



## Joint Federation Complaints policy

Author, date and title	Reviewed on	Next review due date	Statutory Requirement
Federation Complaints policy January 2025		January 2026	Y
Federation Complaints policy January 2026		January 2027	Y

***As Values Schools, Shillington Lower and Stondon Lower ensures that all its policies, principles and practices adhere to the Values Education ethos.***

***We are committed to recognising, valuing and respecting the diversity of our schools' communities. We adhere to the Local Authority's Equal Opportunities Policy and the Equality Duty 2010. We welcome all members of the schools' communities irrespective of race, ethnic or national origins, religious and political beliefs, gender, disability, sexuality, age, marital status and linguistic ability. We will ensure equality and value diversity, and address any unfair treatment, discrimination and prejudice.***

***All our schools' policies include the Pixie class (Shillington) and the before and after school club at both schools***

Head Teacher: .....

Date: .....

Chair of Governors:.....

Date: .....

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## 1. Rationale and Aim

Shillington and Stondon Federation take all complaints seriously. The aim of this document is to set out how a complaint from any parent/carer or the general public is dealt with, and to ensure that it is handled in the most appropriate and efficient manner possible.

This document meets the requirements that we must have and make available a written procedure to deal with complaints from parents of students in the school.

It is also based on guidance published that refers to good practice guidance on setting up complaints procedures from the Department for Education (DfE).

## 2. Introduction

The DfE guidance explains the difference between a concern and a complaint – see definitions below.

- a. A **concern**<sup>1</sup> is defined as “an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought”
- b. A **complaint** is defined as “an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or alack of action”

All complaints, no matter what their nature, whether formal or informal will be treated in the strictest confidence. Shillington and Stondon Federation aims to resolve complaints at the earliest possible stage.

Anonymous complaints will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis to determine if it warrants investigation.

**Please note** that there are specific procedures in place for the following matters and any complaint, dependent on the context, may need to be dealt with outside of this policy:

- Admissions
- Statutory assessments of special educational needs (SEN)
- Safeguarding matters
- Exclusion
- Whistle-blowing
- Withdrawal from curriculum

Any employee related matters such as complaints and grievances must be dealt with via CBC HR policies and procedures.

Complaints about services provided by third parties who use any of the school premises or facilities should be directed to the provider concerned.

Concerns raised in the media (including social media) will not be taken into account. Shillington and Stondon Federation will only respond to complaints raised in accordance with this document.

No form of physical or verbal abuse towards staff will be tolerated and if there is any danger of this occurring, the police will be notified immediately and the perpetrator may be removed and banned from the sites. They may also face criminal prosecution if any damage is caused.

If at any point during the processes outlined in this policy, the complainant wishes to withdraw their complaint, they must do so in writing.

### **3. Roles and Responsibilities**

#### **3.1 The Complainant**

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

- a. Follow these procedures
- b. Co-operate with the school throughout the process, and respond to deadlines and communication promptly
- c. Treat all those involved with respect
- d. Not share or publish details about the complaint with others or on social media

#### **3.2 The Investigator**

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

- e. Interview all relevant parties, keep notes
- f. Consider records and any written evidence and keep these securely
- g. If not the Head teacher, prepare a comprehensive report for the Head teacher or complaints review panel which includes the facts and potential solutions

#### **3.3 The Complaints Co-ordinator**

The complaints co-ordinator can be the Head teacher, or any other staff member providing administrative support.

The complaints co-ordinator will:

- h. Keep the complainant up to date at each stage of the procedure
- i. Make sure the process runs smoothly by liaising with staff members, the Head teacher, Chair of Governors, Clerk to the Governors (Clerk to the Governors) as appropriate.
- j. Be aware of issues relating to the sharing of third party information and additional support needed by complainants (for example interpretation support or where the complainant is a child or young person)
- k. Keep records

#### **3.4 Clerk to the Governors (Clerk to the Governors)**

The Clerk to the Governors will:

- l. At the point of a review panel, be the contact point for the complainant and the complaints review panel, including circulating the relevant papers and evidence before the panel meetings
- m. Arrange the complaints hearing
- n. Record and circulate the minutes and outcome of the hearing

#### **3.5 Review Panel Chair**

The Chair will:

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

### **4. Principles of Investigation**

When investigating a complaint, we will try to clarify:

- a. What has happened
- b. Who was involved
- c. What the complainant feels would put things right

### **5. Time scales**

The complainant must raise the complaint within 3 months of the incident. If the complaint is about a series of

related incidents, they must raise the complaint within 3 months of the last incident.

