



COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

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1 Aim

The aim of this procedure is to ensure that any complaint against the trust, an academy within the trust, or any individual connected with it, is dealt with fairly and efficiently and is resolved as soon as possible.

2 Who can make a complaint?

This complaints procedure is not limited to parents or carers of children that are registered at an academy within the trust. Any person, including members of the public, may make a complaint to an academy within the trust, about any provision of facilities or services that the academy provides.

The policy does not apply to concerns and complaints relating to the following, which are dealt with under separate policies:

- Admissions
- Exclusions
- Issues related to child protection
- EHC plans
- Staff grievances or disciplinary procedures

This procedure will apply to all other complaints.

3 Key principles

A complainant should never feel or be made to feel that a complaint made in a reasonable and appropriate way will cause offence or reflect adversely on the pupil or his/her opportunities at the relevant academy. The academy will endeavour to investigate and resolve every complaint in a positive manner and will treat every complaint as an opportunity to improve the service it provides.

4 The difference between a concern and a complaint

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

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

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. Each academy within the trust takes concerns seriously and will make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.

If you have difficulty discussing a concern with a particular member of staff, your views will be respected. In these cases, the headteacher will refer you to another staff

member. Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels unable to deal with a concern, the headteacher will refer you to another staff member. The member of staff may be more senior but does not have to be. The ability to consider the concern objectively and impartially is more important.

It is understood that there are occasions when people would like to raise their concerns formally. In this case, the relevant academy will attempt to resolve the issue internally, through the stages outlined within this complaints procedure.

5 Definitions

In this policy:

- “school days” excludes weekends, bank holidays and academy holidays
- “parent” means a parent, carer or anyone with legal responsibility for a child

Procedures

6 How to raise a concern or make a complaint

To enable a proper investigation, concerns or complaints should be brought to the attention of the individual academy or the Bonitas Multi-Academy Trust (for trust complaints) as soon as possible. A concern or complaint can be made in person, in writing or by telephone. They may also be made by a third party acting on behalf on a complainant, as long as they have appropriate consent to do so.

Complaints against school staff (except the headteacher) should be made in the first instance, to the headteacher via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Complaints that involve or are about the headteacher should be addressed to the relevant academy’s Chair of Governors, via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Complaints about the Chair of Governors, any individual governor or the whole governing body should be addressed to Dawn Deykin, Bonitas Trust Company Secretary, via the Ranelagh School office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

For ease of use, a template complaint form is included at the end of this procedure. If you require help in completing the form, please contact the office of the relevant academy. You can also ask a third-party organisation for example like the Citizens Advice to help you.

In accordance with equality law, we will consider making reasonable adjustments if required, to enable complainants to access and complete this complaints procedure. For instance, providing information in alternative formats, assisting complainants in raising a formal complaint or holding meetings in accessible locations.

7 Anonymous complaints

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

8 Time scales

A complaint 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. Consideration will be given to complaints made outside of this time frame if exceptional circumstances apply.

9 Complaints received outside of term time

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

10 Scope of this complaints procedure

This procedure covers all complaints about any provision of community facilities or services by academies within the Bonitas Multi-Academy Trust other than complaints that are dealt with under other statutory procedures, including those listed below:

Exceptions	Who to contact
Admissions to schools	Concerns about admissions should be dealt with through a separate process – either through the appeals process or via the local authority.
Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation	Complaints about child protection matters are handled under the child protection and safeguarding policy and in accordance with relevant statutory guidance. If you have serious concerns, you may wish to contact the local authority designated officer (LADO) who has local responsibility for safeguarding LADO@bracknell-forest.gov.uk or the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) MASH@bracknell-forest.gov.uk .
Exclusion of children from school*	Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at: www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions . <i>*complaints about the application of the behaviour policy of an academy within the trust can be made through the complaints procedure.</i>

Whistleblowing	<p>The trust has an internal whistleblowing procedure for all of its 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: www.education.gov.uk/contactus.</p> <p>Volunteer staff who have concerns about an academy within the trust, should complain through the complaints procedure. It may also be possible to complain direct to the LA or the Department for Education (see link above), depending on the substance of the complaint.</p>
Staff grievances	Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the trust's internal grievance procedures.
Staff conduct	<p>Complaints about staff will be dealt with under the trust'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. However, the complainant will be notified that the matter is being addressed.</p>

If other bodies are investigating aspects of the complaint, for example the police, local authority (LA) safeguarding teams or Tribunals, this may impact on the 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 this happens, the complainant will be informed of a proposed new timescale.

