

The Crossways Schools
'Learning Together, Stronger Together'

Complaints Policy

1) Concerns and Complaints – Introduction

The Crossways Schools aim to work in partnership with parents, carers and other adults in the best interests of the children. Any concerns or complaints will be given careful consideration and will be dealt with fairly and honestly. Complaints are not limited to parents, carers or other adults; any person may make a complaint about the provision of facilities or services a school provides.

We will provide sufficient opportunity for any concerns or complaints to be fully discussed, and aim to resolve it through open dialogue and mutual understanding.

2) Addressing concerns

Our complaints procedure is not intended to replace the normal informal discussions which take place between Parent, carer or other adults, staff and the Executive Head Teacher on problems and concerns as they arise. Most issues can be resolved through constructive dialogue.

These concerns might include such matters as your child's work or progress, relations with staff, relations with other pupils including bullying, or your child's personal welfare.

The first point of contact, regarding concerns, should always be the class teacher. Appointments to see the class teacher are available both before and after school and may be made via the office. Please bear in mind though that teachers require time immediately before school to prepare for the day, and may have involvement with clubs or staff meetings after school, so may not always be available at short notice.

When meeting with the class teacher to raise your concerns, please be patient as the class teacher may need time to perform an investigation or put corrective measures in place and then determine their effectiveness. This informal stage may require several meetings to reach a conclusion satisfactory to all parties. Before or during your meeting, say what you would like to happen to resolve the issue, this might include timescales and further meetings. Appendix 1 shows a form that can be used to record informal discussions/meetings at this stage.

If a Parent, carer or other adult feels that a concern has not been solved through discussions with the class teacher, or that it is of a sufficiently serious nature, then an appointment to discuss it with the Executive Head Teacher should be made. The Parent, carer or other adult should clearly indicate that the appointment is regarding a complaint.

3) Referral of Complaints

The majority of formal complaints against the school will fall within the remit of the Governing Board to consider. However, there are some complaints for which there are separate procedures and the Local Authority will usually become involved.

- Admission to the school
- Statutory Assessment of a child's special educational needs

- Exclusion of pupils from the school
- Concerns or allegations against staff or volunteers
- Child protection
- Whistle Blowing
- Staff Grievances and disciplinary
- Complaints about services provided by other providers

In any of these categories the school will advise you of the procedure for your complaint.

4) General Principles Regarding Any Complaint

The following principles will apply to any complaint

- The complaint will be handled with care and sensitivity.
- All stages of the complaints procedure will be investigatory rather than adversarial
- Confidentiality will be respected at all times
- Responses to any complaint will be prompt (timescales are detailed below)
- The Complainant will be given adequate feedback and kept informed of timescales
- The Complainant will be kept informed of the options to appeal during the process
- Any investigation will be thorough and fair
- Any investigation will address all the points at issue
- At each stage of the process, the complainant will be asked what actions they think might resolve the issue(s)

Timescales for Complaints - Complaints will normally be made within 3 months of the incident, although exceptions will be considered.

A complaint can be made in person, by telephone or in writing. If the complaint is made other than in writing, then notes of the telephone conversation, or notes made from a meeting, together with any response will be kept in order to prevent misunderstandings. The school will also ask the complainant to complete the complaint form in appendix 2 of this policy if it goes to stage 1.

Complainants have the right to request an independent panel. The governors will consider such a request, but it is the governors' decision whether to agree to this.

Complaints about staff other than the Executive Head Teacher will usually be dealt with by the Executive Head Teacher. Complaints about the Executive Head Teacher will usually be dealt with by the Chair of Governors. Those about the Chair of Governors or any individual governor should be put in writing to the Clerk to the Governors.

If any Governor is contacted directly by a Parent, carer or other adult regarding a complaint then that Governor will refer the Parent, carer or other adult to this complaints procedure. Individual Governors cannot act unilaterally by investigating a complaint or making any prior judgement about it. The Governor can only refer the Parent, carer or other adult to the class teacher, the Executive Head Teacher or the Chair of Governors as appropriate.

If the complaint is one that may result in disciplinary or legal action against the Executive Head Teacher, or the complaint is regarding the Executive Head Teacher, then the complaint should immediately be escalated to Stage 2 via a letter or email to the Chair of Governors as described below.

If at any stage of a complaint it becomes apparent that the Complainant is seeking some sort of financial compensation, then any investigation will be halted whilst advice is sought from the Local Authority Risk and Insurance Manager.