Shillington and Stondon Federation will consider exceptions to this time frame in circumstances where there were valid reasons for not making a complaint at that time and the complaint can still be investigated in a fair manner for all involved.

When complaints are made out of term time, they will be considered as received on the next school day.

If at any point the school cannot meet the time scales set out in this policy, the following action will be taken:

- a. Set new time limits with the complainant
- b. Send the complainant details of the new deadline and explain the delay

## **6. Stages of the Process (not including complaints made against the Head teacher)**

### **6.1 Stage 1: Informal Concern**

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

The complainant should raise the concern as soon as possible with the relevant member of staff or Head teacher either in person or by letter, telephone or email. If the complainant is unclear who to contact or how to contact them, they should contact the school offices on 01462 850288 (Stondon) or 01462 711637 (Shillington) or via either office email.

The school will acknowledge informal concern within two school days, and investigate and provide a response within 15 school days. The complainant will be notified how to escalate their concerns if they are not satisfied with the response.

If the matter is not resolved informally, it will be escalated to a formal complaint. If the school do not hear from the complainant within 10 school days, it will be assumed that the matter has been informally resolved.

### **6.2 Stage 2: Formal Complaint**

If the complainant is unhappy with the outcome and wishes to proceed to the next step, a formal complaint can be raised with the school via the following methods.

- By letter or email
- Over the telephone
- In person
- By a third party acting on behalf of the complainant

The complainant should provide details such as relevant dates, times, and the names of witnesses of events, alongside copies of any relevant documents, and what they feel would resolve the complaint. If complainants need assistance raising a formal complaint, they can contact the school offices.

The Headteacher or Complaints Co-ordinator will record the date the complaint is received and will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within two school days.

The Headteacher (or other person as delegated by the Headteacher for this purpose) may assign an appropriate member of staff to conduct an investigation. If the Headteacher has been involved in the informal stage of the process, it may be deemed appropriate for the complaint to be directed to a senior colleague or the Governing Board.

The appointed member of staff investigating the complaint may request a meeting to clarify concerns, and seek a resolution. The complainant may be accompanied to this meeting, and must inform the school of the identity of their companion in advance.

In certain circumstances, the school may need to refuse a request for a particular individual to attend any such meeting – for example, if there is a conflict of interest. If this is the case, the school will notify the complainant

as soon as they are aware, so that the complainant has the opportunity to arrange alternative accompaniment.

Electronic recordings of meetings or conversations are not normally permitted unless a complainant's own disability or special needs require it. Complainants must make sure they obtain consent from all parties present before recording conversations or meetings, and this must be recorded in any minutes.

If the complainant wishes to submit electronic recordings (audio or video) as evidence as part of an investigation, written consent must be provided by all recorded parties. We may accept independently notarised transcriptions of recordings but these must not have been obtained covertly or without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.

The appointed investigator will produce a written report of their investigation. The school will aim to respond to the complainant within 15 school days. The complainant will be notified how to escalate their complaint if they are not satisfied with the response.

If the complainant is not satisfied with the response and wishes to proceed to the next stage of the procedure, they must inform the Clerk to the Governors (Clerk to the Governing Board) within five school days. This can be done via the following methods (contact details below).

- letter or email
- over the phone
- in person
- through a third party acting on behalf of the complainant

Clerk to the Governors

**Email:** [via school offices](#)

**Telephone:** 01462 850288 or 01462 711637

The Clerk to the Governors will need the details of the complaint as set out above, as well as details from the complainant on how they feel the previous stage of the procedure has not addressed their complaint sufficiently, and what they feel would resolve the complaint.

The Clerk to the Governors will acknowledge receipt of the request within two school days.

### **6.3 Stage 3: Review Panel**

#### **Convening the panel**

Complaints will be escalated to the panel hearing stage if the complainant is not satisfied with the response to the complaint at the second, formal, stage.

