

# Children's Services

# PANSHANGER PRIMARY


# SCHOOL

## PROCEDURES FOR DEALING WITH SCHOOL BASED COMPLAINTS

Guidelines and suggested best practice for Headteachers and Governing Bodies of Community, Voluntary-Controlled, Voluntary-Aided, Foundation and Trust schools

(Headteachers and Governing Bodies of Academies, Free Schools, Studio Schools and University Technical Colleges should obtain guidance on complaints handling from the Education Funding Agency as they are independent schools. Guidance is available at the following link:

[www.gov.uk/government/publications/setting-up-an-academies-complaints-procedure/putting-in-place-a-complaints-procedure](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/setting-up-an-academies-complaints-procedure/putting-in-place-a-complaints-procedure))

PUBLICATION SCHEDULE NUMBER:	CS4288
ISSUE NUMBER:	7
PUBLICATION DATE:	JULY 2015
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AUTHORISING OFFICER'S SIGNATURE:	
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POST:	COMPLAINTS OFFICER
REVIEW DATE:	JULY 2017
TARGET AUDIENCE:	HEADTEACHERS & GOVERNORS
PUBLISHED BY:	CHILDREN'S SERVICES



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### **Special notes**

- This is not a policy. It is in fact a document outlining model procedures for handling complaints that Community, Voluntary-Controlled, Voluntary-Aided, Foundation and Trust schools may elect to adopt. Schools that choose not to adopt and follow this guidance must still have a complaints procedure that has been approved by Governors and publicised to parents. For example Church of England schools and Catholic schools may elect to adopt and follow diocesan guidance instead.
- Whilst every effort has been made to make these model procedures as comprehensive as possible, the guidance and suggested best practice contained within this document is not exhaustive.
- Each school should ensure that it drafts, approves, adopts and publishes its own complaints procedure based on the guidance and suggested best practice contained within this document. The document featured on pages 5 – 8 is a suggested template to assist schools in doing this.

# Panshanger Primary School

## Complaints Policy

How we will deal with your concerns

### HOW TO COMMENT OR COMPLAIN

#### We care about what you think

Each day this school makes many decisions and tries hard to do the best for all the children. Your comments - either positive or negative - are helpful for future planning.

You may want to talk to us about a particular aspect of this school, though not actually make a complaint - you just want to get something 'off your chest'.

If you are dissatisfied about the way your child is being treated, or any actions or lack of action by us, please feel free to contact us using the details listed above.

#### Our aims

- 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 **28 school days (5½ weeks)**.

#### How to make a complaint

##### In the first instance – informal stage

If you have a concern about anything we do, or if you wish to make a complaint, you can do this by telephone, in person or in writing (by letter or email). We hope that most complaints can be settled quickly and informally, either by putting matters right or by giving you an explanation. If there is something you are not happy about, or you don't understand why we are doing something in a particular way, please come in and discuss it with the class teacher or another appropriate member of staff, such as the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCo) if it is about Special Needs.

We know that it can feel uncomfortable to question or challenge something, 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 the member of staff you speak to in the first instance is unable to attempt to resolve the matter, you should make an appointment with the Headteacher. You should be able to sort out your worries but sometimes this is not possible. In this case there is a next step.

## **First - formal stage**

**Request a meeting with the Headteacher** who will investigate your complaint and aim to inform you of the outcome **within 10 school days (2 weeks)**.

If your first contact is with individual Governors, they will advise you to take up your concerns with the appropriate member of staff or Headteacher. A Governor should not be made aware of a potential complaint as they may be required to sit on a Panel in the event of a formal hearing (Stage Two) and should be impartial.

If your complaint is about the Headteacher, you should **write to the Chair of Governors**. If your child has a Statement of Special Educational Needs (SEN) or an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) you might find it helpful to talk to our Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCo) or your child's named Special Needs Officer at the Local Authority. The SEND Information Advice and Support Service (SENDIASS – formerly Parent Partnership) may also be able to help you.

## **Second - formal stage**

If you remain dissatisfied following Stage 1 and wish to take your complaint further, you will be asked to complete a form or write a letter addressed to the Chair of Governors. In the letter you should:

- Make it clear why you are complaining.
- Say who you have spoken to already.
- Explain what you want to happen as a result of your complaint.

The Chair of Governors will arrange for your complaint to be considered and investigated under the arrangements approved by the Governing Body. This is likely to involve a Panel of Governors. If the Chair of Governors or another Governor has been involved in discussions to help settle the disagreement at Stage 1, s/he should arrange for another Governor to take charge of the investigation. The Governor in charge of investigating the complaint may ask to meet you to discuss your concerns.

You should make sure that the Governors' Complaint Panel is provided with any written information or evidence you intend to use in a formal hearing. You may bring a friend, representative or interpreter to any meeting if you wish. The Chair of the Panel may invite any person who may help establish the facts of the complaint. The Chair should tell you who this person is before the meeting. If any member of staff is required by the Governing Body to attend a meeting they will have the opportunity to be accompanied or represented as they wish. A member of staff named in a complaint may also choose to attend a meeting, even if not required to do so by the Governors. They may be represented. If this happens, we will inform you in advance.

When the Panel has fully investigated your complaint, the Chair of the Panel or the Governor in charge of the investigation will write to you to tell you the findings. These findings will be reported to the Governing Body. The Chair of Governors will then write to you confirming the outcome of your complaint and any agreed actions to be taken. Our Governing Body will aim to deal with your complaint **within 28 school days (5½ weeks)**.

## Further recourse

Most complaints are resolved by this process. Should your complaint not be resolved, your further options are as follows:

- You may complain to the Diocese  
(If the school is a Church of England or Catholic school – delete as appropriate)

### ***For Roman Catholic schools:***

The Director of the Education Service, Diocese of Westminster, Vaughan House, 46 Francis Street, London, SW1P 1QN. Email: [education@rcdow.org.uk](mailto:education@rcdow.org.uk), Website: [www.rcdow.org.uk](http://www.rcdow.org.uk). Telephone: 020 7798 9005.

### ***For Church of England schools:***

The Diocesan Director of Education, Diocesan Office, Holywell Lodge, 41 Holywell Hill, St Albans, AL1 1HE. Email: [schools@stalbans.anglican.org](mailto:schools@stalbans.anglican.org), Website: [www.stalbans.anglican.org](http://www.stalbans.anglican.org). Telephone: 01727 818170.

- You can complain to the Secretary of State at the Department for Education:

The Secretary of State  
Department for Education  
Sanctuary Buildings  
Great Smith Street  
London  
SW1P 3BT  
Website: [www.education.gov.uk](http://www.education.gov.uk)  
Telephone: 0370 000 2288

In the case of complaints about **Special Educational Needs provision**, you may complain further to the Local Authority. This should be done by writing to the Children's Services Complaints Manager.

It should be noted however that if you wish to pursue this route, you must do so within **20 working days (4 weeks)** of receiving the written outcome of the hearing into your complaint. After **20 working days (4 weeks)**, neither the school nor the Local Authority is under any obligation to investigate or progress your complaint any further.

## Useful contacts

### **Advisory Centre for Education**

Education Advice & Training  
72 Durnsford Road  
London  
N11 2EJ  
Web: [www.ace-ed.org.uk](http://www.ace-ed.org.uk)  
Phone: **0300 0115 142**

### **POhWER**

Hertlands House  
Primett Road  
Stevenage  
SG1 3EE  
Web: [www.pohwer.net](http://www.pohwer.net)  
Phone: **0300 456 2370**

### **Children's Legal Centre**

### **National Youth Advocacy Service**

Riverside Office Centre  
Century House North  
North Station Road  
Colchester  
Essex  
CO1 1RE  
Web: [www.childrenslegalcentre.com](http://www.childrenslegalcentre.com)  
Phone: **0345 345 4345**

(NYAS)  
Egerton House  
Tower Road  
Birkenhead  
Wirral  
CH41 1FN  
Web: [www.nyas.net](http://www.nyas.net)  
Phone: **0345 345 4345**

**SENDIASS** (Special Educational Needs & Disability Information Advice Support Service – formerly Parent Partnership)

Registry Office Block  
CHR102  
County Hall  
Hertford  
SG13 8DF  
Web: [www.hertsdirect.org/parentpartnership](http://www.hertsdirect.org/parentpartnership)  
Email: [parent.partnership@hertfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:parent.partnership@hertfordshire.gov.uk)  
Phone: **01992 555847**

**Family Lives  
(Formerly Parentline Plus)**

15-17 The Broadway  
Hatfield  
Hertfordshire  
AL9 5HZ  
Web: [www.familylives.org.uk](http://www.familylives.org.uk)  
Phone: **0808 800 2222**

**General Principles of complaints**

***Some text extracted from ‘School Complaints Procedure’ document (DCSF – now DFE)***

**Dealing with Complaints – Initial concerns**

1. Schools need to be clear about the difference between a concern and a complaint. A concern can be defined as a cause of worry, whilst a complaint can be defined as an expression of dissatisfaction. Taking informal concerns seriously at the earliest stage will reduce the numbers that develop into formal complaints.
2. These key messages deal with complaints but the underlying principle is that concerns ought to be handled, if at all possible, without the need for formal procedures. The requirement to have a complaints procedure need not in any way undermine efforts to resolve the concern informally. In most cases the class teacher or the individual delivering the service in the case of extended school provision, will receive the first approach. It would be helpful if Staff were able to resolve issues on the spot, including apologising where necessary.

*Schools may also wish to meet with Parents if that would help resolve the issue.*

*Similarly Parents can be given details of support organisations that may be able to impartially discuss their concerns with them.*

### **Dealing with Complaints – Formal procedures**

3. The formal procedures will need to be invoked when initial attempts to resolve the issue are unsuccessful and the person raising the concern remains dissatisfied and wishes to take the matter further.