If an anonymous complaint is received, or the Complainant requests anonymity, then the Complainant will be urged to identify themselves in the interests of fairness and of dealing effectively with the complaint. However, if the anonymous complaint is of a sufficiently serious nature then the Executive Head Teacher or Chair of Governors will decide whether action is appropriate. If an anonymous complaint raises child protection issues, then the complaint will be referred immediately to the Local Authority.

The Complainant should not attempt to bypass steps in the complaints procedure. Escalation to the Local Authority or Secretary of State levels before the formal school procedures have been exhausted will result in the Complainant being referred back to the schools' procedure by those bodies.

5) Stage 1 - School Level Complaint

Complaint handled by the Executive Head Teacher - If a complainant feels that a concern has not been resolved through discussion with the class teacher, or that it is of a sufficiently serious nature, then an appointment to discuss it with the Executive Head Teacher should be made. The complainant should indicate that the appointment is regarding a complaint. The complainant should complete the stage 1 complaint form noted in appendix 2 below.

If the Executive Head Teacher cannot resolve the complaint at the initial meeting, then the school may carry out an investigation of the complaint. It will be the Executive Head Teacher's responsibility to decide who should conduct the investigation. This may be the Executive Head Teacher or may be a member of the Senior Leadership Team, especially if there is the likelihood of a personnel issue emerging from the investigation.

The investigation will be completed within **10 school days** and a follow on meeting held with the complainant to discuss the results of the investigation will be arranged at a convenient and prompt time after the investigation is complete. Further meetings may be held as required if both parties agree that the concern may be resolved by subsequent meetings.

The Executive Head Teacher or designated lead for the investigation will make written notes of any stage 1 complaint. The notes will include details of the complaint, how it was dealt with, by whom and the outcome. In the event of the complaint proceeding to a further complaint stage, these notes will be made available to the Complaints Panel.

If discussions between the Executive Head Teacher and the Complainant do not resolve the complaint to the Complainant's satisfaction, the Executive Head Teacher will then

advise the Complainant that they may make a formal complaint to the Chair of Governors as part of a stage 2 complaint, by putting the complaint in writing (using the Complaints Form in appendix two) and sending or emailing to the Chair of Governors **within 15 school days** from the final meeting with the Executive Head Teacher under stage 1.

6) Stage 2 – Complaint to the Chair of Governors

Complaint handled by the Chair of Governors – Once the Chair of Governors has received the complaints form from the complainant, the Chair should acknowledge receipt within 10 School Days. The Chair should arrange to meet the complainant at a mutually convenient time and date, but within **20 school days** from receiving the complaints form. Extensions to this timeframe can be made but only if agreed by both complainant and Chair of Governors.

The aim of the meeting is to establish the nature of the complaint, any issues that need investigation, what resolution the complainant would want to see and to establish the next steps. The meeting may resolve the complaint, but if not an investigation will be required.

The investigation will be completed within **10 school days** of the meeting between the complainant and chair of governors noted above. A follow on meeting held with the complainant to discuss the results of the investigation should be arranged once the investigation is complete. Further meetings may be held as required if both parties agree that the concern may be resolved by subsequent meetings.

The Chair of Governors will make notes of any meetings, as well as producing a written report which sets out the aims of the investigation, including any relevant details of the investigation and recommendations.

If the complaint is not resolved following the Chair of Governors investigation, then the complainant can make a stage 3 formal complaint to the Governing Board. This can be made by completing a complaints form (see appendix 2) and should be submitted to the Vice-Chair of Governors.

7) Stage 3 – Complaint to Governing Board

When the Vice-Chair of Governors has received a formal complaint, they will acknowledge receipt of the complaint to the complainant and request written evidence supporting the complaint within **10 school days**. The Vice-Chair of Governors will also form a panel of two or three Governors to hear the complaint, with the aim of making a decision about the complaint on behalf of the Governing Board. The Governors appointed to the panel will have had no previous involvement in the complaint.

All other parties to the complaint will receive a letter outlining the complaint and requesting written evidence. The letters will detail the Governors involved in the Complaints Panel and the nominated Chair (who may not be the vice-chair of governors). Any written evidence should be sent to the nominated Chair of the Complaints Panel. The panel will convene the complaints meetings as soon as is practically possible after the receipt of all written evidence, at mutually acceptable times. Following the conclusion of the complaints meetings with all parties, the panel will provide a written response to the complaint within **15 school days**.

