grievances 	<p>Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the school's internal grievance procedures.</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Staff conduct 	<p>Complaints about staff will be dealt with under the school’s internal disciplinary procedures, if appropriate.</p> <p>Complainants will not be informed of any disciplinary action taken against a staff member as a result of a complaint.</p> <p>However, the complainant will be notified that the matter is being addressed.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Complaints about services provided by other providers who may use school premises or facilities 	<p>Providers should have their own complaints procedure to deal with complaints about service. Please contact them direct.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ National Curriculum content 	<p>Please contact the Department for Education at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus</p>

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 school Principal or chair of governing board 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:
DAYTIME 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

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT SENT BY WHO

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

The school Principal 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 school Principal 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 school Principal 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 endeavour 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 complaints investigation process
- refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of the complaints procedure
- insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the complaints 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 DfE
- 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 school Principal or chair of governors will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying an 'unreasonable' marking.

If the behaviour continues, the school Principal 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 policy

Appendix E1

School Complaints Procedure

Guidance for Governors – on formal Stage 2

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 school Principal/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 emotional when 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 ensure the 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 views of 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 in which they give their evidence
- after introductions, the complainant is invited to explain their complaint, and be followed by their witnesses
- the school Principal may question both the complainant and the witnesses after each has spoken
- the school Principal is then invited to explain the school's actions and be followed by the school's witnesses
- the complainant may question both the school Principal 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 school Principal 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 DfE 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/ school Principal/ 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 school Principal or the LA 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 school Principal or chair of governors. However, complaints about barring cannot be escalated to the DfE. 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 the 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 defence.

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 LA and 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 school Principal 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 school Principal from the school premises for a period of time, subject to review.

In imposing a bar the following steps will be taken:

1. 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.
2. Where an assault has led to a bar, a statement indicating that the matter has been reported to the LA and the police will be included.
3. The chair of governors/LA will be informed of the bar.
4. Where appropriate, arrangements for pupils being delivered to, and collected from, the school gate will be clarified.

Conclusion

Either the school or the LA 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 the LA's education, health and safety and legal departments, to ensure fairness and consistency.