If a complainant commences legal action against the Bonitas Multi-Academy Trust, or an individual school within the trust, in relation to their complaint, consideration will be given to whether to suspend the complaints procedure until those legal proceedings have concluded.

11 Resolving complaints

At each stage in the procedure, there is a commitment to resolving the complaint. If appropriate, the trust, or the relevant academy within the trust, will acknowledge 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 we will try to ensure the event complained of will not recur

- an explanation of the steps that have been or will be taken to help ensure that it will not happen again and an indication of the timescales within which any changes will be made
- an undertaking to review school policies in light of the complaint
- an apology.

It would be useful if complainants were encouraged to state what actions they feel might resolve the problem at any stage. An admission that the academy/trust could have handled the situation better is not the same as an admission of negligence.

12 Withdrawal of a complaint

Complainants wishing to withdraw their complaint will be asked to confirm this in writing.

13 Vexatious complaints and unreasonable complainant behaviour

The trust is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, in a friendly, respectful and professional way. Complainants are expected to understand the need to behave in a similar way; it is in everyone's best interests to help ensure that the matter can be resolved as quickly and informally as possible.

The procedures described in this policy should limit the number of complaints that become protracted. However, there will be occasions when, despite having followed all stages of the procedure, the complainant remains dissatisfied. If, at any stage, the trust or the academy believes that the concern or complaint is vexatious, has insufficient grounds, has already been considered in full or has been closed, under this policy, the CEO, Headteacher or Chair of Governors/Trustees (as appropriate) may write to the complainant to refuse to consider the concern or complaint further, giving reasons why they are refusing to do so.

14 Investigating complaints

At each stage, the person investigating the complaint must ensure that they:

- establish **what** has happened so far, and **who** has been involved;
- clarify the nature of the complaint and what remains unresolved;
- meet with the complainant or contact them (where clarification or further information is necessary);
- clarify what, in the complainant's view, would put things right;
- interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish;
- conduct the interview with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning;
- keep notes of the interview.

15 Record keeping and confidentiality

A written record will be kept of all complaints, including at what stage they were resolved. Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except where access is requested by the Secretary of State or where disclosure is required in the course of an academy inspection or under other legal authority.

16 Framework for dealing with complaints

Stage One: Informal Stage – initial complaints and minor concerns

In many cases, a concern can be resolved quickly and will not reach the stage of becoming a formal complaint. Many concerns can be resolved by simple clarification or the provision of information.

In situations in which a complaint is about the trust, it is normally appropriate to communicate directly via the Company Secretary. This may be by email, letter, by telephone or in person by appointment, requested via the trust office. Where the complaint is about a member of the trust's staff, it is normally appropriate to communicate directly with them in the first instance. This may be by email, letter, telephone or in person, by appointment requested via the trust office.

In situations in which a complaint concerns a child attending an academy, it is normally appropriate to communicate directly with the child's class/form teacher, head of year, a member of the academy's senior staff or the Headteacher.

Where the complaint is about a member of academy staff, it is normally appropriate to communicate in the first instance directly with that member of staff. This may be by email, letter, by telephone or in person by appointment, requested via the academy office.

Informal meetings and discussions are very valuable and parents are encouraged to approach staff with any concerns they may have, the aim being to resolve all issues with open dialogue and mutual understanding.

In the case of serious concerns, it may be appropriate to address them directly to the Headteacher (or to the CEO of the trust, via the Company Secretary, if the complaint is about a Headteacher, or Chair of Governors or the Chair of Trustees, if the complaint is about the CEO). Advice about who to contact should be sought from the Company Secretary of the trust or the Clerk to Governors of the appropriate academy.

It is anticipated that most complaints will be resolved by this informal stage within 15 working school days of an academy/the trust being notified of the complaint. Should the

matter not be resolved informally, or where parents are not satisfied with the response to the complaint raised informally, they may proceed to Stage 2 of the procedure.

Stage Two: Formal Stage

If a concern or complaint is not resolved to the satisfaction of the complainant at the informal stage, or if a complainant expresses a wish for the complaint to be dealt with immediately as a formal complaint, the complaint should be put in writing to the headteacher (unless they are about the head teacher), via the school office. This may be done in person or in writing (preferably using the Complaint Form).

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

Within this response, the head teacher will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, ask what remains unresolved, what outcome the complainant would like to see and to explore the possibility of an informal resolution. The head teacher can consider whether a face-to-face meeting is the most appropriate way of doing this. If a complainant accepts an invitation to attend a meeting, they may be accompanied by one other person such as a relative or friend, who should not be legally qualified, to assist in explaining the nature of the concerns. Where possible, this meeting will take place within 10 school days of receipt of the written complaint.