N.B - Where it is not possible to respond to a complaint within the stated timescales, the Complainant will be informed in writing of the reason for the delay and given an anticipated response date.

The primary function of the Complaints Panel is to decide on the merits or otherwise of the complaint. However, the panel will also play an important role in attempting to resolve the complaint. The panel will reach a decision on whether the complaint is upheld or rejected and may call for certain action to be taken by the school or the complainant.

The Complaints Panel will invite written evidence from all parties to the complaint. A timescale for provision of evidence will be mutually agreed. Any written evidence will be circulated to all parties prior to any meetings. The written evidence from the parties will only be provided for the panel. Further written evidence and or clarification may be requested by the panel following any meetings. Evidence submitted after any meeting convened to discuss the complaint by the complainant will only be considered at the discretion of the panel.

The Complaints Panel will then meet with all parties to the complaint, formally and separately. Each party may be accompanied by a friend who can speak on their behalf if necessary. All parties will be given a fair opportunity to express their point. The procedure for each meeting will be as follows

- Introductions will be performed by the Chair of the Complaints Panel
- The Complainant/party to the complaint makes a statement of their complaint/relating to the complaint and the outcome sought
- The panel will question the Complainant/party to the complaint
- The Complainant/party to the complaint may make a final statement

The meetings will be minuted. Care will be taken in identifying a clerk. It may be appropriate for a member of staff such as the school secretary to act as clerk, although consideration will be given to the sensitivity of the particular complaint.

The draft minutes will be circulated to those attending the meetings. Any amendments will be considered by the panel before the minutes are added to the record.

The decision reached by the panel will be notified in writing to the Complainant and any subject(s) of the complaint. It will also be reported back to the next meeting of the full Governing Board. Only a brief summary to the full Governing Board will be provided, with no detailed or named information. This will ensure that any further actions will not be jeopardised.

Written replies to Complainants will aim to answer all the points of concern, be factually correct, avoid jargon, and inform the Complainant about what to do next if they are still not satisfied. It may be appropriate for the nominated complaints governor to telephone the Complainant regarding the outcome. However, this will always be followed up with a letter to make sure there is no misunderstanding.

8) Appeal To The Secretary Of State

A complaint may be made to the Secretary of State for Education if a person believes that a Governing Board or Local Authority is acting unreasonably, or is failing to carry out its statutory duties properly. However, intervention can only occur if the Governing Board has failed to carry out a legal duty or has acted unreasonably in the performance of a duty. Intervention would have to be expedient in the sense that there would have to be something that the Secretary of State could instruct either party to do to put matters right. The Secretary of State must be satisfied that a decision is unreasonable in the sense that no reasonable authority or Governing Board, acting with due regard to its statutory responsibilities, would have reached that decision. The Secretary of State cannot act until the school has finished looking into the complaint. Any appeals should be made using the on-line form on the DfE website.

9) Documentation

Any records relating to a complaint could be subject to Freedom of Information or Data Protection requests.

10) Recording of meetings

Recordings of meetings should only happen with the permission of all those present, but in certain circumstances (disability) may need to be considered.

11) Monitoring and Review

The Governing Board will review this complaints policy every three years. The Executive Head Teacher will log all formal complaints received by the school and will record how they were resolved.

Governors will examine the complaints log on an annual basis and will consider the need for any changes to the procedure.

12) Staff Disciplinary Procedures

It may be necessary to suspend the complaints procedure in respect of a complaint, which indicates that there may be a need for disciplinary action to be taken against a member of staff. The decision to suspend the complaints procedure will be taken when it has been established that there may be a case to answer. In this instance the advice of the Local Authorities Human Resources department will be sought.

The Complainant will be notified that the complaints procedure has been suspended and the likely timescale for its reactivation. The resolution of the complaint will be notified to the Complainant at the conclusion of any disciplinary proceedings. However, the details of any disciplinary proceedings will not be released to the Complainant.

13) School Policy Regarding Harassment or Abusive Behaviour

The Executive Head Teacher and Governing Board are fully committed to the improvement of our school. We welcome feedback from parents/carers and will always try to resolve any concerns as quickly as possible.

Sometimes, however, parents or carers pursuing complaints or other issues may treat staff and others in a way that is unacceptable. Whilst the Governing Board recognises that some complaints may relate to serious and distressing incidents, it will not accept threatening or harassing behaviour towards any members of the school community.

