



Alexander Hosea Primary School

'Roots to grow, wings to fly'

COMPLAINTS POLICY

Concerns and Complaints – Introduction

Alexander Hosea Primary School aims to work in partnership with parents in the best interests of the children. Any complaint will be given careful consideration and will be dealt with fairly and honestly.

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

Actions Before Making Any Complaint

Our complaints procedure is not intended to replace the normal informal discussions which take place between parents, staff and the Headteacher about problems and concerns as they arise. Most issues can be resolved through this dialogue.

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

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

When meeting with the class teacher to raise your concerns, please be patient; the class teacher may need time to undertake an investigation or put corrective measures in place and then determine their effectiveness. This informal stage may require several meetings to reach a conclusion satisfactory to all parties. During the appointment, discuss desired actions for the school and parent, timescales, and further meetings.

If a parent feels that a concern has not been solved through discussions with the class teacher, or that it is of a sufficiently serious nature, then an appointment to discuss it with the Headteacher should be made. The parent should indicate that the appointment is regarding a complaint.

Referral of Complaints

The majority of formal complaints against the school will fall within the remit of the Governing Body to consider, in line with this policy. However, there is a separate whistle-blowing policy and there are seven other categories of complaint for which there are separate procedures and the Local Authority may become involved.

- Admission to the school
- Statutory Assessment of special educational needs
- Exclusion of pupils from the school
- Concerns or allegations against staff or volunteers
- Child protection related issues or allegations of child abuse
- Any complaint about the action of the Governing Body

- Staff grievances and disciplinary

In any of these categories, the school will advise you of the procedure for your complaint. Complaints against any providers who are using the school premises will be handled by the provider according to their own complaints policy.

General Principles Regarding Any Complaint

The following principles will apply to any complaint

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

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

If the complaint is one that may result in disciplinary or legal action against the Headteacher, or the complaint is regarding the Headteacher, then the complaint will immediately be escalated to Stage 3 via a letter to the Chair of Governors as described below.

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

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

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

Stage 1 (Informal) - School Level

a) Complaint handled by the Headteacher.

If a parent feels that a concern has not been solved through discussion with the class teacher, or that it is of a sufficiently serious nature, then an appointment to discuss it with

the Headteacher should be made. The parent should indicate that the appointment is regarding a complaint.

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

The investigation will be completed within 10 school days and a follow up meeting held with the parent to discuss the results of the investigation. Further meetings may be held as required if both parties agree that the concern may be resolved by subsequent meetings, whilst still at the informal level.

The Headteacher will make written notes of any informal complaint. The notes will include details of the complaint, how it was dealt with, by whom and the outcome. In the event of the complaint proceeding to the Chair of Governors (informal stage 2) or the formal stage, these notes will be made available to the Chair, their representative or the Complaints Panel, as relevant.

If discussions between the Headteacher and the Complainant prove fruitless, and the issue cannot be resolved to the Complainant's satisfaction, then the complaint moves to stage 2, below.

b) Complaint about the Headteacher.

If the complaint is about the Headteacher, the informal investigation will progress straight to stage 2 and be undertaken by the Chair of Governors, unless the Chair decides it is necessary to move straight to Stage 3 (formal complaint).

Stage 2 (Informal) – Governing Body

If discussions between the Headteacher and the Complainant cannot resolve the issue to the Complainant's satisfaction, or if the complaint is about the Headteacher, the Chair of Governors will be invited to review the complaint and meet with the Complainant to resolve the complaint, whilst still at the informal level. The Chair of Governors may nominate a Vice Chair or other representative to do this on their behalf. If at this point the issue cannot be resolved to the Complainant's satisfaction then the Chair will advise the Complainant that they may make a formal complaint to the Governing Body, by putting the complaint in writing (using the Complaints Form) to the Chair of Governors **within 15 school days**.

The Chair of Governors can decline to review the complaint, in which case the Headteacher will advise the Complainant that they may make a formal complaint to the Governing Body, by putting the complaint in writing (using the Complaints Form) to the Chair of Governors **within 15 school days**.

Stage 3 (Formal) – Governing Body

When the Chair of Governors has received a formal complaint, a panel of two or three Governors will be convened to hear the complaint, and make a decision about it on behalf of the Governing Body. The Governors appointed to the panel will have had no previous involvement in the complaint.

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

The Complaints Panel will invite written evidence from all parties to the complaint. Any written evidence will be circulated to all parties prior to any meetings. The Complaints Panel will then meet with all parties to the complaint, formally and separately. Each party may be accompanied by an appointed representative who can speak on their behalf if necessary. All parties will be given a fair opportunity to express their point. The procedure for each meeting will be as follows

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

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

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

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

When a formal complaint is received by the Chair of Governors a letter of acknowledgement and a request for written evidence will be sent to the Complainant within 10 school days. All other parties to the complaint will receive a letter outlining the complaint and requesting written evidence. The letters will detail the Governors involved in the Complaints Panel and the nominated Chair. Any written evidence will be sent to the nominated Chair of the Complaints Panel. The panel will convene the complaints meetings as soon as is practically possible after the receipt of all written evidence, at mutually acceptable times. Following the conclusion of the complaints meetings with all parties, the panel will provide a written response to the complaint within 15 school days.

