



# Complaints Policy and Procedure

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## **1. Purpose of Policy**

Bohunt Education Trust (the Trust) has introduced this Policy to set out the framework by which member schools and the Trust work with complainants under this Policy to resolve, in as timely a manner as possible, concerns or complaints raised with member schools. This Policy is designed to enable those who raise concerns to feel confident that they will be treated seriously, and that member schools are committed to resolving complaints and concerns constructively. The primary principle underlying this Policy is that it is always in the best interests of the child or young person in the member school that those raising concerns/complaints and schools maintain or as necessary -rebuild a working relationship of trust and to work to agree mutually satisfactory outcomes in a timely and practical manner.

## **2. Legislation and Guidance**

This Policy complies with and discharges the Trust's legal duties with respect to:

- Education (Independent Schools Standards) Regulations 2014
- Keeping Children Safe in Education
- National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools

This policy also complies with our funding agreement and articles of association.

## **3. Equalities Assessment Impact Statement**

The Trust is committed to treating all people equally and with respect irrespective of their age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy or maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, or sexual orientation. We are committed to eliminating discrimination and recognise children's diverse circumstances. We ensure that we comply with our duties under the Equality Act 2010. We have reviewed the effect of this policy on those who may face additional or different barriers to securing its benefits than the population as a whole and have identified the following:

- Those for whom reasonable adjustments are required in order to ensure they are able to access and participate in all stages of this policy.

All correspondence relating to formal stages of the Policy invites recipients to inform the correspondent of any needs they reasonable adjustments that the recipient would like put in place: this may include step free access to meeting rooms if possible, or a translator, participation by remote means, large scale print or other support including assistance with preparation of written material within reason.

## **4. Procedures and Provisions**

### **4.1. 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 opportunity. Many issues can be resolved informally, without the need to use the formal stages of the complaints procedure. Bohunt Education Trust member schools take 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, we will respect your views. In these cases, the headteacher, or a member of the senior leadership team 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, or may not be, more senior. The ability to consider the concern objectively and impartially is important to us.

We understand, however, that there are occasions when people would like to raise their concerns formally. In this case, Bohunt Education Trust will attempt to resolve the issue internally, through the stages outlined within this complaints procedure.

#### **4.2. How to raise a concern or make a complaint**

A concern or complaint can be made in person or in writing.

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 Neil Strowger, CEO. 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 CEO.

Complaints about the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) or a trustee of the Trust, should be addressed to the Chair of the Trust.

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 school office. 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.

#### **4.3. Anonymous complaints**

We will not normally investigate anonymous complaints. However, the headteacher, CEO, or Trust Lead for Governance, if appropriate, will determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation.

#### 4.4. Time scales

You must raise the complaint within three months of the incident or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within three months of the last of these incidents. We will consider complaints made outside of this time frame if exceptional circumstances apply.

#### 4.5. Complaints received outside of term time

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

#### 4.6. Scope of this complaints procedure

This procedure covers all complaints about any provision of services by Bohunt Education 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 handled 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 our 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 or the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)
Exclusion of children from school*	Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at: <a href="http://www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions">www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions</a> . *complaints about the application of the <a href="#">behaviour policy</a> can be made through the school's complaints procedure.
Whistleblowing	We have an internal whistleblowing procedure for all our employees, including temporary staff and contractors. 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: <a href="http://www.education.gov.uk/contactus">www.education.gov.uk/contactus</a> . Volunteer staff who have concerns about our school should complain through the school's complaints procedure.
Staff grievances	Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the school's internal grievance procedures.
Staff conduct	Complaints about staff will be dealt with under the school's internal disciplinary procedures, if appropriate. 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 has been addressed.
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If other bodies are investigating aspects of the complaint, for example the Police, local authority (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 this happens, we will inform you of a proposed new timescale.

If a complainant commences legal action against Bohunt Education Trust in relation to their complaint, we will consider whether to suspend the complaints procedure until those legal proceedings have concluded.

#### **4.7. Resolving complaints**

At each stage in the procedure, Bohunt Education Trust wants to resolve the complaint. If appropriate, we will acknowledge that the complaint is upheld in whole or in part or rejected. In addition, we may offer one or more of the following:

- 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.

#### **4.8. Complaint Campaign**

Occasionally, a member school(s) or Trust may become the focus of a campaign and receive large volumes of complaints:

- All based on the same subject and /or
- From complainants unconnected with the school.

Such complaints may be written in the same wording, format or content, or may differ in detail but continue to be focussed on the same subject.

In these circumstances, the member school(s) or Trust reserve the right not to reply to each complaint individually. They may publish a single response as appropriate.

#### **4.9. Withdrawal of a complaint**

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

### **5. Complaints Process**

#### **5.1. Stage 1 – Informal complaints**

It is hoped that most concerns can be expressed and resolved on an informal basis.