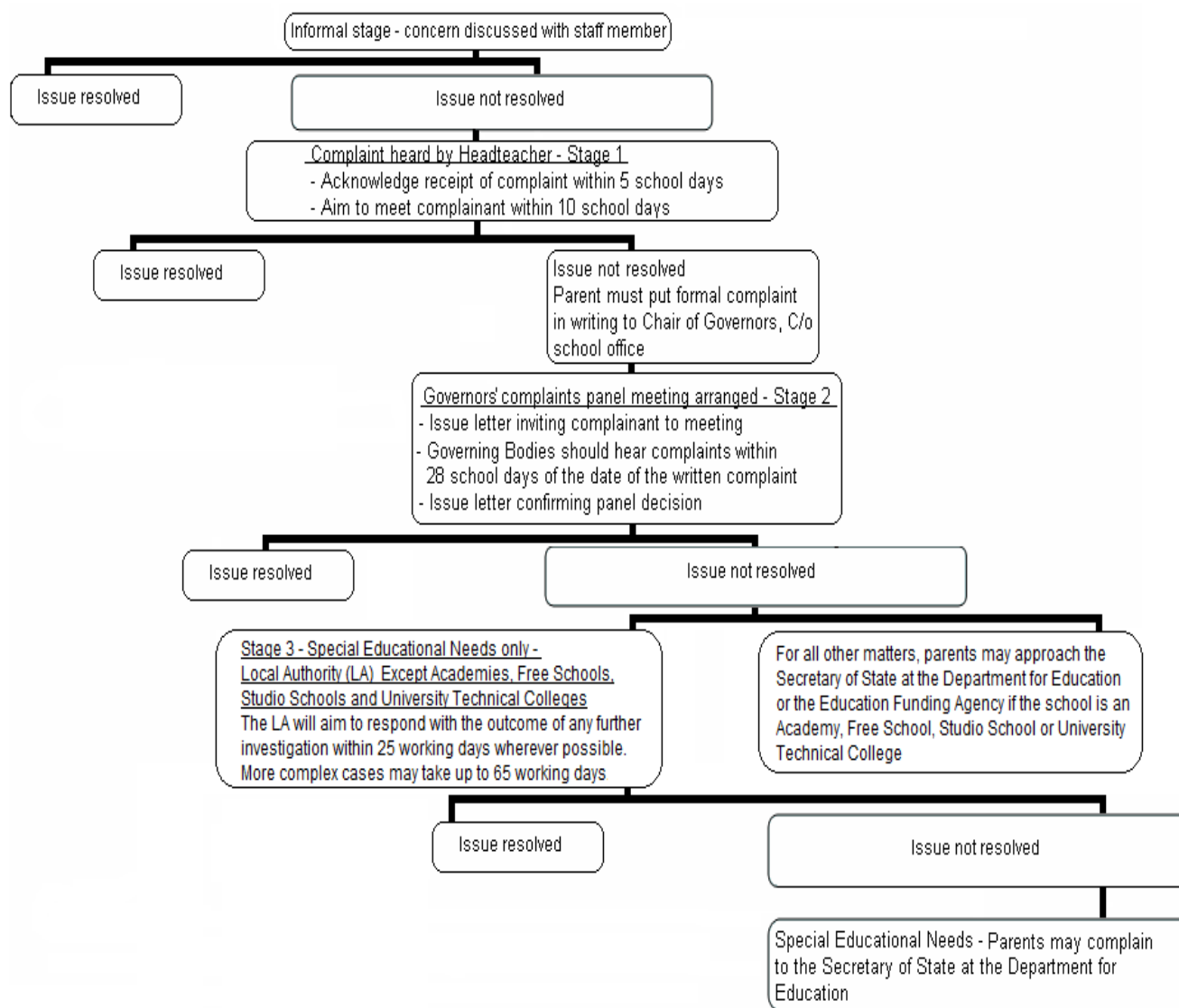
4. Schools might wish to nominate a member of Staff to have responsibility for the operation and management of the school complaints procedure. They could be termed the school's 'Complaints Co-ordinator'. In smaller schools this may often be the Headteacher.

### **Flowchart - Summary of Dealing with Complaints**

Please see next page.

### **Dealing with complaints**





Please note that the timescales specified in diocesan complaints guidance may differ from those detailed above. School days are term time only, whilst working days are weekdays throughout the year.

### **Framework of Principles**

5. An effective Complaints Procedure will:

- encourage resolution of problems by **informal** means wherever possible;
- be easily **accessible** and **publicised**;
- be **simple** to understand and use;
- be **impartial**;
- be **non-adversarial**;
- allow **swift** handling with established **time-limits** for action and keeping people informed of the progress;
- ensure a full and **fair** investigation by an independent person where necessary;
- respect people's desire for **confidentiality**;
- address all the points at issue and provide an **effective** response and **appropriate** redress, where necessary;

- provide **information** to the school's Senior Management Team so that services can be improved.

### **Investigating Complaints**

6. It is suggested that at each stage, the person investigating the complaint (the Complaints Co-ordinator), makes sure that they:

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

### **Resolving Complaints**

7. Prior to a complaint being escalated to involve a formal hearing, schools will want to keep in mind ways in which a complaint can be resolved. It might be sufficient to acknowledge that the complaint is valid in whole or in part. In addition, it may be appropriate to offer one or more of the following:

- an apology;
- an explanation;
- an admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better;
- an assurance that the event complained of will not recur;
- an explanation of the steps that have been taken to ensure that it will not happen again;
- an undertaking to review school policies in light of the complaint.

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

9. An effective complaints procedure will identify areas of agreement between the parties. It is also of equal importance to clarify any misunderstandings that might have occurred as this can create a positive atmosphere in which to discuss any outstanding issues.

### **Vexatious Complaints**

10. If properly followed, a good complaints procedure will limit the number of complaints that become protracted. However, there will be occasions when, despite all stages of the procedure having been followed, the complainant remains dissatisfied. A vexatious complaint is likely to involve some or all of the following:

- the complaint arises from a historic and irreversible decision or incident;
- contact with the school is frequent, lengthy, complicated and stressful for Staff;
- the complainant behaves in an aggressive manner to Staff when he/she presents his/her complaint or is verbally abusive or threatening;
- the complainant changes aspects of the complaint partway through the complaint process;
- the complainant makes and breaks contact with the school on an ongoing basis; or
- the complainant persistently approaches the school (and in some cases the Local Authority) through different routes about the same issue in the hope of eliciting different responses.

If the situation is challenging but it is possible to proceed, Staff should avoid giving unrealistic expectations on the outcome of the complaint. In instances where there is a complete breakdown of relations between the complainant and the school, a decision may be made to restrict contact. Any restrictions imposed should be appropriate and proportionate. The options that schools are most likely to consider are:

- requesting contact in a particular form (e.g. – letters only);
- requiring contact to take place with a named member of Staff (e.g. – Headteacher);
- restricting telephone calls to specified days and times;
- asking the complainant to enter into an agreement about his/her future contact with the school; and
- informing the complainant that if he/she still does not follow this advice (as stated above) any further correspondence that does not present significant new matters or new information will not necessarily be acknowledged, but should be kept on file.
- if the complainant tries to reopen an issue that has already been examined through the complaints procedure, the Chair of the Governing Body is able to inform them in writing that the procedure has been exhausted and that the matter is now closed.

The Complaints Team can be contacted directly where the school identifies a need to discuss a particular case further in order to ascertain whether the complaint can be considered vexatious or not. Useful contact details are included in this document at the end of Appendix 2.

### **Time-Limits**

11. Complaints need to be considered, and resolved, as quickly and efficiently as possible. An effective complaints procedure will have realistic time limits for each action within each stage. However, where further investigations are necessary, new time limits can be set and the complainant sent details of the new deadline and an explanation for the delay.

## **Stages of the complaints process**

12. A clear complaints process has well-defined stages:

Informal – Local resolution of the concern with Staff member

Stage 1 – complaint heard by Headteacher

Stage 2 – Governors' Complaint Panel

Further recourse – Possibly to Department for Education, Diocese, Local Authority, or OFSTED (where appropriate).

## **Recording Complaints**

13. Schools should record the progress of the complaint and the final outcome. A complaint may be made in person, by telephone, or in writing. At the end of a meeting or telephone call, it would be helpful if the member of Staff ensured that the complainant and the school have the same understanding of what was discussed and agreed. A brief note of meetings and telephone calls can be kept and a copy of any written response added to the record.

## **Governing Body (GB) Review**

14. The Governing Body can monitor the level and nature of complaints and review the outcomes on a regular basis to ensure the effectiveness of the procedure and make changes where necessary. Preferably, complaints information shared with the whole Governing Body will not name individuals.

15. As well as addressing an individual's complaints, the process of listening to, and resolving complaints will contribute to school improvement. When individual complaints are heard, schools may identify underlying issues that need to be addressed. The monitoring and review of complaints by the school and the Governing Body can be a useful tool in evaluating a school's performance.

## **Publicising the Procedure**

16. There is a legal requirement for the Complaints Procedure to be publicised. It is up to the Governing Body to decide how to fulfil this requirement but details of the Complaints Procedure could be included in the following ways:

- on the school website;
- in the school prospectus;
- in the Governors' report to Parents;
- the information given to new Parents when their children join the school;
- the information given to the children themselves;
- in the home-school agreement;
- in home-school bulletins or newsletters;
- in documents supplied to community users including course information or letting agreements;
- in a specific complaints leaflet;

- on posters displayed in areas of the school that will be used by the public, such as reception or the main entrance

### **Why does the school need a complaints procedure?**

Section 29 of the Education Act 2002 requires all maintained School Governing Bodies to adopt and publicise a complaints procedure for Parents. This includes complaints about any community facilities or services that the school provides.

Previous legislation still applies. In particular, 1991 SEN Information Regulations require Governing bodies of schools to publicise their complaint procedures in relation to SEN and the 1996 Education Act requires the LA to establish procedures for disputes between schools and Parents about SEN provision.

### **How will these guidelines help you?**

The Model Procedures include:

- Guidelines for Headteachers and Governing Bodies for handling complaints.
- A Toolkit for Governors – Hearing Stage 2 Formal Complaints (Appendix 1).