Unreasonable behaviour may include:

- Actions which are out of proportion to the nature of the complaint, persistent – even when the complaints procedure has been exhausted, personally harassing, or unjustifiably repetitious
- An insistence on pursuing unjustified complaints and / or unrealistic outcomes to justified complaints
- An insistence on pursuing justifiable complaints in an unreasonable manner e.g. using abusive or threatening language; or making complaints in public or via social networking sites; or refusing to attend appointments to discuss the complaint.

We regard harassment as the unreasonable pursuit of issues or complaints, particularly, but not limited to, if the matter appears to be pursued in a way intended to cause personal distress rather than to seek a resolution.

Behaviour may fall within the scope of this policy if:

- It appears to be deliberately targeted at one or more members of school staff or others, without good cause;
- The way in which a complaint or other issues is pursued (as opposed to the complaint itself) causes undue distress to school staff or others;
- It has a significant and disproportionately adverse effect on the school community.

The school expects anyone who wishes to raise concerns to:

- Treat all members of the school community with courtesy and respect;
- Respect the needs of pupils and staff within the school;
- Avoid the use of violence, or threats of violence, towards people or property;
- Recognise the time constraints under which members of staff in schools work and allow the school a reasonable time to respond to a complaint;
- Follow the school's complaints procedure.

In cases of unreasonably persistent complaints or harassment, the school may take some or all of the following steps, as appropriate:

- Inform the complainant informally that his/her behaviour is now considered by the school to be unreasonable or unacceptable, and request a changed approach
- Inform the complainant in writing that the school considers his/her behaviour to be unreasonable or unacceptable, and request a changed approach
- Require all future meetings with a member of staff to be conducted with a second person present. In the interests of all parties, notes of these meetings may be taken
- Inform the complainant that, except in emergencies, the school will respond only to written communication and that these may be required to be channelled through the Local Authority

The Governing Board will not tolerate **any** form of physical or verbal aggression against members of the school community. If there is evidence of any such aggression the school may:

- Ban the individual from entering the school site, with immediate effect
- Request an Anti-Social Behaviour Order (ASBO)

- Prosecute under Anti-Harassment legislation
- Call the police to remove the individual from the premises, under powers provided by the Education Act 1996.

Legitimate new complaints will always be considered, even if the person making them is (or has been) subject to action relating to harassment or abusive behaviour. The school nevertheless reserves the right not to respond to communications from individual's subject to the policy.