Concerns should be raised with either the tutor, year head / subject head or headteacher. Complainants should not approach individual governors to raise concerns or complaints. They have

no power to act on an individual basis and it may also prevent them from considering complaints at Stage 4 of the procedure.

Generally, a written follow up setting out the resolution will be provided. This stage should be used until it has exhausted all potential solutions and compromises to achieve mutually agreed outcomes.

There is no restriction on the number of times or amount of time that the Informal Process can be used.

If the issue remains unresolved, the next step is to make a formal complaint.

## **5.2. Stage 2 – Formal complaint investigated by a member of School Staff**

If the complainant is unhappy with the way in which the concern was dealt with at Stage 1, then the complainant should raise the complaint as a stage 2 complaint. Stage 2 complaints must be made to the headteacher's PA (unless they are about the headteacher). This may be done in person or in writing (preferably on 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 headteacher will identify who the complaint investigator will be. The investigator will then make contact to seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, ask what remains unresolved and what outcome the complainant would like to see.

During the investigation, the 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 investigator will provide a formal written response within 15 school days of the date of receipt of the complaint.

If the investigator 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 for the school to take that will resolve the complaint.

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

## **5.3. Stage 3 – Formal complaint investigated by the Headteacher/ Bohunt Trust Lead**

If the complainant is unhappy with the way in which the concern was dealt with at Stage 2, then the complainant should raise the complaint as a stage 3 complaint. Stage 3 complaints must be made to

the headteacher's PA (unless they are about the headteacher), This may be done in person or in writing (preferably on the Complaint Form). They must outline clearly, how the complaint has not been addressed under stage 2 and what they are looking for in terms of reconciliation that has not already been offered if applicable.

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

During the investigation, the headteacher will:

- Review the process, information, records and outcome of the stage 2 complaint
- 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 15 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 School 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 3.

If the complaint is about the headteacher, the CEO in liaison with the Trust Governance Lead will appoint a suitable person to complete all the actions at Stage 3.

The investigator will advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 3. If a complaint wishes to escalate a complaint to stage 4, then they must outline clearly, how the complaint has not been addressed under stage 3 and what they are looking for in terms of reconciliation that has not already been offered if applicable.

Anything new that has not been mentioned previously as part of the complaint is not a reason for escalation.

#### **5.4. Stage 4 – Panel Hearing**

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome at Stage 3 and wishes to take the matter further, they can escalate the complaint to Stage 4 – a panel hearing consisting of at least three governors or



trustees who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint. This is the final stage of the complaints procedure.

A request to escalate to Stage 4 must be made to the Trust Governance Lead within 10 school days of receipt of the Stage 3 response.

The Trust Governance Lead 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.

Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.

The Trust Governance Lead will write to the complainant to inform them of the date of the panel meeting. They will aim to convene a meeting within 25 school days of receipt of the Stage 4 request. If this is not possible, they will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed.

If the complainant rejects the offer of three proposed dates, without good reason, the Trust Governance Lead 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.

A complainant may bring someone along to the panel meeting to provide support. This can be a relative or friend. Generally, we do not encourage either party 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.

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

At least 10 school days before the meeting, the Trust Governance Lead will:

- confirm and notify the complainant of the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that, if the complainant is invited, the dates are convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible
- request copies of any further written material to be submitted to the committee at least 7 school days before the meeting.

Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least 5 school days before the date of the meeting. The committee will not normally accept, as evidence, recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.

The committee will also 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 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 committee will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented. The committee 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 committee 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 Committee will provide the complainant and Bohunt Education Trust with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within 10 school days.

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 by Bohunt Education Trust.

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 Bohunt Education 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 headteacher and CEO.

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, along with what actions have been taken, regardless of the decision.

All correspondence statements and records relating to individual complaints are confidential, except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the 2008 Act requests access to them.

### **5.5. Complaints about the CEO**

If the complaint concerns the CEO or a Trustee, the complaint should be investigated by the Chair of the Trust Board. If a formal complaint form is received about the Chair, the complaint will be referred to the Vice Chair for investigation

Where the Chair of the Trust Board has investigated the complaint, they will write the letter of outcome to the Complainant and provide a copy to the CEO.

If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of the previous stage, the complainant should write to the Trust Governance Lead asking for the complaint to be heard before a Complaint Panel under stage 4, within 15 school days.

The Trust Governance Lead 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.

Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.

The Trust Governance Lead will write to the complainant to inform them of the date of the meeting. They will aim to convene a meeting within 25 school days of receipt of the Stage 3 request. If this is not possible, the Trust Governance Lead will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed.

If the complainant rejects the offer of three proposed dates, without good reason, the Trust Governance Lead 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.

The Complaint Panel will consist of three members. None of the three members of the Complaint Panel will have been involved in the incidents or events which led to the complaint, or have been involved in dealing with the complaint in the previous stages, or have any detailed prior knowledge of the complaint.