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

Appeal to the Secretary Of State

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

Monitoring and Review

The Governing Body will review this complaints policy on a regular basis. The Headteacher will log all formal complaints received by the school and will record how they were resolved.

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

Staff Disciplinary Procedures

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

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

School Policy Regarding Harassment or Abusive Behaviour

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

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

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

The school expects anyone who wishes to raise concerns with the school to:

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

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

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

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

- Ban the individual from entering the school site, with immediate effect
- Prosecute under Anti-Harassment legislation
- Call the police to remove the individual from the premises, under powers provided by the Education Act 1996

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

Serial and Persistent Complaints

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

Acknowledgements

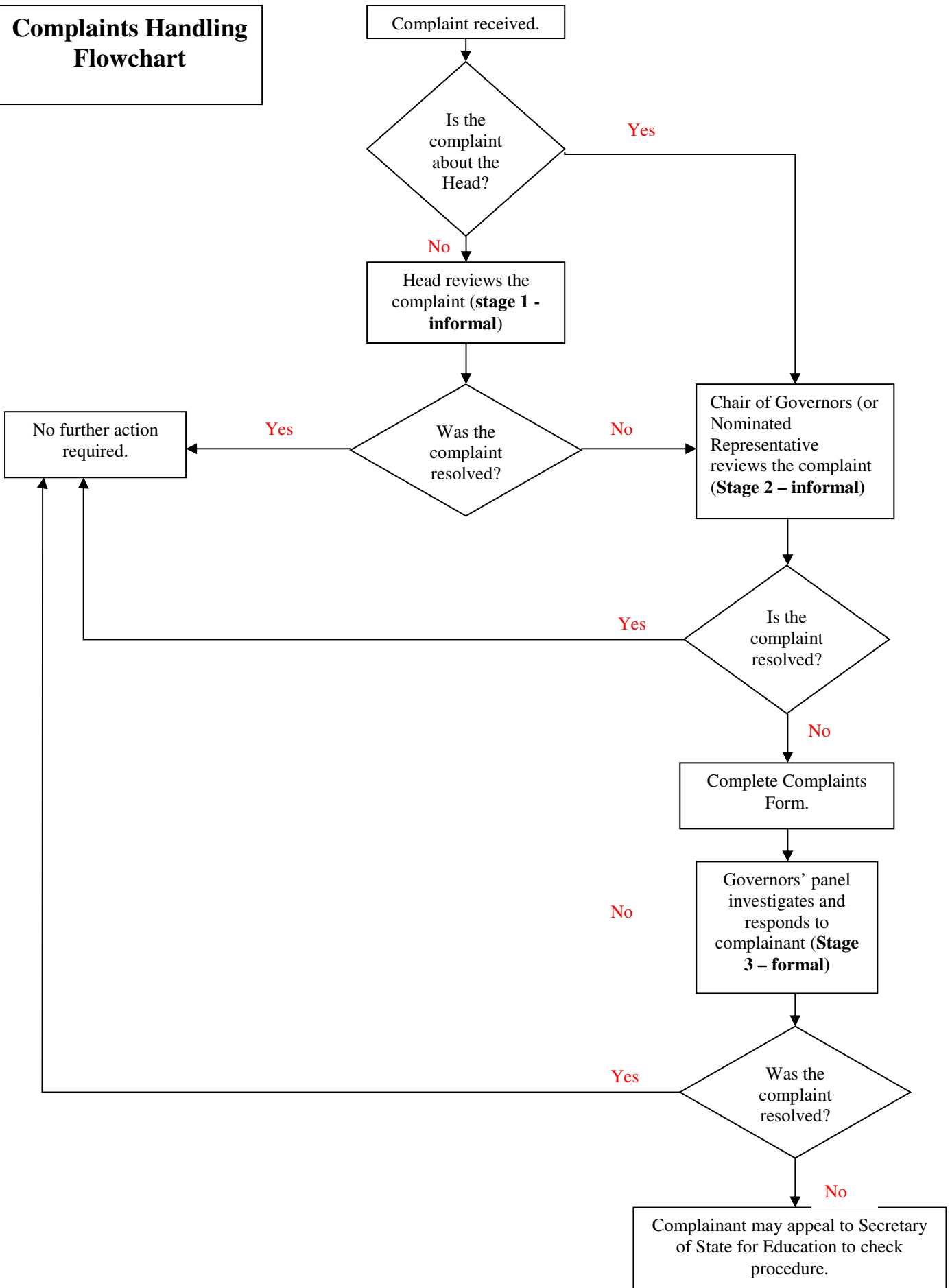
The main text of this policy is based upon a Complaints Policy from Charfield Primary School in South Gloucestershire. The Governors and Headteacher kindly agreed to share their work with all other South Gloucestershire Schools. Additional materials have been adapted from National Association of Head Teachers' guidance and South Gloucestershire Council's guidance.

Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA)

This policy has been screened to ensure that we give 'due consideration' to equality of opportunity and has been agreed and formally approved by the appropriate reviewing and ratification Committee.

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Complaints Handling Flowchart



Appendix 1 – Extract from South Gloucestershire Council Guidance 2012

Complaints not covered by this policy

17. Separate guidance is available for complaints about admission to school; about the SEND service and the statutory assessment of a child's special educational needs; the exclusion of pupils from school; concerns or allegations against staff or volunteers and child protection. The following is a brief guide.

Admission to school

18. If a place is not offered at a parent's/carer's preferred choice of school there is the right of appeal to an independent body under the School Standards and Framework Act of 1998 - Section 94 and Schedule 24. Appeals for community and controlled schools are arranged by South Gloucestershire Council Legal and Democratic Services. Appeals for places at academies, voluntary aided and foundation schools are the responsibility of the Academy Trust or Governing Body to arrange.
19. Appeals for Community and Controlled Schools must be made in writing to: Admissions and Transport Team, South Gloucestershire Council, Department for Children, Adults and Health, PO Box 298, Civic Centre, High Street, Kingswood, Bristol, BS15 0DQ.
20. Complaints about any aspect of the Admissions and Transport Service, should be made following the South Gloucestershire Council Complaints Procedure which is available on the South Gloucestershire Website.

Special Educational Needs & Disability (SEND)

21. The provision for pupils with special educational needs is the responsibility of the Governing Body and any complaints about SEND provision should be addressed using the complaints procedure.
22. Complaints about any aspect of the SEND Service, should be made following the South Gloucestershire Council Complaints Procedure which is available on the South Gloucestershire Website.
23. If the Local Authority has refused to carry out a Statutory Assessment of a child's SEN or the parents disagree with their child's proposed Education Health Care Plan, they should first ask for a meeting with a Local Authority Officer. If they are not satisfied, they are entitled to ask for a formal Disagreement Resolution process.
24. Parents also have a statutory right of appeal if the Local Authority has:
 - refused a request to begin a Statutory Assessment of their child's SEN
 - refused to issue a EHCP at the end of a Statutory Assessment
 - issued a Final EHCP and the parents disagree with Parts 2, 3 or 4
 - ceased to maintain a child's ECHP
 - refused to change the name of the school in Part 4 of a child's ECHP, provided the EHCP is at least 12 months old and the parent is asking for another maintained school.

The appeal rights are to the SEN and Disability Tribunal and last for two months from the date of the formal notification of the Authority's decision.

Exclusions from school

25. Subject to certain conditions, the governing body has a duty to consider parents' representations about an exclusion. They may delegate their responsibility to a designated sub-committee of at least three members.
26. The procedure for appeals against the governing body's decision has been revised by the School Discipline (Pupil Exclusions and Reviews) (England) Regulations 2012. Under the regulations, if a parent applies with fifteen days of receiving notice that a governing body has decided not to reinstate a permanently excluded pupil, the Local Authority must arrange for an independent review panel hearing to review the decision.
27. Full details of the process and remit of governing bodies and independent review panels are available in the statutory guidance 'Exclusion from maintained schools, Academies and pupil referral units in England.'

Allegations

28. Concerns or allegations of abuse against people who volunteer or work with children or those who are in positions of trust should be directed to the senior manager or employer for the organisation with operational responsibility for dealing with allegations, who will contact the Local Authority Designated Officer as appropriate.

Child Protection

29. **ANY concerns about possible child abuse should not be dealt with as a complaint but MUST be reported to the Access and Response Team on 01454 86 6000. If it is out of office hours then concerns should be raised with the Emergency Duty Team or the Police on 999.**

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

Agreed actions to address the problem at this stage?

Follow Up / Review Meeting Date:-

Signature:	
Date:	

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

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

Signature:

Date:

School use:

Date Form received:

Received by:

Date acknowledgement sent:

Acknowledgement sent by:

Complaint referred to:			
Date:			

Appendix 4

Investigation Procedure

The investigation of an allegation or a complaint will always be carried out thoroughly and responsibly, irrespective of whether the complaint appears to be trivial or serious. The outcome of such an investigation will have significance not only for the complainant but also for any member of staff against whom a complaint has been made.

Any anonymous complaint will not be investigated, unless there are exceptional circumstances. These would include serious concerns such as Child Protection issues or bullying allegations, where the school will either involve appropriate external agencies or else conduct its own internal review to test whether there is any corroborative evidence which might trigger a formal investigation.

Preparing for an Investigation

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

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

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

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

Conducting the investigation

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

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

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

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

Where children are potential witnesses, discretion will be exercised over their involvement. Pupils will only be interviewed when the nature of the complaint is sufficiently serious to

warrant it and adult witnesses are not available. Only in extreme circumstances will younger pupils be interviewed.

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

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

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

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

Concluding the investigation

The report may contain:

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

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

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

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

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

Taken from the National Association of Head Teachers Policy and Guidance.