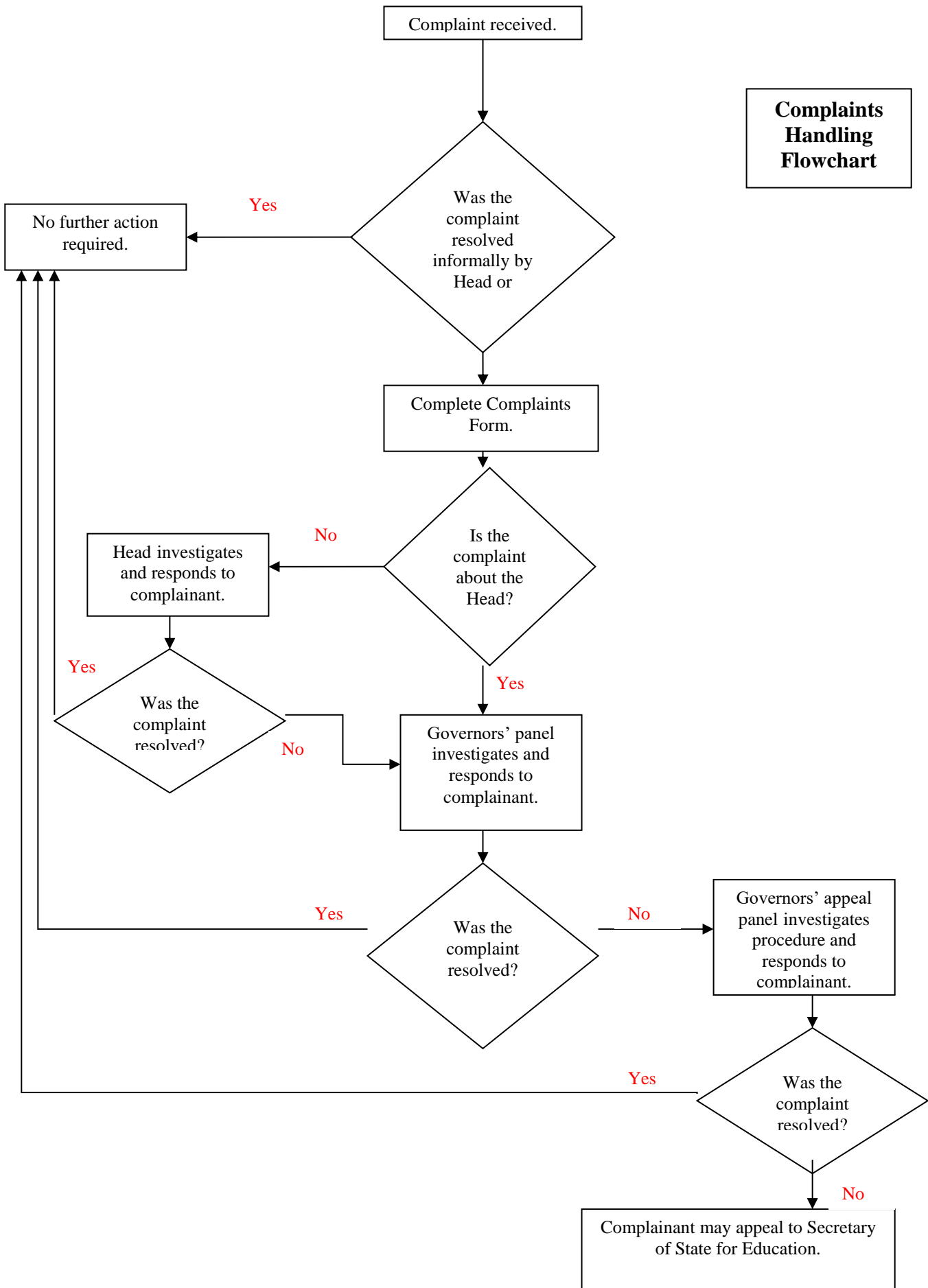
14) Serial and Persistent Complaints

A complaint may become 'serial and persistent' when it has been properly considered and dealt with, but the complainant is not prepared to accept the conclusion or persists in making the same or substantially the same complaint. Continuing with such complaints can unreasonably take up time and resources and detract from the responsibility to others in the school community. If the Chair of Governors judges that a complaint has become vexatious he/she will inform the complainant in writing of this, stating that the matter is now closed.

15) Acknowledgements

The main text of this example policy is based upon a Complaints Policy DfE guidance Best Practice advice for School Complaints Procedures 2016 (DfE Jan 2016). Additional materials have been adapted from National Association of Executive Head Teachers' guidance and South Gloucestershire Council's guidance.

Complaints Handling Flowchart



Appendix 1

Parent, carer or other adult Concern – Meeting/Investigation form

To be completed by a school professional during meeting.

Parent, carer or other adult / Adult Name:

.....

Pupil's name [if relevant to your concern]:

.....

Daytime telephone number:

.....

Evening telephone number:

.....

Concern Details [including dates, names of witnesses etc....], to allow the matter to be fully investigated:

Continue on separate paper, or attach additional documents, if you required.

Number of Additional pages attached =

What actions have already been taken in relation to the concern?
[Who have they spoken or written to and what was the outcome?]

Agreed actions to address the problem at this stage?

Follow Up / Review Meeting Date: -

Signature:	
Date:	

Appendix 2

The Crossways Schools Complaint Form

Please complete this form and return it to the Executive Head Teacher (or Clerk to the Governing Board), who will acknowledge its receipt and inform you of the next stage in the procedure.

Your name:

Relationship with school [e.g. Parent, carer or other adult of a pupil on the schools roll]:
.....

Pupil's name [if relevant to your complaint]:
.....

Your Address:

Daytime telephone number:

Evening telephone number:

Please give concise details of your complaint, [including dates, names of witnesses etc...], to allow the matter to be fully investigated:

You may continue on separate paper, or attach additional documents, if you wish.

Number of Additional pages attached =

What action, if any, have you already taken to try to resolve your complaint? [i.e. who have you spoken with or written to and what was the outcome?]

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

Signature:

Date:

School use:
Date Form received:
Received by:
Date acknowledgement sent:
Acknowledgement sent by:

Complaint referred to:			
Date:			

Appendix 3

Additional Guidance for Governors when Preparing for an Investigation

Where the school receives a formal complaint, it should be acknowledged and a commitment made that the complaint will be investigated and the outcome of the investigation notified to the complainant in due course.