Note: The head teacher may delegate the investigation to another member of the school's senior leadership team but not the decision to be taken.

During the investigation, the headteacher (or investigator) will:

- if necessary, interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish
- keep a written record of any meetings/interviews in relation to their investigation.

At the conclusion of their investigation, the headteacher will provide a formal written response within 10 school days of the date of receipt of the complaint.

If the headteacher is unable to meet this deadline, they will provide the complainant with an update and revised response date.

The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions the academy will take to resolve the complaint.

The headteacher will advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 2.

If the complaint is about the headteacher, or a member of the governing body it should be made to the Chair of Governors, via the school office, following which a suitably skilled governor will be appointed to complete all the actions at Stage 2.

Complaints about the Chair or Vice Chair of Governors should be made to the CEO of the Bonitas Trust, via the Company Secretary at the following address:
Bonitas Multi-Academy Trust, c/o Ranelagh School
Ranelagh Drive, Bracknell, RG12 9DA

Complaints about the CEO should be sent to the Chair of the Bonitas Trust, via the Company Secretary (contact details shown above)

If the complaint is about:

- the Chair of Trustees
- jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair of trustees
- the entire board of trustees or
- the majority of the board of trustees

Stage 2 will be considered by an independent investigator appointed by the trust. At the conclusion of their investigation, the independent investigator will provide a formal written response.

Following investigation, the Headteacher, CEO or Chair of Governors/Trustees (as appropriate) will notify the complainant in writing of their decision and the reasons for it. Where possible, this will be within 15 school days of receipt of the complaint.

If, in the early stages of the investigation, the Headteacher/CEO considers that the complaint is best dealt with immediately at Stage 3, it will be passed to the Chair of Governors/Trustees and the complainant will be informed of this action without delay.

Stage Three: Review Panel Hearing

If a complainant is dissatisfied with the decision of the Headteacher/Chair of Governors (in the case of individual academy complaints), CEO/Chair of Trustees (in the case of complaints which relate to the Bonitas Multi-Academy Trust), under the Formal Stage, it is possible to request that a Review Panel of the governing body is convened to reconsider the complaint. A request will only be considered if the complainant has completed the relevant procedures at Stages 1 and 2.

A request for a hearing by the Review Panel should be made in writing to the the Clerk to the Governing Body/Company Secretary within 10 school days of receiving notice of the outcome of the Formal Stage. Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.

The complainant should ensure that

- they provide copies of all relevant documentation;
- state all the grounds for the complaint;

- state the outcome that they are seeking.

The Clerk to the Governing Body/Company Secretary will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 5 school days of receipt.

As soon as reasonably practical, and in any event at least 5 working days before the hearing, the Clerk to the Governing Body/Company Secretary will send the complainant written notification of the date, time and place of the hearing, together with brief details of the Panel members who will be present. Fair consideration will be given to any bona fide objection to a particular member of the Panel. They will aim to convene a meeting within 20 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.

If the complainant rejects the offer of three proposed dates, without good reason, the Clerk to the Governing Body/Company Secretary 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.

Copies of any additional documents the complainant may wish the panel to consider should be sent to the Clerk to Governing Body/ Company Secretary at least 3 days prior to the hearing. The Panel reserves the right not to consider any documentation presented after this.

A copy of the complaint and any other documentation provided by the complainant in support of their complaint, or by the academy/trust in defence of the complaint, will be provided to the Review Panel as soon as practicable upon receipt. Copies of these documents shall also be provided to the complainant and Headteacher/ CEO (as applicable) at least 3 school days before the hearing. The Review Panel reserves the right not to consider any documentation presented by either the complainant or the academy, less than 3 school days prior to the hearing.

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 Stage 1 of the procedure.

The review will be conducted by a panel of at least three people. No governor/trustee may sit on the panel if they have had prior involvement in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it. In the case of complaints to an academy, the panel will include two governors of the academy. In the case of complaints to the Bonitas Trust, the panel will include two trustees. In both cases, at least one other member of the panel must be independent of the management and running of the trust/academy.

If the complaint is:

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

Stage 3 will be heard by a committee of independent, co-opted governors and trustees.

The aim of the hearing is for the Panel to review the decision reached at Stage 2 with a view to resolving the complaint and achieving reconciliation between the academy/trust and the complainant. The Panel will not consider any new complaints that have not been raised as part of the initial complaint. After due consideration of all facts the Panel considers relevant, the Panel will reach a decision on the balance of probabilities as to whether or not the complaint is substantiated.