One of the Complaint Panel members will be independent of the management and running of the Academy Trust. This means that the independent Complaint Panel member will not be a Trustee or an employee of the Trust.

A complainant may bring someone along to the panel meeting to provide support. This can be a relative or friend. Generally, we do not encourage either party to bring legal representatives to the committee meeting. However, there may be occasions when legal representation is appropriate. For instance, if a trust employee is called as a witness in a complaint meeting, they may wish to be supported by union and/or legal representation.

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

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 staff disciplinary procedures, if appropriate, but outcomes will not be shared with them.

At least 10 school days before the meeting, the Trust Governance Lead will:

- confirm and notify the complainant of the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that, if the complainant is invited, the dates are convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible
- request copies of any further written material to be submitted to the committee at least 7 school days before the meeting.

Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least 5 school days before the date of the meeting. The committee will not normally accept, as evidence, recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.

The committee will also 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 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 committee will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented. The committee 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 committee 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 Committee will provide the complainant and Bohunt Education Trust with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within 10 school days.

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 by the Trust.

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 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 headteacher.

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, along with what actions have been taken, regardless of the decision.

All correspondence statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential, except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the 2008 Act requests access to them.

## 5.6. Next Steps

If the complainant believes the school / 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 Trust. They will consider whether the 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](http://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

## 6. Anonymous Complaints

As the purpose of this policy is to achieve resolution of any outstanding concern or complaint, the Trust cannot accept anonymous complaints and will not normally investigate an anonymous complaint. The Trust or School may consider any consequences arising from the complaint, in their absolute discretion. If you have a concern but do not wish to raise it as a concern or complaint, you may contact the Head's PA or Trust Governance Lead for further guidance, including the extent to which confidentiality can be offered.

## 7. Records

All member schools will ensure that they log all complaints raised at Formal Complaint Resolution Stage 1 and above in accordance with the Trust's processes and procedures as advised to Schools from time to time so as to ensure that the Trust keeps a formal central record of all concerns and complaints received and addressed at Formal Complaint Resolution Stage 1 and above in accordance with paragraph 33 of Section 7 of the Schedule to the Education (Independent Schools Standards) Regulations 2014. The log will identify whether the complaint was resolved at each relevant stage, or proceeded to the next stage in the procedure; and any action taken by the Member School or the Trust as a result of complaints regardless of whether they are upheld.

All records of complaints and concerns around Boarding Provision at Steyning Grammar School including those received on a Blue Form will be identified as relating to Boarding Provision on the Member School's written record.

## 8. Confidentiality

The Member School and Trust will keep all correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints confidential, except where the Secretary of State or a body authorised to

conduct a school inspection requests access to them under section 109 of the 2008 Act or any person is entitled to personal information under the Data Protection Act 2018.

## **9. Training for staff, volunteers, governors/Trustees**

All staff will receive training and development as follows:

- Trustees and governors participating in panels: specific training provided by Governance Team
- All staff are trained by their line managers to work constructively and effectively to resolve concerns and complaints at Informal Complaint Resolution Process.
- Staff engaged in Stage 1-3 Formal Complaints Resolution process will receive training as determined by their Headteacher.

## **10. Monitoring provisions**

The Board's Audit Committee will review this policy annually. Each Local Governing Body receives a termly report identifying all complaints raised at Formal Complaint Resolution Stage 1 and above that term, as well as cumulatively year on year over each three-year period. The Board of Trustees receives an annual report from the CEO showing all complaints at Stage 2 and above in the same terms across the Trust as a whole.

All information is anonymised in full; governors and trustees receive information around nature of complaint, and the outcome, and any learning taken from the complaint or concern and how the School and/or Trust are implementing and monitoring outcomes and learning

## **11. Links to other policies**

This Policy links to:

- Safeguarding and Child Protection
- Whistleblowing Policy
- Admissions Policies
- Anti-Bullying, Bribery and Corruption Policy
- Unreasonable and Vexatious Complaints Policy

## Appendix I Complaint Form

Please complete and return to the member school headteacher's PA who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

<b>Your name:</b>
<b>Pupil's name (if relevant):</b>
<b>Your relationship to the pupil (if relevant):</b>
<b>Address:</b>     <b>Postcode:</b> <b>Telephone:</b> <b>Email address:</b>
<b>Please give details of your complaint, including whether you have spoken to anybody at the school about it.</b>

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

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

**Signature:**

**Date:**



## Appendix 2 - 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 headteacher or complaints committee that sets out the facts, identifies solutions and recommends courses of action to resolve problems.
- The headteacher 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

The complaints co-ordinator should:

- ensure that the complainant is fully updated at each stage of the procedure
- liaise with staff members, headteacher, CEO, Chair of Governors, Chair of Trust 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.

### Trust Governance Lead / Trust Board

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.

### Panel 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).

### Panel Member

Committee members should be aware that:

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

No governor / trustee 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.