Also included is:

- HCC school complaints information factsheet entitled 'Complaints regarding schools' (Appendix 2).

These procedures are now well-established in Hertfordshire and have been formally adopted or followed by the vast majority of schools. They were drawn up following consultation with Headteachers, Governors, the Diocesan Authorities, the Teacher Associations and Representatives of Parent groups in 1995. The Diocese of St Albans commended the adoption of these procedures for Church of England Schools. For Roman Catholic schools the Diocese of Westminster has also provided its own guidelines for dealing with complaints.

The Department for Education (DFE) has confirmed that these model procedures are well ordered. They have, however, issued guidance in the form of a School Complaints Procedure Toolkit. The document is intended to help schools draw up a complaints procedure if they have not already done so, or to review their existing procedure if they wish. However, the good news is that the DFE acknowledges that the vast majority of schools already have a complaints procedure in place, based on LA or Diocesan Board models.

The DFE guidance broadly reflects what this LA has for many years commended to schools. To obtain a copy of the guidance, download it from [www.governornet.co.uk](http://www.governornet.co.uk) (go to Publications and search for School Complaints Procedure Toolkit) or telephone 08000 722 181.

By following the updated procedures set out here, schools can ensure complaints are handled effectively.

### **How should schools handle complaints made about or by:**

- A member of Staff about another member of Staff or the Headteacher?
- A member of the Governing Body about a member of Staff?

- A member of Staff about a member of the Governing Body?
- A member of Staff about the action/decision of the Governing Body?
- Members of the public (not Parents)?
- A Parent whose child no longer attends the school?
- Data Protection and Freedom of Information related matters

This model procedure essentially covers complaints made by Parents or Carers of children who attend the school, but it is important that schools do have in place written procedures for the above eventualities. It would not normally be necessary for schools to consider complaints made 12 months or more after the events complained of.

### **Complaint made by one member of Staff against another (including the Headteacher)**

Complaints from members of Staff are not covered by this procedure. They should be dealt with by the Headteacher (where appropriate) or the Chair of Governors informally in the first instance. If this approach fails to resolve the issue, the next step would be for the Staff Grievance Procedure to be invoked (by the person bringing the grievance). A full transcript of the Model Grievance Procedure for Schools is available on [www.thegrid.org.uk](http://www.thegrid.org.uk)

The Schools HR Advisory Team can be contacted for advice on (01438) 844875.

### **Complaint made by a Governor about a member of Staff**

This should be dealt with through the complaints process outlined in this document. Clearly the Governor concerned would have to withdraw from any meeting at which the complaint or its outcome was being discussed. If the complaint is related to the *conduct* of a member of Staff, it would be more appropriate to invoke the School's Disciplinary Procedures.

### **Complaint by a member of Staff against an individual Governor acting in a personal capacity**

The Chair of the Governing Body (or the Vice-Chair if the complaint is against the Chair) should attempt to resolve the matter informally. If such a resolution is not possible, and with the agreement of the Governor concerned, a Panel of Governors could be set up to consider the matter as per the complaints process outlined in this document.

### **Complaint by a member of Staff against the action/decision of the Governing Body**

If the decision was taken at a meeting of the full Governing Body the matter would have to be put on the agenda for review at another meeting and if the decision was then confirmed, that would be the end of the matter. (For this reason it is important that matters that could potentially lead to a complaint or appeal are routinely dealt with by a committee with delegated authority, in order to allow for an appeal or a rehearing by an unprejudiced second group of Governors). If a committee or individual with delegated authority took the original decision then a Panel of Governors who were not involved in the decision should review the matter,

ensuring that the member of Staff concerned was given an opportunity to state his/her case to the Panel. Any decision by the Panel would be final.

### **Complaint by a member of the public (not a Parent)**

Complaints from members of the public are most likely to be dealt with by the Headteacher and beyond that the Chair of Governors.

### **Complaint by a Parent whose child no longer attends the school**

The purpose of this complaints process is to ensure that if an error has been made, or an injustice done, some action can be taken to remedy matters for the injured party. Where Parents have removed their child from the roll of a school it is clearly impossible for the Governing Body to put things right for that child. However, the Governing Body has a duty of care to the pupils who remain on roll and it would be advisable for Governors to investigate the circumstances to satisfy themselves that no-one had acted inappropriately and that procedures and policies had been followed correctly. Whilst it is not necessary to convene a Governor's Complaint Panel, it would be good practice to inform Parents whether the complaint had been upheld or otherwise and of any changes to practice and procedures which have been agreed by the Governing Body.

### **Complaints regarding compliance with Data Protection and Freedom of Information legislation**

All schools are responsible for their own compliance with the Data Protection and Freedom of Information Acts, regardless of their status. Hertfordshire County Council is not responsible, even if the school is a Community or Voluntary-Controlled school. Should your school receive a complaint concerning Data Protection or Freedom of Information compliance, the complaints process outlined in this document should be followed. Advice and guidance about DP and FOI can be found at [www.ico.org.uk](http://www.ico.org.uk)

### **What complaint/appeal procedures are NOT covered by this document?**

This document does not cover:

- Complaints by Governors about other Governors – contact School Governance for advice – email [gov.courses@hertsforlearning.co.uk](mailto:gov.courses@hertsforlearning.co.uk)
- Child Protection Procedures – see [www.hertsdirect.org/childprotection](http://www.hertsdirect.org/childprotection)
- Appeals about admissions – see [www.hertsdirect.org/schoolappeals](http://www.hertsdirect.org/schoolappeals)
- Complaints about fixed term or permanent exclusions from school – see [www.hertsdirect.org/schoolappeals](http://www.hertsdirect.org/schoolappeals)
- Staff Disciplinary Procedures – see [www.thegrid.org.uk](http://www.thegrid.org.uk)

### **Complaints about Academies**

Whilst they are required to have a complaints procedure in place, Academies operate independently of the Local Authority. As such, the Local Authority is unable to investigate complaints regarding Academies. Parents wishing to escalate a complaint about an Academy which has not been satisfactorily resolved through the Academy's complaints procedure should contact the Education

Funding Agency. The contact details for the Education Funding Agency are as follows:

Academies Central Unit (Academy Complaints)  
Education Funding Agency  
Earlsdon Park  
53-55 Butts Road  
Coventry  
CV1 3BH  
Email: [academyquestions@efa.education.gov.uk](mailto:academyquestions@efa.education.gov.uk)

### **What is the position of Staff complained about?**

Any member of school Staff who is the subject of a parental complaint will have the opportunity to respond to the complaint during its investigation. They should also be able to see any response sent to the complainant as a result of the investigation.

There is an entirely separate procedure for schools to follow in dealing with Staff disciplinary matters. Therefore, if in the course of considering a complaint the Governing Body concludes that disciplinary procedures should be initiated, they will take separate action.

### **Where can the school get further help?**

There is a "Toolkit" to help Governors with practical arrangements for Stage 2 complaints to the Governing Body contained in Appendix 1. For specific guidance on the materials in the "Toolkit" and for the practical arrangements for carrying out Governor investigations and hearings, please contact School Governance at [gov.courses@hertsforlearning.co.uk](mailto:gov.courses@hertsforlearning.co.uk) or on 01438 843082.

### **How long should the school take in dealing with concerns and complaints?**

Schools should aim to deal with these quickly and efficiently at Stage 1, so avoiding the formal Stage 2 procedure wherever possible. All complaints should be acknowledged within **5 school days (1 week)**.

The Governing Body should deal with and respond fully to Stage 2 formal complaints within **28 school days (5½ weeks)** of the written complaint being received. If this is not possible Parents need to be given the reasons for the delay and to be kept informed of progress.

### **What is the FIRST stage in dealing with a complaint?**

Most concerns, or potential complaints, can be resolved informally by offering Parents a full discussion with the member of Staff who is best able to help.

Should this approach not resolve matters, a formal complaint should be made to the Headteacher at Stage 1. The Headteacher should carry out an investigation. Governors approached by Parents at this stage should steer parents in this direction initially.



**Governors need to be aware that if they do become involved closely with complaints at Stage 1, they cannot be involved with Stage 2 of the complaints process.**

If the complaint is about the provision the school is making for a child's Special Educational Needs, then a Parent might find it helpful to talk to the named SEN Officer where this applies. SENDIASS (Special Educational Needs & Disability Information Advice & Support Service – formerly known as the Parent Partnership Service) will be able to provide advice on the procedures the LA has in place for resolving disputes between schools and Parents over SEN provision.

Schools should give Parents wishing to complain further a copy of the school's complaints procedure and ask them to set out their complaint in a letter or by completing the formal complaint form (see Annex A).

#### **What is the SECOND stage in dealing with a complaint?**

**Please see "Hearing Stage 2 Formal Complaints - A Toolkit for Governors" (Appendix 1) for detailed guidance on all the practical steps for investigating and hearing Stage 2 complaints.**

The Chair of Governors will arrange for the complaint to be investigated and considered under the arrangements approved by the Governors for this purpose. This will usually involve a Panel of Governors appointed to act on behalf of the Governing Body. **In the case of Special Educational Needs complaints, the Chair of Governors must inform the Children's Services Complaints Manager at the Local Authority.**

If the Chair of Governors, or other Governors, have been involved in earlier discussions to try and help settle the disagreement at Stage 1, then arrangements should be made for another Governor with no prior involvement to take charge of the investigation and consideration of the complaint.

It may be helpful to offer the Parent an opportunity to talk about the complaint in the course of the investigation, prior to the complaint hearing. This might clarify the outstanding matters of complaint which remain unresolved and what outcome is sought by the complainant. Please note that neither a pre-meeting nor an investigation in advance of the Panel are a requirement. They are optional and it is up to Governors to decide whether to conduct them.

Parents should be provided with full details of how the Governors' Complaint Panel will conduct the further investigation, if there is to be one, (please see page 16, paragraph 3 entitled 'Complaint by a Parent whose child no longer attends the school' for the exception to this rule). A formal hearing is the best way for both Parents and the Headteacher and Staff to be satisfied they have had a proper opportunity to be listened to by Governors. Everyone should also be informed in advance of the order of proceedings for complaint hearings.