The panel will be appointed by or on behalf of the proprietor and must consist of at least 3 people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint. At least 1 panel member must be independent of the management and running of the school. The panel cannot be made up solely of the Governing Board members, as they are not independent of the management and running of the school. In accordance with government guidance, this may be a governor from a Governing Board at a different school, who has no conflict of interest or prior knowledge of the complaint.

The panel will have access to the existing record of the complaint's progress.

The complainant must have reasonable notice of the date of the review panel. The Clerk to the Governors will aim to find a date within 15 school days of the request, where possible.

If the complainant rejects the offer of three proposed dates without good reason, the Clerk to the Governors will set a date. The hearing will go ahead using written submissions from both parties.

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

### **At the meeting**

The meeting will be held in private. As per the second, formal, stage, 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 will be sought before meetings or conversations take place. Consent will be recorded in any minutes taken.

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

The complainant must be allowed to attend the panel hearing and be accompanied if they wish. We do not encourage either party to bring legal representation, but will consider it on a case-by-case basis. For instance, if a school employee is called as a witness in a complaint meeting, they may wish to be supported by their union.

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

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

The panel, the complainant and the school representative(s) will be given the chance to ask and reply to questions. Once the complainant and school representative(s) have presented their cases, they will be asked to leave and evidence will then be considered.

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

### **The outcome**

The panel can:

- Uphold the complaint, in whole or in part
- Dismiss the complaint, in whole or in part

If the complaint is upheld, the panel will:

- Decide the appropriate action to resolve the complaint
- Where appropriate, recommend changes to the school's system or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future

The panel will inform those involved of the decision in writing within five school days. The complainant will be informed of any rights appeal.

If the panel/school do not hear from the complainant within 10 school days, it will be assumed that the complaint has been resolved.

## **7. Complaints against a Headteacher, a Governor or Governing Board**

Complaints made about the decisions made by the Headteacher will be dealt with using this complaints procedure. Complaints about the conduct of the Headteacher should be directed to the Chair of Governors.

## **8. Persistent & Vexatious 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 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, refused 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

If the school deems the complaint 'persistent' or 'vexatious', a final response statement will be issued and if further communication is received, the school may decide to stop responding. Where this action is deemed appropriate, the school will notify the individual and explain that only new complaints will be considered.

In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, the school will immediately inform the police and communicate the actions in writing. This may include barring from the school site.

If an individual's behaviour is a cause for concern and a decision to bar an individual from the school is made, the decision will be reviewed by the Chair of Governors. If the Chair confirms that the decision is appropriate, the individual will be notified in writing, explaining:

- How long the bar will be in place
- When the decision will be reviewed

In response to duplicate complaints (such as a complaint on the same subject from a partner, family member or other individual), the school will notify the new complainant that the matter is being or has already been investigated and confirm whether the complaint has been responded to.

In response to complaint campaigns (where the school receives a large volume of complaints about the same topic or subject), the school will publish a single response on the school website and send a template response to all complainants. If complainants are not satisfied with the response, or wish to pursue the complaint further, the normal procedures will apply.

## **9. Record Keeping**

The school will record all complaints, including information about actions taken at all stages 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 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 an inspection.

Records of complaints will be kept securely, only for as long as necessary and in line with Data Protection law, our privacy notices and GDPR policy.

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 schools 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.

## **10. Handling Complaints Fairly**

The schools aim to make sure that complainants are treated fairly and offered a chance to state their case either in person or in writing, at each stage of the procedure.

If the schools have made reasonable attempts to accommodate the complainant with dates for complaint meetings and they refuse or are unable to attend, the schools will:

- convene meetings in their absence
- reach a conclusion in the interests of drawing the complaint to a close.
- If the complainant feels that the governing board acted 'unreasonably' in the handling of the complaint, they can complain to the Department for Education after the complaints procedure has been exhausted. Please note that unreasonable is used in a legal sense and means acting in a way that no reasonable school or authority would act in the same circumstances.
- <https://www.gov.uk/complain-about-school>.
- Ofsted will also consider complaints against schools. They do not, however, look into problems with individual students, such as exclusions or not getting a place at the schools. You can only complain to Ofsted if you have already followed the schools' complaints procedure.  
<https://contact.ofsted.gov.uk/onlinecomplaints>
- For further guidance on these matters parents may seek advice from the Local Authority Tel: 0300 300 8304

## **11. Monitoring**

The Headteacher will monitor the effectiveness of the complaints procedure in ensuring that complaints are handled properly.