It is essential that there is a clear understanding of the complaint. Where necessary the nature of the complaint should be confirmed with the complainant. e.g. through an initial meeting. (If an investigator is appointed there may need to be more detailed follow-up.)

Any member of staff against whom a complaint has been made, should be notified that a complaint has been received and that the appropriate school procedure will be followed. It is usually not appropriate to provide the member of staff with details of the evidence on which the complaint is based until any investigation has been completed. However, the member of staff does need to be able to understand the nature of any allegations against them.

Once any complaint has been confirmed the school needs to determine which procedure (school or LA) is most appropriate and to select an appropriate person to conduct any investigation.

Conducting the investigation

The investigation must be carried out in accordance with the provisions of the relevant procedure.

Arrangements should be agreed so that accurate notes can be taken of all interviews and the outcome of the investigation be accurately recorded.

The complainant should be given the opportunity to offer documentation and to identify potential witnesses or sources of evidence.

The member of staff subject to the complaint should be advised that they may be accompanied by a friend or trade union representative when invited to be interviewed.

Where children are potential witnesses, discretion should be exercised over their involvement. Pupils should only be interviewed when the nature of the complaint is sufficiently serious to warrant it and adult witnesses are not available. Only in extreme circumstances will younger pupils be interviewed.

Any interviews should be conducted as soon as possible to ensure that recollections are as fresh as possible and to minimise the possibility that evidence will become tainted through witnesses discussing alleged incidents with other persons.

In conducting interviews, the investigator should prepare the questions to be asked prior to the interview. These can always be supplemented during the interview. The investigator should allow the interviewee to answer in their own way. Their responses should be listened to attentively. Any temptation to cut an interviewee short or to seek to "lead" them must be resisted. The interviewee should be given the opportunity of providing other relevant information at the end of the interview.

Interviewees should, however, be advised that their responses must be confined to the substance of the complaint. Any attempt by the interviewee to introduce information relating to other members of staff or to issues unrelated to the complaint should be resisted.

The investigator should avoid reaching conclusions or passing judgement until the investigation has been completed and their report is being written.

Concluding the investigation

The report may contain:

- a brief outline of the process that has been followed
- a statement of the complaint/concern
- a summary of the findings, linked to the relevant evidence
- any recommendations for future action
- annexes containing copies of witness statements and other evidence collected during the investigation

The report of the investigation will usually be confidential to the school, as it is likely to contain sensitive personal information. If a request is received to release the report, under either the Data Protection Act or Freedom of Information, the school should seek legal advice from the LA.

A summary of the process undertaken and the outcome of the investigation may be provided to the complainant. Caution must be exercised in reporting back to the complainant as revealing certain details may prejudice the ability of an employee to continue in post.

Following consideration of the report by the relevant body, any final recommendations may also be shared with the parties, unless there is good reason not to do. Wherever possible, recommendations should be constructive and not punitive.

The complainant should be advised that he/she may, if they are not satisfied that the appropriate procedure has been followed, request a review of that process by the Governing Board.

Taken from the National Association of Executive Head Teachers Policy and Guidance (2012).

Appendix 4 – Plain English Version: Prospectus or Website Page

What should you do if you have a query or aren't happy about something?

If there is something you don't understand or you are not happy about, please come in and see us. You can discuss this with the class teacher or other appropriate member of staff, such as the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENDSCO) if it is about special needs.

The beginning and end of the school day is a very busy time for class teachers, who usually have a class of children to welcome, so you may need to be flexible when arranging a time to meet. In some cases, you may need to make an appointment to see either the Deputy Head Teacher or Executive Head Teacher.

We know that it can feel uncomfortable to question or challenge, but if you don't tell us what is worrying you we cannot explain what we are doing or try to put it right.

If you feel you need to complain when you've discussed your query or concern there is a form you'll need to use. (The school office and Clerk to the Governing Board have copies of this form and guidance for making a complaint.)

If you make a complaint using the complaints form this is what will happen:

- You will receive a response within ten school working days, even if this is just a courtesy call to acknowledge receipt of the complaint
- Your complaint will be dealt with honestly, politely and in confidence
- Your complaint will be looked into thoroughly and fairly
- If your complaint is urgent we will deal with it more quickly
- We will keep you up to date with progress at each stage
- You will get an apology if we have made a mistake
- You will be told what we are going to do to put things right
- You will get a full and clear written reply to formal complaints within 15 school days of the complaint being heard
- The Executive Head Teacher will keep a copy of all complaints made in a complaints log.