Both parties should make available to the Panel, in advance, any written information they wish to be considered in the formal hearing.

#### **Who can attend a Stage 2 hearing?**

At any meeting Parents may be accompanied by a friend or representative who may speak on their behalf. This person could be an interpreter of their choice and Parents should be encouraged to do this where necessary.

The Chair of the Panel may invite to the meeting any person who may help establish the facts of the complaint. Parents need to be told who this person is before the meeting.

Any member of Staff required by Governors to attend any meeting or the hearing will have the opportunity to be accompanied or represented.

A member of Staff named by Parents in the complaint may also choose to attend even if not required to do so by Governors and may be represented. If this happens, Parents should be told beforehand.

### **What happens after the investigation/hearing?**

When the complaint has been fully investigated and the hearing has taken place, Parents should be notified of the **findings** in writing by the Chair of the Panel hearing the complaint or the Governor responsible for the investigation within **5 school days (1 week)** of the hearing date.

The report, with findings, should, at the same time, be published to the Governing Body as a confidential item and will, in addition, include any **recommendations**. A meeting of the Governing Body must accept the findings but can accept, reject or reject in part, the recommendations. Personal details should not be disclosed, but an outline of the complaint hearing and findings should be given.

The Chair of Governors should write to the Parents to confirm any actions agreed by the Governing Body. Any agreed actions must be implemented by whoever it applies to - this could be the Governing Body as well as the Headteacher. Parents should also be informed whether and how they can take their complaint further.

**A copy of the report must be sent to the Headteacher and the Children's Services Complaints Manager in the case of a Special Educational Needs complaint, where there is a possibility of a third stage of complaint to the County Council.**

### **What can Parents do if they are not satisfied with the outcome of the second stage of investigation?**

In most cases it is expected that Parental complaints will be satisfactorily resolved following a formal complaint to the Governing Body. However, should Parents remain dissatisfied, the following sections explain the circumstances in which complaints can be taken further.

It should be noted that if Parents remain dissatisfied following the outcome of their Stage 2 hearing and wish to take their complaint further, they must do so within **20 working days (4 weeks)** of receiving the written outcome of the hearing.

After **20 working days (4 weeks)**, neither the school nor the Local Authority (where appropriate) are under any obligation to investigate or progress the complaint any further.

**When is there a THIRD stage of complaint to the County Council and how does it work?  
(THIS APPLIES TO VERY FEW COMPLAINTS AS SET OUT BELOW)**

**When it is a complaint about the way a school is providing for a child's Special Educational Needs.**

Parents may complain further to the LA by writing to the Children's Services Complaints Manager.

The CS Complaints Manager will acknowledge the letter and will notify the Chair of Governors and the Headteacher. The CS Complaints Manager will arrange for the complaint to be investigated. The Investigator will seek the comments of the Governing Body and any other information or advice as necessary.

When the complaint has been fully investigated and considered the CS Complaints Manager will notify Parents of the outcome in writing, giving the reasons for it, any action or proposed action to be taken and the further recourse available. A copy of this will be sent to the Headteacher, the Chair of Governors and to anyone else concerned in the investigation. This brings the third stage for Special Educational Needs complaints to a conclusion.

Parents who remain dissatisfied following further investigation of their Special Educational Needs complaint by the Local Authority have the right to complain to the Secretary of State who may decide to conduct an additional investigation. The contact details for the Secretary of State are as follows:

The Secretary of State  
Department for Education  
Sanctuary Buildings  
Great Smith Street  
London  
SW1P 3BT  
Website: [www.education.gov.uk](http://www.education.gov.uk)  
Telephone: 0370 000 2288

**What happens when there is NO statutory third stage of complaint to the County Council?**

**If the complaint is about Denominational Religious Education in a Voluntary-Aided school or Collective Worship in a Voluntary-Aided school in accordance with the trust deed or previous practice before the school became a Voluntary-Aided school:**

There is no formal right of complaint to the LA. This is because the LA has no power to inspect the provision or to influence its content but complaint beyond the second stage may be made to the relevant Diocesan Authority where this applies.

**For Roman Catholic schools, complainants should write to:** The Director of the Education Service, Diocese of Westminster, Vaughan House, 46 Francis Street, London, SW1P 1QN. Email: [education@rcdow.org.uk](mailto:education@rcdow.org.uk), Website: [www.rcdow.org.uk](http://www.rcdow.org.uk). Telephone: 020 7798 9005.

**For Church of England schools complainants should write to:** The Diocesan Director of Education, Diocesan Office, Holywell Lodge, 41 Holywell Hill, St Albans, AL1 1HE. Email: [schools@stalbans.anglican.org](mailto:schools@stalbans.anglican.org), Website: [www.stalbans.anglican.org](http://www.stalbans.anglican.org). Telephone: 01727 818170.

**FOR ALL OTHER TYPES OF COMPLAINT, INCLUDING THOSE REGARDING BULLYING, THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM OR COLLECTIVE WORSHIP IN A COMMUNITY, VOLUNTARY-CONTROLLED, VOLUNTARY-AIDED, FOUNDATION OR TRUST SCHOOL, THERE IS NO THIRD STAGE OF COMPLAINT TO THE LOCAL AUTHORITY**

For almost all complaints there is no right of further complaint or appeal to the LA beyond the school's Governing Body.

Parents may contact the complaints helpline for further advice but will be told there is no right of a further stage of formal investigation by the LA.

If parents who have not yet complained to their child's school contact the Local Authority, Council Officers will ask the complainant for their written consent to share information regarding their complaint with the school in question. If the complainant declines to provide their consent, the matter will not normally be taken any further. If consent is provided, the Council will pass the complainant's concerns onto the school, whilst ensuring that the complainant is made aware that this will not necessarily result in the complaint against the school being resolved or the complainant achieving the outcome they were seeking.

**Can Parents complain to anyone other than the County Council?**

Parents have the right to complain to the Secretary of State at the Department for Education (under the Education Act 1996), if they believe that the Governing Body or the LA is acting or proposing to act unreasonably (section 496), or is failing to carry out a statutory duty (section 497). This has to mean that the LA or the Governing Body is acting outside its powers, or misusing them. Only then would the Secretary of State follow up the complaint.

The Secretary of State will then contact the Governing Body or LA for information. The contact details for the Secretary of State are as follows:

The Secretary of State  
Department for Education  
Sanctuary Buildings  
Great Smith Street  
London  
SW1P 3BT  
Website: [www.education.gov.uk](http://www.education.gov.uk)  
Telephone: 0370 000 2288

## **What kind of record will be kept about complaints?**

The County Council will monitor Special Educational Needs complaints escalated to it under the statutory third stage of the complaints procedure.

Schools should, as good practice, formally record and monitor all Stage 2 complaints to the Governing Body.

Statistics may be published from time to time about the number and nature of complaints about individual schools. Publications will not include reference to any named individual. This is used to identify complaint trends and whether individual schools need particular guidance or support.

## Hearing Stage 2 Formal Complaints A Toolkit for Governors

The material contained in this appendix is designed to guide Governors through all the practical steps required by the complaints process. It is for the use of Headteachers and Governors only.

### CONTENTS

**A checklist of actions:**

- Upon receipt of a formal letter of complaint.
- The Complaints Panel's first meeting.
- Preparing for the formal hearing.
- When the Panel has reached its conclusions.
- If the Parent is not satisfied with the outcome.

Formal Complaint form

Sample letters

Considering the evidence

Questions for the hearing

Format of hearing

Suggested layout of room

**School Governance can answer Governors' questions on this material**

**Website:** <http://www.hertsforlearning.co.uk/team/governance>

**Email:** [gov.courses@hertsforlearning.co.uk](mailto:gov.courses@hertsforlearning.co.uk)

**Telephone:** 01438 843082

**This material is also available to download at:**

[www.thegrid.org.uk](http://www.thegrid.org.uk)

## INDEX FOR GOVERNORS TOOLKIT

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>Formal Complaint form - Annex A</b></li> </ul> <p><b><u>Sample letters</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>Acknowledgement to Parent on receipt of the complaint – Annex B</b></li> <li>○ <b>To Headteacher on receipt of Parent’s complaint – Annex C</b></li> <li>○ <b>To Complaints Team from the school advising of an SEN complaint – Annex D</b></li> <li>○ <b>To Parents inviting them to clarify their complaints – Annex F</b></li> <li>○ <b>To member of Staff requesting them to give evidence – Annex G</b></li> <li>○ <b>To Parents and Headteacher giving the date of the formal hearing – Annex H</b></li> <li>○ <b>To member of Staff named in the complaint – Annex I</b></li> <li>○ <b>To Parents and Headteacher enclosing papers – Annex K</b></li> <li>○ <b>To Headteacher with the Panel’s conclusions – Annex O</b></li> <li>○ <b>To Complaints Team, copy of Panel’s recommendations – Annex Q</b></li> <li>○ <b>To Parents following the discussion of recommendations by the Governing Body – Annex R</b></li> <li>○ <b>To Parents not satisfied with the Governing Body’s conclusions – Annex S</b></li> </ul>	
<b>Considering the evidence</b>	<b>Annex E</b>
<b>Format of hearing</b>	<b>Annex J</b>
<b>Suggested layout of room</b>	<b>Annex L</b>
<b>Questions for the hearing</b>	<b>Annex M</b>
<b>The Panel’s Conclusions about the Complaint</b>	<b>Annex N</b>
<b>Report from the Complaints Panel</b>	<b>Annex P</b>

Whilst not a statutory requirement, training to support the good practice guidance contained within these model procedures can be arranged through the Hertfordshire School Governance Team:

**Website:** <http://www.hertsforlearning.co.uk/team/governance>  
**Email:** [gov.courses@hertsforlearning.co.uk](mailto:gov.courses@hertsforlearning.co.uk)  
**Telephone:** 01438 843082

## Checklist of actions

Complaint from .....dated .....