This policy will be reviewed annually or as required. At each review, the policy will be approved by the Governing Board

## **12. Links to other policies**

Policies dealing with other forms of complaints include:

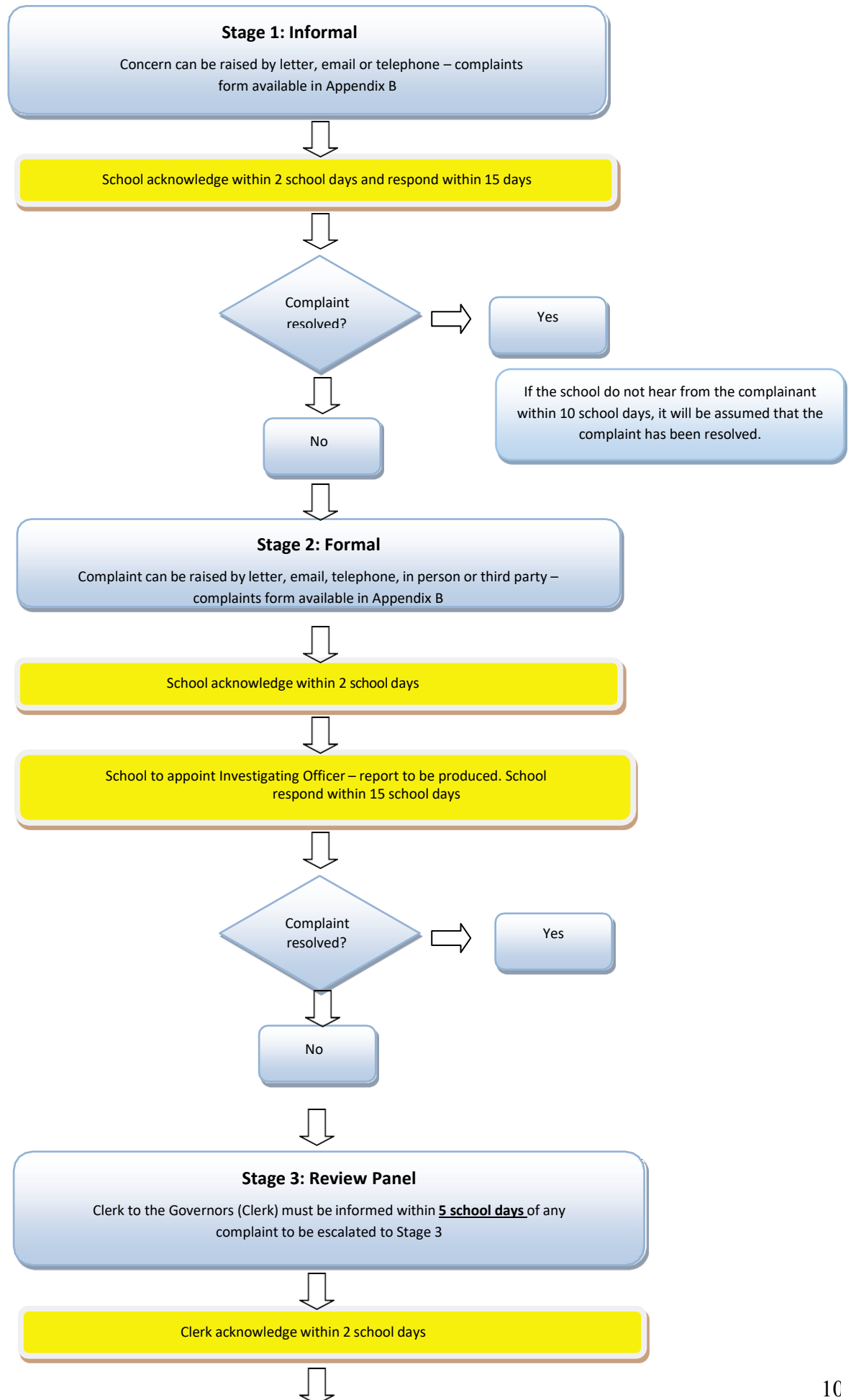
- Safeguarding policy and procedures
- Admission arrangements
- Federation suspensions and permanent exclusion policy
- Freedom of information policy
- Federation SEND policy and information report
- Data protection (GDPR) policy and privacy notices
- CBC's confidential reporting policy (Whistleblowing)
- CBC Capability Procedure – for school Based Employees
- CBC Disciplinary Policy and Procedures - for school based Employess