The complainant will be asked to attend the hearing and may be accompanied by one other person such as a relative or friend. Generally, neither party is encouraged to bring legal representatives to the committee meeting. However, there may be occasions when legal representation is appropriate.

For instance, if a school employee is called as a witness in a complaint meeting, they may wish to be supported by union and/or legal representation.

Note: Complaints about staff conduct will not generally be handled under this complaints procedure. Complainants will be advised that any staff conduct complaints will be considered under (Human Resources) staff disciplinary procedures, if appropriate, but outcomes will not be shared with them.

The Clerk to Governing Body/Company Secretary or nominated deputy will also attend the hearing in order to keep a record of the proceedings.

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

The meeting will be held in private. Electronic recordings of meetings or conversations are not normally permitted unless a complainant's own disability or special needs require it. Prior knowledge and consent of all parties attending must be sought before meetings or conversations take place. Consent will be recorded in any minutes taken.

The Review Panel will be conducted in such a way as to ensure that all those present have the opportunity to ask questions and make comments in an appropriate manner. The Panel is under no obligation to hear oral evidence from witnesses but may do so and/or may take written statements into account.

Any governor/trustee sitting on a Review Panel needs to remember:

- It is important that the Review Panel hearing is independent and impartial and that it is seen to be so.
- The aim of the hearing, which needs to be held in private, will always be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the academy/trust 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 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 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 panel will ensure that the proceedings are as welcoming as possible.

Roles and responsibilities

The Role of the Clerk/Company Secretary

The clerk is the contact point for the complainant and is required to:

- set the date, time and venue of the hearing, ensuring that the dates are convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible;
- collate any written material and send it to the parties in advance of the hearing;
- meet and welcome the parties as they arrive at the hearing;
- record the proceedings;
- notify all parties of the panel's decision.

The Role of the Chair of the Review Panel

The Chair of the Panel has a key role, ensuring that:

- the remit of the panel is explained to the parties and each party has the opportunity of putting their case 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 panel is open minded and acts independently;
- no member of the panel has 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.

Format of the meeting

Unless otherwise stated, the procedure for an appeal is as follows:

- the complainant and Headteacher/CEO will enter the hearing together;
- the Chair of the Review Panel will introduce the panel members and outline the process;
- the complainant will explain the complaint;
- the Headteacher/CEO and committee members will question the complainant;
- the Headteacher/CEO will explain the academy/trust's actions;
- the complainant and the committee members will question the Headteacher/CEO
- the complainant will sum up their complaint;
- the Headteacher/CEO will sum up the academy/trust's actions;

- the Chair of the panel will explain that both parties will hear from the committee within 5 school days;
- both parties will leave together while the panel decides;
- the Clerk/Company Secretary will stay to assist the panel with its decision making.

The Chair of the Committee will provide the complainant and the academy/ trust with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within 5 school days.

The Panel can:

- Request further information from the complainant and/or the academy/trust to assist them in making their decision.
- Dismiss the complaint in whole or in part.
- Uphold the complaint in whole or in part.
- Decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint.
- Recommend changes to the academy/trust's systems or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not reoccur.

The letter to the complainant will include details of how to contact the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled.

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 academy/trust will take to resolve the complaint.

The panel will ensure that those findings and recommendations are sent by electronic mail or otherwise given to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about. Furthermore, they will be available for inspection on the school premises by the proprietor and the head teacher.

A written record will be kept of all complaints, and of whether they are resolved at the preliminary stage or proceed to a panel hearing.

Next steps

If the complainant believes the academy/trust did not handle their complaint in accordance with the published complaints procedure or they acted unlawfully or unreasonably in the exercise of their duties under education law, they can contact the ESFA after they have completed Stage 3.

The ESFA will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by the academy/trust. They will consider whether the academy/trust 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

17 Monitoring procedures

The LGB and Bonitas Board of Trustees will monitor the level and nature of complaints within an academy and across the trust. They will review the outcomes on a regular basis to ensure the effectiveness of the policy and procedures.

Complaint Form

Appendix 1

Please complete and return to <Name> (*either Headteacher / Clerk / Company Secretary*) who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

Your name:
Pupil's name (if relevant):
Your relationship to the pupil (if relevant):
Address: Postcode: Day time telephone number: Evening telephone number: Email address:
Please give details of your complaint, including whether you have spoken to anybody at the school about it.

What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?

Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details.