### Upon receipt of a formal letter of complaint

Tasks	Done (date)	Notes
Acknowledge receipt of formal complaint (Chair of Governors).		<p><i>See complaint form, Annex A and letter, Annex B.</i></p> <p>Has the parent followed procedure – Informal; Stage 1?</p> <p>If no: Chair of Governors should write to parent informing them of the procedure and advise them to write to Headteacher.</p> <p>If yes: Follow process outlined here.</p> <p>Chair of Governors should ensure the complaint is clear to avoid the Panel meeting with the parents to clarify the complaint if at all possible.</p>
At the same time inform the Headteacher that a complaint has been received (Chair of Governors).		<i>See Annex C.</i>
<p>Notify your complaints Panel that a complaint has been received.</p> <p>Ask them to set a date for the Panel's first meeting to plan any investigation and provide a copy of the complaint received to Panel members.</p>		<p>The Panel will typically consist of 3 Governors but it is up to the Governing Body to decide the number for hearing complaints*.</p> <p>The membership of this group should have been established at the first meeting of the autumn term with reserves in case any of the Governors need to withdraw because they have prior knowledge of the incident or have a conflict of interest or are unavailable.</p> <p>The Governing Body may wish to give delegated powers to the Chair to vary the Complaints Panel membership where specialist knowledge by another Governor would be useful.</p> <p>The Governing Body must delegate powers <b>to reach FINDINGS</b> on whether the Parents' complaint is justified since only the members of the Panel will have all the evidence to reach their conclusions.</p> <p>However, the Panel should be delegated <b>to</b></p>



		<p><b>report RECOMMENDATIONS</b> on any further action to the full Governing Body. This means that the members of the Panel do not have to take sole responsibility for decisions on subsequent action and ensures that any decisions will have the backing of the Governing Body as a corporate group.</p> <p>*(The law only specifies at least three Governors in the case of dismissal and exclusions)</p>
Inform Complaints Team if required (SEN only).		The Complaints Team should be informed in the case of a complaint about the provision of SEN. See <i>Annex D</i> .

### The Complaints Panel's first meeting See *Annex E*

Tasks	Done (date)	Notes
Make sure you understand the nature of the complaint.		<p>If the complaint is not clear, the complainant will need to be asked for clarification.</p> <p>In particular you will need to be clear whether the Governing Body/Panel is being asked to consider the original incident, or how the Headteacher has dealt with it. In practice, it is unlikely that it will be possible to separate the two entirely.</p> <p>However, if the original incident related to something for which the Headteacher was responsible under internal management (e.g. class organisation) the Governing Body/Panel must ensure that the complainant is aware that it has no power to change the Headteacher's decision – only to review how s/he dealt with the situation and make recommendations if appropriate.</p>
Decide whether it would be helpful to offer the Parent an opportunity to talk about the complaint. (This is not an opportunity for the complainant(s) to add to their complaint).		<p>In many cases this can help to bring out more fully the nature and detail of the complaint to help any investigation to proceed.</p> <p>A response to the complaint is not appropriate at this stage and the Panel would need to make clear that they will not come to a decision at this stage.</p> <p>The complainant(s) may be accompanied by a friend, or representative who may speak on their behalf. The Governing Body/Panel should encourage complainants to be represented by an interpreter of their choice, if language</p>



	<p>need to be scrupulously careful to question in an objective and impartial way to ascertain the facts. The specific item of evidence should be typed up and signed by the witness.</p> <p>If any member of Staff is required to attend any meeting they will have the opportunity to be accompanied or represented as they wish. <i>See Annex G.</i></p> <p>Note: No child may be requested to attend without written Parental permission. Complainants cannot insist that a witness attends. However, signed, dated and named witness statements will always be considered by the Panel. Please note that it is up to the Panel to decide whether to invite a witness to the hearing. The Governing Body cannot insist on anyone attending a hearing.</p>
Decide the date of the complaint hearing.	<p>It may appear to the Panel that there is no case to answer but Parents lodging the complaint can only be satisfied that the Governors have taken it seriously if they take part in a formal hearing. The Panel must avoid giving any impression that they have pre-judged the case.</p> <p>The date should be as soon as possible and within <b>28 school days (5½ weeks)</b> of the date of the complaint/receipt of the complaint (if outside of this timescale, there should be a compelling reason and all parties informed) and consistent with giving time for the necessary evidence to be collected, copied and distributed to all concerned at least 7 school days before the hearing (see below).</p>
Write to Parents and Headteacher informing them of the date of the hearing.	<p>At the same time ask them to provide a written statement and other documentation by a date at least <b>10 school days (2 weeks)</b> before the hearing.</p> <p>Also ask them to say if they will be accompanied by a friend and to give the name and address of that person and in what capacity they are attending (friend, interpreter, solicitor, union official etc). <i>See Annex H.</i></p>
Write to any member of Staff named in the complaint to offer them an opportunity to attend the hearing.	<p>You may not wish to call upon them, but they have a right to attend. They may be accompanied by a friend or representative, however the latter must not have a conflict of interest. <i>See Annex I.</i></p>

## Preparing the formal hearing

Tasks	Done (date)	Notes
Decide the format of the hearing.		<p>A schedule describing the suggested format of the hearing is included in <i>Annex J</i>.</p> <p>All questioning should be conducted by the Panel (who are actually the ones carrying out the investigation/hearing). It is not appropriate for the Headteacher/respondent and complainant to question each other. This should be made clear at the outset and strictly enforced by the Chair. The Panel will need to make sure that it asks all the crucial questions that the Headteacher/respondent and complainant would have asked. At the end of their questioning the Chair of the Panel should ask the complainant and Headteacher/respondent whether the Panel has asked all the questions that they would have wished.</p>
Send out papers to Parents, Headteacher/respondent, etc.		<p>These should arrive at least 7 school days before the hearing. This allows good time for everyone to study them. <i>See Annex K.</i></p> <p>Papers should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• all the documentary evidence</li> <li>• names and status (i.e. Friend, Solicitor, Interpreter, Union Official, etc) of everyone who will attend including any witnesses.</li> <li>• a schedule describing the format of the hearing. <i>See Annex J.</i></li> <li>• Please note that the Panel may need to consider some evidence that must remain confidential and not be shared externally beyond the Panel (e.g. when evidence contains 3<sup>rd</sup> party information).</li> </ul>
Ensure there is an appropriate meeting room to conduct the hearing.		For suggested layout see <i>Annex L</i> .
Decide where Parents, Headteacher/respondent and any witnesses will wait.		It is important that Headteacher/respondent and complainant go into the hearing at the same time, ushered by the Clerk, so there is no suggestion that the Panel have been 'got at'.
Organise a Clerk to take notes.		<p>These notes should enable members of the Panel to check back on any significant points that were made at the hearing. Members of the Panel should avoid taking minutes and focus on the hearing.</p> <p>Panels are advised NOT to tape record hearings</p>

		unless they are prepared to spend hours poring in minute detail over every word that was uttered in the hearing. The Panel, assisted by the Clerk's notes, should be trusted to hear the key points of the evidence without the need for tape recording. The Chair of the Panel should make it clear that recording of the hearing is not permitted and that any unauthorised recordings will be inadmissible as evidence.
Prepare questions the Panel needs to ask on the basis of all available documentation.		<i>See Annex M.</i>
Reflect with all Panel members on how the Panel can ensure that Parents, Headteacher (and any other Staff involved) feel that they have been given a fair hearing.		

### When the Panel has reached its conclusions

Tasks	Done (date)	Notes
Write with your conclusions to the Parents within <b>5 school days (1 week)</b> .		<p><i>See Annex N.</i></p> <p>In some circumstances the Panel may prefer to communicate their findings orally through a meeting with a very brief follow-up letter.</p> <p>The Panel should aim to keep its findings brief and simple.</p> <p>If the Panel wants to make recommendations such as for restitution or a change in policy, these should not be included in the letter since the decision remains with the Governing Body which might overturn or amend the recommendation. If follow-up action is agreed it may be appropriate to inform the Parents in a separate letter.</p> <p>There is no need to send Parents notes of the meeting but they should be available for examination by the LA if the case goes to Stage 3 or to arbitration.</p>
Write to the Headteacher enclosing a copy of your conclusions to the Parents.		<i>See Annex O.</i>
Report to Governing Body		<p><i>See Annex P</i></p> <p>The findings and recommendations should be presented to the Governing Body within in a</p>

		<p>reasonable timescale. If a meeting is not scheduled within 5 weeks after the hearing, it is recommended that an extra-ordinary meeting is called.</p> <p>This confidential report should draw the distinction between the Panel's findings and its recommendations.</p> <p>The Governing Body must delegate the power to determine their <b>findings</b> from consideration of all the evidence. This means that the findings must be accepted by the Governing Body. However, the Panel may make <b>recommendations</b> to the full Governing Body based on lessons learned from the investigation of the complaint. Any recommendations will be subject to discussion by the Governing Body and may not be accepted.</p> <p>In the event of a disagreement to accept recommendations, a majority vote decides.</p>
Report to Complaints Team where required (SEN only).		Governing bodies are required to report the outcome of complaints regarding SEN to the LA. <i>See Annex Q.</i>
Write again to Parents if it is appropriate to report any action decided by the Governing Body as a result of the Panel's findings and recommendations.		<i>See Annex R.</i>

### **If the Parent is not satisfied with the outcome of the hearing**

Acknowledge receipt of their letter and respond appropriately.		<p>There are a number of possible next steps depending on the type of complaint. Complaints about the provision of SEN may move to Stage 3 with the LA. Remember however - If Parents remain dissatisfied following the outcome of their Stage 2 hearing and wish to take their complaint further, they must do so within <b>20 working days (4 weeks)</b> of receiving the written outcome of the hearing. After <b>20 working days (4 weeks)</b>, neither the school nor the Local Authority (where appropriate) are under any obligation to investigate or progress the complaint any further. For other complaints there is no appeal beyond the Governing Body although Parents can complain to the Secretary of State. A range of responses is shown in <i>Annex S.</i></p>
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It is strongly recommended that all parents are asked to fill this out and return it

**Annex A**





**What would you like us to do to put things right?**

**Signed**  
**Date**

**Please return this form to the Chair of the Governing Body**

**Letter of acknowledgement to Parent on receipt of complaint**

Dear .....