## **13. Appendices**

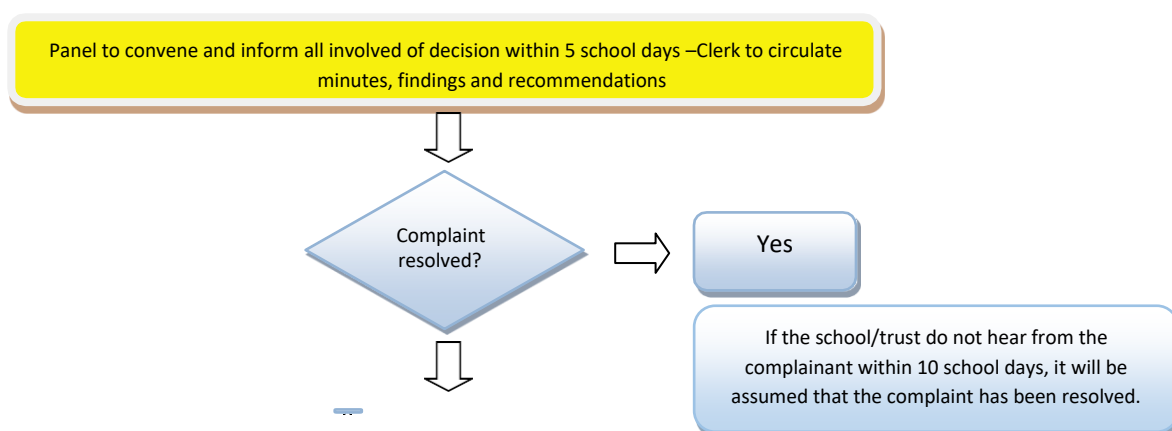
Appendix A – Complaints Procedure Flow Chart

Appendix B – Complaints Form

## Appendix A – Complaints Flowchart



## Appendix A – Complaints Flowchart contd...



If a complaint is not resolved at Stage 3, then a complaint can seek advice from an appropriate external body.

### External Bodies to Contact:

- [Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman \(LGSCO\)](#): This is the primary body to complain to for issues of maladministration (poor handling) that caused you injustice, after exhausting the school's procedure.
- [Department for Education \(DfE\)](#): You can contact the DfE if you believe the school (or trust) acted unlawfully or unreasonably in its duties under education law, though they won't reinvestigate the substance but will check if procedures were followed.
- [Ofsted](#): You can complain to Ofsted about a state school, but they focus on overall effectiveness and specific issues, not usually individual complaint handling unless it points to systemic failure.

## Appendix B – Concern / Complaint Form

\*An electronic version of this form is available via the school offices.

**Please complete and return to the school office.**

*Please tick appropriate box below – complainants are encouraged to try to resolve the complaint informally with the school prior to escalation to formal complaint stage.*

**Informal Concern**

☐

**Formal Complaint**

☐

The Informal Procedure within the Complaints Policy should have been followed before a Formal Complaint is lodged unless:

- the Concern is about the actions of a member of staff
- the Concern places the health, well-being or safety of pupils at risk

**Complainant's name:**

**Pupil/student's name (if applicable):**

**Relationship to the pupil/student:**

**Address:**

**Postcode:**

**Day time telephone number:**

**Evening telephone number:**

**Please give details of concern/complaint:**

**What action, if any, has already been taken to try and resolve this matter (who has been spoken to and what were the response(s)?**

**How can this matter be resolved satisfactorily?**