Signature:

Date:

Official use

Date acknowledgement sent:

By who:

Complaint referred to:

Action taken:

Date:

Roles and Responsibilities

Complainant

The complainant will receive a more effective response to the complaint if they:

- explain the complaint in full as early as possible
- co-operate with the school in seeking a solution to the complaint
- respond promptly to requests for information or meetings or in agreeing the details of the complaint
- ask for assistance as needed
- treat all those involved in the complaint with respect
- refrain from publicising the details of their complaint on social media and respect confidentiality.

Investigator

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

- providing a comprehensive, open, transparent and fair consideration of the complaint through:
 - sensitive and thorough interviewing of the complainant to establish what has happened and who has been involved
 - interviewing staff and children/young people and other people relevant to the complaint
 - consideration of records and other relevant information
 - analysing information
- liaising with the complainant and the complaints co-ordinator as appropriate to clarify what the complainant feels would put things right.

The investigator should:

- conduct interviews with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning
- keep notes of interviews or arrange for an independent note taker to record minutes of the meeting
- ensure that any papers produced during the investigation are kept securely pending any appeal
- be mindful of the timescales to respond
- prepare a comprehensive report for the head teacher or complaints committee

that sets out the facts, identifies solutions and recommends courses of action to resolve problems.

- The head teacher or complaints committee will then determine whether to uphold or dismiss the complaint and communicate that decision to the complainant, providing the appropriate escalation details.

Complaints Co-ordinator

(this could be the head teacher / designated complaints governor or other staff member providing administrative support)

The complaints co-ordinator should:

- ensure that the complainant is fully updated at each stage of the procedure
- liaise with staff members, head teacher, Chair of Governors or the Clerk and to ensure the smooth running of the complaints procedure
- be aware of issues regarding:
 - sharing third party information
 - additional support. This may be needed by complainants when making a complaint including interpretation support or where the complainant is a child or young person
- keep records.

Clerk to the Governing Body / Company Secretary

The Clerk is the contact point for the complainant and the committee and should:

- ensure that all people involved in the complaint procedure are aware of their legal rights and duties, including any under legislation relating to school complaints, education law, the Equality Act 2010, the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act (DPA) 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)
- set the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that the dates are convenient to all parties (if they are invited to attend) and that the venue and proceedings are accessible
- collate any written material relevant to the complaint (for example: stage 1 paperwork, school and complainant submissions) and send it to the parties in advance of the meeting within an agreed timescale
- record the proceedings
- circulate the minutes of the meeting
- notify all parties of the committee's decision.

Committee Chair

The committee's chair, who is nominated in advance of the complaint meeting, should ensure that:

- both parties are asked (via the Clerk) to provide any additional information relating to the complaint by a specified date in advance of the meeting
- the meeting is conducted in an informal manner, is not adversarial, and that, if all parties are invited to attend, everyone is treated with respect and courtesy
- complainants who may not be used to speaking at such a meeting are put at ease. This is particularly important if the complainant is a child/young person
- the remit of the committee is explained to the complainant
- written material is seen by everyone in attendance, provided it does not breach confidentiality or any individual's rights to privacy under the DPA 2018 or GDPR.

If a new issue arises it would be useful to give everyone the opportunity to consider and comment upon it; this may require a short adjournment of the meeting

- both the complainant and the school are given the opportunity to make their case and seek clarity, either through written submissions ahead of the meeting or verbally in the meeting itself
- the issues are addressed
- key findings of fact are made
- the committee is open-minded and acts independently
- no member of the committee has an external interest in the outcome of the proceedings or any involvement in an earlier stage of the procedure
- the meeting is minuted
- they liaise with the Clerk (and complaints co-ordinator, if the school has one).

Committee Member

Committee members should be aware that:

- the meeting must be independent and impartial, and should be seen to be so

No governor may sit on the committee if they have had a prior involvement in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it.

- the aim of the meeting should be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant

We recognise that the complainant might not be satisfied with the outcome if the meeting does not find in their favour. It may only be possible to establish the facts

and make recommendations.

- many complainants will feel nervous and inhibited in a formal setting

Parents/carers often feel emotional when discussing an issue that affects their child.

- extra care needs to be taken when the complainant is a child/young person and present during all or part of the meeting

Careful consideration of the atmosphere and proceedings should ensure that the child/young person does not feel intimidated.

The committee should respect the views of the child/young person and give them equal consideration to those of adults.

If the child/young person is the complainant, the committee should ask in advance if any support is needed to help them present their complaint. Where the child/young person's parent is the complainant, the committee should give the parent the opportunity to say which parts of the meeting, if any, the child/young person needs to attend.

However, the parent should be advised that agreement might not always be possible if the parent wishes the child/young person to attend a part of the meeting that the committee considers is not in the child/young person's best interests.

- the welfare of the child/young person is paramount.