**COMPLAINT ABOUT.....**

I am writing to acknowledge receipt of your complaint dated  
.....

I shall arrange a Panel of Governors to investigate your complaint. The Panel will meet to decide what it needs to do to ensure it has all the relevant evidence and to plan a realistic timetable for the investigation. When this planning is complete, we shall write to you again with further details. You should receive that letter by.....

Or

There is no record of you raising this matter with the school in the first instance. Please note the process in the enclosed complaints procedure.

I have passed the paperwork to the Headteacher to give the school the opportunity to respond and seek resolution. The Governing Body cannot intervene before this process has been applied.

I enclose a copy of our complaints procedure.

Yours sincerely,

**Chair of the Governing Body**

Enc.

Cc. Headteacher

**Letter to Headteacher on receipt of Parent's complaint**

Dear .....

**COMPLAINT ABOUT .....**

I have received a letter of complaint from .....(name of Parent) dated ..... I enclose a copy of the complaint for your information.

In line with our complaints procedure, I shall arrange a Panel of Governors to investigate the complaint.

The Panel will meet to decide what it needs to do to ensure it has all the relevant evidence and to plan a realistic timetable for investigation.

When this planning is complete, we shall write to you again with further details. You should receive that letter by.....

You will appreciate that the Governing Body must be equally fair to both sides in investigating this complaint.

I would be grateful if you could send me a written statement responding to the complaint. You will have an opportunity to expand on the statement but it would be very helpful if you can submit your initial statement before the Panel meets to plan its investigation on ..... (Amend or delete as applicable).

Yours sincerely,

**Chair of the Governing Body**

Enc.

**Letter to Complaints Team informing about a complaint concerning  
SEN**

Complaints Team  
Customer Service Team  
County Hall  
Hertford  
SG13 8DF

Date .....

Dear

**COMPLAINT CONCERNING SEN**

The Governing Body has received a complaint from name  
..... dated ..... concerning  
.....

I enclose a copy of the complaint.

The Governing Body will investigate the complaint and report the outcome to  
you as soon as the investigation is complete.

Yours sincerely,

**Chair of the Governing Body**

Enc.

**Considering the evidence**  
**A suggested format for clarifying issues and seeking information**

**What is the complaint?**

**What facts are not disputed?**

- 
- 
- 
- 
- 

**What facts do we need to establish?**

**How?**  
*(documentation from .....  
questioning of .....)*

**Comments**

**Letter to Parent inviting them to clarify the complaint**

Dear .....

**COMPLAINT ABOUT .....**

The Chair/Clerk has passed your complaint to me as the Chair of the Complaints Panel. The Panel of Governors has met to plan our investigation of your complaint. Members of the Panel are ..... (named Governors)

We would like to get a clearer understanding of your complaint before we start the investigation. The questions we would particularly like to ask are:

(Fill in here)

We think it would be helpful if you could meet with the Panel to clarify your complaint. We have arranged a meeting on .....(date) and hope that you will be able to attend. If you cannot attend on that date please contact me (telephone) and we shall try to arrange another time. You may prefer to write with more details. If so, please reply by .....(the day before the suggested meeting date).

Your daughter/son .....(name) may also be able to help us clarify some points. We should be very pleased if you are able to bring her/him with you to this meeting. We cannot insist that she/he attends. Please note that the Panel reserves the right to decide whether or not to hear representations from your child. For example, if the Panel considers that your child may become distressed as a result of the process, it may exercise its discretion not to hear from your child.

**The meeting we suggest is not a formal hearing of your complaint.** The Panel would not come to a decision at this stage.

You may be accompanied at the meeting, if you wish, by a friend, or representative who may speak on your behalf. *(You may also bring an interpreter of your choice, if you need one.)*

Please let me know, as soon as possible, whether you will attend the meeting on ..... (date).

Yours sincerely,

**Chair of Complaints Panel**

**To member of Staff required to give evidence**

Dear

**COMPLAINT ABOUT .....**

The Governing Body has received a complaint from ..... and a Panel has been convened to consider the complaint comprising ..... (named Governors).

The Panel is keen to establish all the relevant facts and it would be very helpful if we could interview you to ascertain ..... (what are the questions you wish to ask?).

We are therefore asking you to attend .....(the arrangements that you have decided).

**This meeting is not a formal hearing of .....’s complaint** but you are entitled to be accompanied by a friend or representative, if you wish. I should be grateful if you would confirm your attendance at this meeting and let me know the name and status of any friend or representative who will accompany you.

I enclose a copy of the school’s complaints procedure for your information.

Yours sincerely,

**Chair of Complaints Panel**

Enc.

**Letter to Parents and Headteacher giving date of the formal hearing**

Dear .....

**COMPLAINT ABOUT .....**

The Chair/Clerk has passed your complaint on to me as the Chair of the complaints Panel. The Panel of Governors has met to plan our investigation of your complaint. Members of the Panel are .....(named Governors).

We have arranged a formal hearing of the complaint on .....(date and time) at ..... (venue).

You are entitled to be accompanied by a friend or representative, if you wish. I should be grateful if you would confirm your attendance at this meeting and let me know the name of any friend or representative who will accompany you by ..... (date, at least 9 school days ahead of formal hearing). You must let us know in which capacity the additional person is attending - Interpreter, Legal Representative, Friend, etc). Please note that they will not be invited to make representations to the Panel unless it has been requested that they make formal representations on your behalf.

I shall write to you by .....(date, at least 7 school days ahead of formal hearing) to let you know the names of everyone attending the formal hearing and enclosing copies of all the written evidence provided by the parents, the Headteacher and any witnesses. If you wish to submit any further evidence, please send it to me by ..... (date, at least 9 school days ahead of formal hearing).

It is imperative that you submit all of your evidence by the date indicated. In the event that you fail to do so, the Panel reserves the right to reject late submission of evidence, or to delay the hearing taking place.

Yours sincerely,

**Chair of Complaints Panel.**

C.c. Parent/Headteacher

**N.B. The first paragraph of this letter will need to be amended if you have already sent the letter in Annex C.**



**Letter to member of Staff named in the complaint**

Dear .....

**COMPLAINT ABOUT .....**

The Governing Body has received a complaint from .....  
(named Parents) in which you are named. I enclose a copy of the complaint  
and the school's complaints procedure for your information.

We have arranged a formal hearing of the complaint on  
.....(date and time) at ..... (venue).

As a member of Staff named in the complaint you are entitled to attend  
although we do not wish to call you as a witness. You are entitled to be  
accompanied by a friend or representative, if you wish.

I should be grateful if you would let me know whether you wish to attend this  
hearing and inform me of the name of any friend or representative who will  
accompany you by ..... (date, at least 9 school days ahead of  
formal hearing). It would help us to know in which capacity the additional  
person is attending - legal representative, union representative, friend etc).

I shall write to you by .....(date, at least school 7 days  
ahead of formal hearing) to let you know the names of everyone attending the  
formal hearing and enclosing copies of all the written evidence provided by  
the Parents, the Headteacher and any witnesses.

Yours sincerely,

**Chair of Complaints Panel**

### Format of Hearing

Stage A	Introductions of everyone present and clarification of the complaint lodged and conduct of the hearing. Panel Chair checks that everyone has a copy of this Format of Hearing on the table.
Stage B	Parents present summary of complaint highlighting points made in their written complaint and other documentation. Witnesses are called as and when required. Panel questions Parents to clarify the points they make.
Stage C	Headteacher/respondent presents the facts as s/he perceives them - highlighting points made in the written response and other documentation. Witnesses are called as and when required. Panel questions Headteacher/respondent to clarify the points s/he has made.
Stage D	Parents summarise their case highlighting evidence including anything that has emerged in the questioning.
Stage E	Headteacher/respondent summarises the case for the school highlighting evidence. This should include the school's response and actions in relation to the complaint before the hearing and anything that has emerged in the questioning.
Close	Panel Chair thanks Parents and Headteacher for attending and gives an indication of when they can expect to hear the outcome. Parents and Headteacher leave the room together. Panel considers all the evidence and comes to its conclusion.
NB. Parents and Headteacher /respondent are not invited to question each other. If you have adopted a Diocesan complaints policy, please check the guidance contained as it may differ from these model procedures.	

➤ The Panel also needs to take the following points into account:

- The hearing should be as informal as possible.
- Witnesses should only be required to attend for the part of the hearing in which they give their evidence.
- The Panel may ask questions at any point or adjourn the meeting.

**Letter to Parents and Headteacher enclosing papers**

Dear .....

**COMPLAINT ABOUT .....**

Thank you for providing the information we asked for in our letter of ..... date (Annex G)

I am now in the position to give you full details about how we propose to conduct the hearing of your complaint on (date) and to enclose all the statements and other evidence we shall use to consider your complaint.

The hearing will start at (time). You are asked to report to the school office. You will be shown to a waiting area. The Clerk will collect the Headteacher and the Parents from the waiting area and you will be introduced to the Panel at the same time (amend as appropriate).

The hearing will be attended by: *(insert names)*

- *Members of Panel*
- *Clerk/Notetaker*
- *Parents*
- *Friend/Representative (indicating status)*
- *Headteacher*
- *Head's Representative (indicating status)*
- *Witnesses (if required)*
- *Additional named Staff (who are entitled or have expressed an intention to attend).*

The following written statements and evidence is enclosed:

- *Statement of Complaint*
- *Headteacher's statement*
- *Statements from witnesses*
- *Any other evidence*

The Panel will refer to the enclosed documents and seek answers to questions to help them come to a decision. The format of the meeting is described on the attached sheet. *(enclose Annex J amended as required)*. I wish to remind you that the Panel will investigate the process by which any decisions which are the subject of your complaint were arrived at.

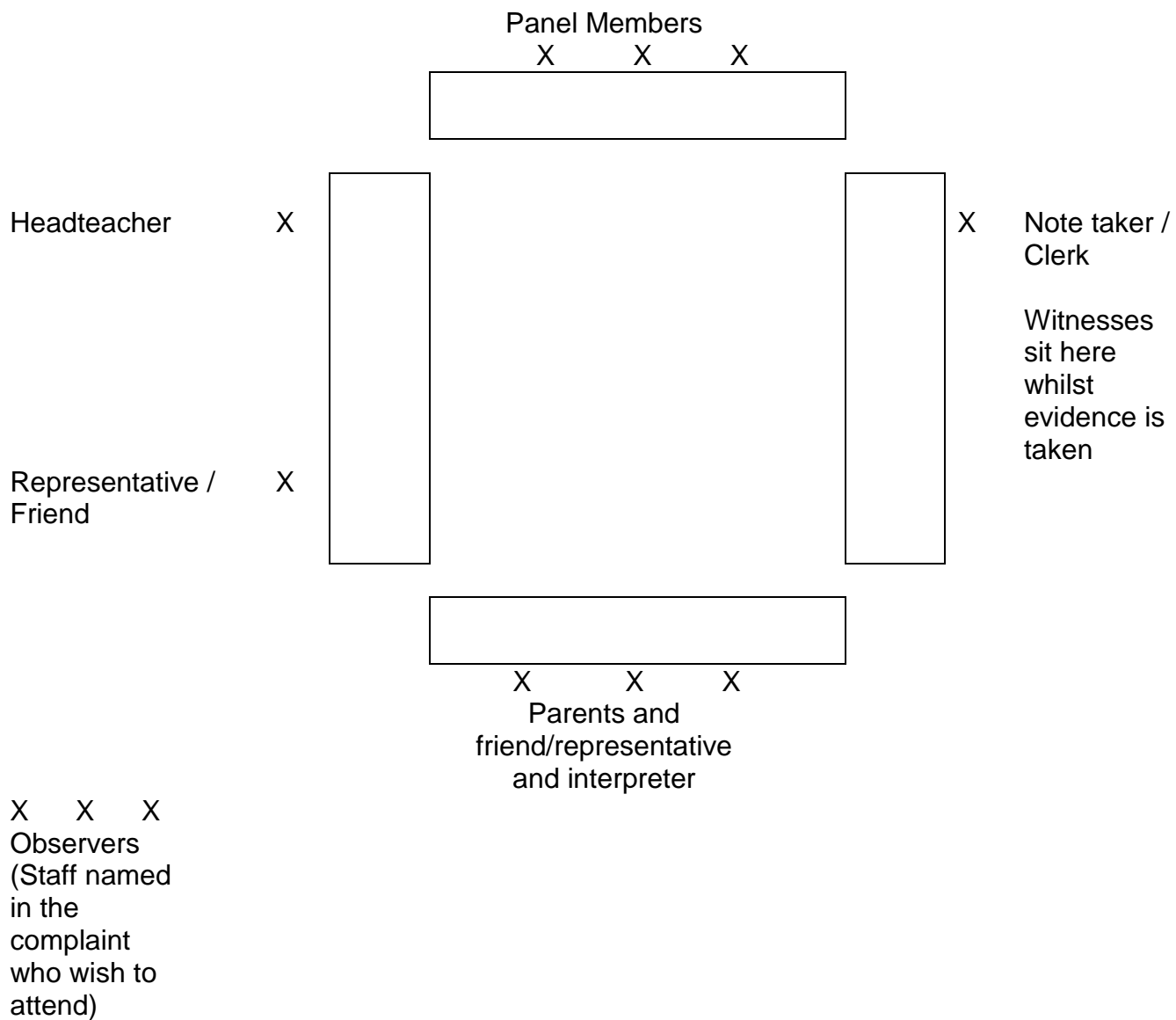
We look forward to meeting you on .....

Yours sincerely,

**Chair of Complaints Panel**

Enc.

Suggested layout for Complaints Hearing



**Questions for the hearing**  
**A suggested format for the Panel to agree lines of questioning and to**  
**record evidence provided at the hearing.**

**What is the  
complaint?**

**What facts are not  
disputed?**

- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 

**What facts do we  
need to establish?**

**What questions  
do we need to  
ask of whom?**

**Conclusions**

## The Panel's Conclusions about the Complaint

Dear .....

### **COMPLAINT ABOUT.....**

Thank you for attending the hearing on ..... The Panel considered the evidence very carefully and we have come to the following conclusion(s).

Complaint Upheld / Partially Upheld / Not Upheld / etc

*Optional addition:*

As a result of our investigation there are a number of recommendations that we shall be making to the Governing Body. We shall write to you again to inform you of any action the Governing Body decides to take as a result of this incident.

Yours sincerely,

**Chair of Complaints Panel**

Cc. Headteacher

Any Staff Member named in the complaint  
Complaints Team (SEN only)

**Letter to Headteacher with the Panel's conclusions**

Dear .....

**COMPLAINT ABOUT.....**

Thank you for attending the hearing on ..... The Panel considered the evidence very carefully and we have come to the following conclusion(s).

*Add a paragraph about any action that you propose to take or recommendations you will make as a result of these conclusions.*

I enclose a copy of the letter that we have sent to the Parents.

Yours sincerely,

**Chair of Complaints Panel**

Enc.

(Please ensure that a copy of this letter is shared with the member of staff named in the complaint – if applicable)

**STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL**

**Report from the Complaints Panel**

Report on a complaint: .....  
(give brief summary of complaint – no personal details)

Hearing date .....

Panel membership

- .....
- .....
- .....

The Panel reached the following findings (exact wording from letter to the Parent(s))

The Panel asks that the following recommendations be considered by the full Governing Body meeting on .....

- (a)
- (b)
- (c)
- (d)
- (e)



**Copy to Complaints Team (if complaint concerns the provision of SEN)**

Complaints Team  
Customer Service Team  
County Hall  
Hertford  
SG13 8DF

Dear

**MR AND MRS .....**  
**COMPLAINT ABOUT.....**

Please find enclosed the letter which we have sent to .....  
(named Parents) with the Panel's conclusions following a hearing of their  
complaint on ..... (date).

Yours sincerely,

**Chair of Complaints Panel**

Enc.

**Letter to Parents following discussion of any recommendations  
by the Governing Body.**

Dear.....

**COMPLAINT ABOUT .....**

When we wrote to you with our findings following the investigation of your complaint we told you that we would be making some recommendations to the Governing Body. The Governing Body has discussed our recommendations and has agreed the following action(s).

(List actions here)

Yours sincerely,

**Chair of the Governing Body**

**Letter to Parents not satisfied with the Governing Body's conclusions**

Dear.....

**Complaint about .....**

I am sorry to hear that you are not satisfied with the conclusions we reached in respect of your complaint. The Panel made every effort to be scrupulously fair in hearing your complaint and taking account of all the evidence presented to it.

I can confirm that the school's complaints procedure has now been exhausted.

Since this is a complaint about the provision of Special Educational Needs, you may lodge a third stage complaint with the LA. Please write to the Children's Services Complaints Team, County Hall, Hertford, SG13 8DF (Delete as appropriate).

Or

You may make a complaint to the Secretary of State at the Department for Education if you believe the Governing Body has acted outside its powers or is misusing them. The Secretary of State's address is Department for Education, Sanctuary Buildings, Great Smith Street, London, SW1P 3BT.

Yours sincerely,

**Chair of Complaints Panel**

# Complaints about schools

## Introduction

Hertfordshire County Council cannot deal with complaints about schools. School Governors are responsible in law for having a published complaints procedure and for responding to complaints.

## Stage One

Most concerns, complaints or potential complaints can be resolved by **talking to the member of school staff** concerned. The school can tell you who you should speak to first. You may wish to request a copy of the school's complaints procedure, available from the school office or website. If the concern isn't resolved by speaking to a member of staff, you should then **request a meeting with the Headteacher** who will investigate your complaint and aim to inform you of the outcome within **10 school days (2 weeks)**.

If your first contact is with individual Governors, you may be asked to take up your concerns with the Headteacher or the appropriate member of staff. A Governor should not be made aware of a potential complaint as they may be required to sit on a Panel in the event of a formal hearing (Stage Two) and should be impartial.

If your complaint is about the Headteacher, you should **write to the Chair of Governors** at the school. If your child has a Statement of Special Educational Needs (SEN) or an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) you might find it helpful to talk to the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCo) at your child's school or your child's named Special Needs Officer. The SEND Information Advice and Support Service (SENDIASS – formerly Parent Partnership) may also be able to help you.

If you have not yet raised your concerns with the school in question but contact the Local Authority instead, Council Officers will ask you for your written consent to share information regarding your complaint with the school. If you decline to provide your consent, the matter will not be taken any further. If you do provide consent, the Council will pass your concerns onto the school for action by either school staff or governors.

## Stage Two

If you remain dissatisfied following Stage 1 and wish to take your complaint further, the school may ask you to complete a form or write a letter addressed to the Chair of Governors. In the letter you should:

- Make it clear why you are complaining.
- Say who you have spoken to already.
- Explain what you want to happen as a result of your complaint.

The Chair of Governors will arrange for your complaint to be considered and investigated under the arrangements approved by the Governing Body. This is likely to involve a Panel of Governors. If the Chair of Governors or another Governor has been involved in discussions to help settle the disagreement at Stage 1, s/he should arrange for another Governor to take charge of the investigation. The Governor in charge of investigating the complaint may ask to meet you to discuss your concerns. The Governing Body should give you full details of how they will carry out any further investigation or formal hearing and keep you up to date with progress.

You and the school must make sure the Governors' Complaint Panel is provided with any written information or evidence you intend to use in a formal hearing. You may bring a friend, representative or interpreter to any meeting if you wish. The Chair of the Panel may invite any person who may help establish the facts of the complaint. The Chair should tell you who this person is before the meeting. If any member of staff is required by the Governing Body to attend a meeting they will have the opportunity to be accompanied or represented as they wish. A member of staff named in a complaint may also choose to attend a meeting, even if not required to do so by the Governors. They may be represented. If this happens, the school will inform you in advance.

When the Panel has fully investigated your complaint, the Chair of the Panel or the Governor in charge of the investigation will write to you to tell you the findings. These findings will be reported to the Governing Body. The Chair of Governors will then write to you confirming the outcome of your complaint and any agreed actions to be taken. The Governing Body should aim to deal with complaints within **28 school days (5½ weeks)**.

For Academies, Free Schools, Studio Schools and University Technical Colleges, please seek guidance regarding Stage Two from the Education Funding Agency.

## **Stage Three**

**FOR ALMOST ALL COMPLAINTS, THE PROCEDURE ENDS WITH THE GOVERNING BODY AND THERE IS NO THIRD STAGE OF COMPLAINT TO THE LOCAL AUTHORITY**

If the school's complaints procedure has been exhausted and you remain dissatisfied, you can approach the Secretary of State (or the Education Funding Agency if the school is an Academy, Free School, Studio School or University Technical College). Further advice is available from the Children's Legal Centre, the Advisory Centre for Education (ACE) or Family Lives (formerly Parentline Plus).

**However, if your complaint is about the way that a school is providing for your child's Statement of Special Educational Needs or Education Health & Care Plan, you do have a third stage of complaint to the Local Authority (if the school is a Community, Voluntary-Controlled, Voluntary-Aided, Foundation or Trust school).**

In this case, you can write to the Complaints Manager who will acknowledge your complaint within five working days and inform the Chair of Governors and Headteacher. The Complaints Team will aim to investigate your complaint within 25 working days; however the investigation may take longer (up to 65 working days) in

complex cases. When your complaint has been fully investigated the Complaints Manager will write to let you know the outcome. S/he will give the reasons for the outcome, any action or proposed action to be taken and any further avenues open to you. S/he will send a copy to the Headteacher, the Chair of Governors and anyone else concerned in the investigation. Parents who remain dissatisfied following further investigation by the Local Authority have the right to complain to the Secretary of State who may decide to conduct an additional investigation.

You may also wish to contact the relevant diocese in the case of a church school:

***For Roman Catholic schools:***

The Director of the Education Service, Diocese of Westminster, Vaughan House, 46 Francis Street, London, SW1P 1QN. Email: [education@rcdow.org.uk](mailto:education@rcdow.org.uk), Website: [www.rcdow.org.uk](http://www.rcdow.org.uk). Telephone: 020 7798 9005.

***For Church of England schools:***

The Diocesan Director of Education, Diocesan Office, Holywell Lodge, 41 Holywell Hill, St Albans, AL1 1HE. Email: [schools@stalbans.anglican.org](mailto:schools@stalbans.anglican.org), Website: [www.stalbans.anglican.org](http://www.stalbans.anglican.org). Telephone: 01727 818170.

## **Can I complain to anyone other than the County Council?**

**FOR ALL OTHER TYPES OF COMPLAINT, INCLUDING THOSE REGARDING BULLYING, THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM OR COLLECTIVE WORSHIP IN A COMMUNITY, VOLUNTARY-CONTROLLED, VOLUNTARY-AIDED, FOUNDATION OR TRUST SCHOOL, THERE IS NO THIRD STAGE OF COMPLAINT TO THE LOCAL AUTHORITY**

However, you can complain to the Secretary of State at the Department for Education:

The Secretary of State, Department for Education, Sanctuary Buildings, Great Smith Street, London, SW1P 3BT. Website: [www.education.gov.uk](http://www.education.gov.uk). Telephone: 0370 000 2288

## **Complaints about Academies, Free Schools, Studio Schools and University Technical Colleges**

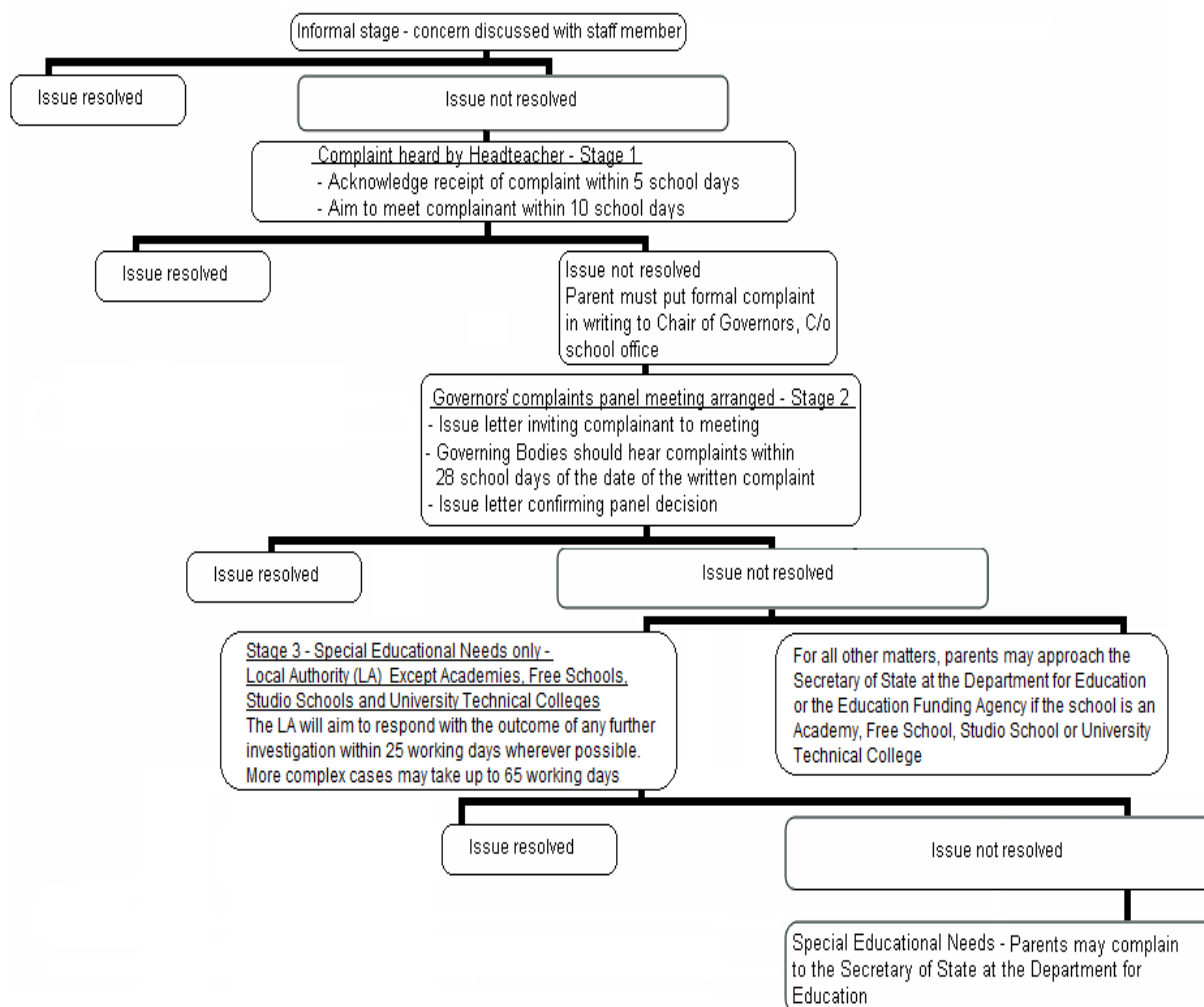
Whilst they are required to have a complaints procedure in place, these types of schools operate independently of the Local Authority. Accordingly, the Local Authority is unable to investigate complaints regarding these types of schools, even if your complaint relates to Special Educational Needs provision. If you have a complaint about one of these schools which has not been satisfactorily resolved through its complaints procedure, you should contact the Education Funding Agency:

Academies Central Unit (Academy Complaints), Education Funding Agency, Earlsdon Park, 53-55 Butts Road, Coventry, CV1 3BH  
Email: [academyquestions@efa.education.gov.uk](mailto:academyquestions@efa.education.gov.uk)

## **Useful contact details**

Chair of Governors	The school secretary can tell you who this is and pass on any written correspondence	
Complaints Team (Children's Services)	<a href="http://www.hertsdirect.org/complaints">www.hertsdirect.org/complaints</a> Email: <a href="mailto:cs.complaints@hertfordshire.gov.uk">cs.complaints@hertfordshire.gov.uk</a>	01992 588542
SEND Information Advice & Support Service	<a href="http://www.hertsdirect.org/parentpartnership">www.hertsdirect.org/parentpartnership</a> Email: <a href="mailto:parent.partnership@hertfordshire.gov.uk">parent.partnership@hertfordshire.gov.uk</a>	01992 555847
ACE (Advisory Centre for Education)	<a href="http://www.ace-ed.org.uk">www.ace-ed.org.uk</a>	0300 0115 142
HertsHelp	<a href="http://www.hertsdirect.org/hertshelp">www.hertsdirect.org/hertshelp</a>	0300 123 4044
Family Lives	<a href="http://www.familylives.org.uk">www.familylives.org.uk</a>	0808 800 2222
Carers in Herts	<a href="http://www.carersinherts.org.uk">www.carersinherts.org.uk</a>	01992 586969
Children's Legal Centre	<a href="http://www.childrenslegalcentre.com">www.childrenslegalcentre.com</a>	0345 345 4345
Citizen's Advice Bureau	<a href="http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk">www.citizensadvice.org.uk</a>	03444 111 444

## Summary of the complaints process



Please note that the timescales specified in diocesan complaints guidance may differ from those detailed above. School days are term time only, whilst working days are weekdays throughout the year.

\*\*\*\*\*End of Factsheet\*\*\*\*\*