



BONITAS
Multi-Academy Trust

BONITAS COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

This policy applies to all academies of the Bonitas Multi-Academy Trust

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1 Aim

The aim of this procedure is to ensure that any complaint against the trust, an academy school within the trust, or any individual connected with it, is dealt with fairly and efficiently and is resolved as soon as possible.

The procedure is in writing and is available to parents / carers of pupils on the Bonitas Trust website and its academies. A written copy of the policy will be sent to parents/carers after either verbal or written request.

2 Who can make a complaint?

This complaints procedure is not limited to parents or carers of children that are registered at an academy school within the trust. Any person, including members of the public, may make a complaint to an academy school within the trust, about any provision of facilities or services that the academy school provides.

The policy does not apply to concerns and complaints relating to the following, which are dealt with under separate policies:

- Admissions
- Exclusions
- Issues related to child protection
- EHC plans
- Staff grievances or disciplinary procedures

This procedure will apply to all other complaints.

3 Key principles

A complainant should never feel or be made to feel that a complaint made in a reasonable and appropriate way will cause offence or reflect adversely on the pupil or his/her opportunities at the relevant academy school. The school will endeavour to investigate and resolve every complaint in a positive manner and will treat every complaint as an opportunity to improve the service it provides.

4 The difference between a concern and a complaint

A concern may be defined as *'an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought'*.

A complaint may be defined as *'an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action'*.

It is in everyone's interest that concerns and complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. Many issues can be resolved informally, without the need to use the formal stages of the complaints procedure. Each academy school within the trust takes concerns seriously and will make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.

If you have difficulty discussing a concern with a particular member of staff, your views will be respected. In these cases, the headteacher will refer you to another staff member. Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels unable to deal with a concern, the headteacher will refer you to another staff member. The member of staff may be more

senior but does not have to be. The ability to consider the concern objectively and impartially is more important.

It is understood that there are occasions when people would like to raise their concerns formally. In this case, the relevant academy school will attempt to resolve the issue internally, through the stages outlined within this complaints procedure.

5 Definitions

In this policy:

- “school days” excludes weekends, bank holidays and academy trust holidays
- “parent” means a parent, carer or anyone with legal responsibility for a child

Procedures

6 How to raise a concern or make a complaint

To enable a proper investigation, concerns or complaints should be brought to the attention of the individual academy school or the Bonitas Multi-Academy Trust (for trust complaints) as soon as possible. A concern or complaint can be made in person, in writing or by telephone. They may also be made by a third party acting on behalf on a complainant, as long as they have appropriate consent to do so.

Concerns should be raised with either the class teacher or headteacher. If the issue remains unresolved, the next step is to make a complaint.

Complainants should not approach individual governors or trustees to raise concerns or complaints. They have no power to act on an individual basis and it may also prevent them from considering complaints at Stage 2 of the procedure.

Complaints against school staff (except the headteacher) should be made in the first instance, to the headteacher via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Complaints that involve or are about the headteacher should be addressed to the relevant academy school’s Chair of Governors, via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Complaints about the Chair of Governors, any individual governor or the whole governing body, the Chair of Trustees, any individual trustees or the whole trust board should be addressed to Dawn Deykin, Bonitas Trust Company Secretary, via the Ranelagh School office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

For ease of use, a template complaint form is included at the end of this procedure. If you require help in completing the form, please contact the office of the relevant academy school. You can also ask third-party organisations like the Citizens Advice to help you.

In accordance with equality law, we will consider making reasonable adjustments if required, to enable complainants to access and complete this complaints procedure. For instance, providing information in alternative formats such as large print, braille, translation services, assisting complainants in raising a formal complaint or holding meetings in accessible locations.

7 Anonymous complaints

We will not normally investigate anonymous complaints. However, the headteacher or Chair of Governors of the relevant academy school, if appropriate, will determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation. Serious safeguarding concerns are an exception to this policy.

8 Time scales

A complaint must be raised within three months of the incident or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within three months of the last of these incidents. Consideration will be given to complaints made outside of this time frame if exceptional circumstances apply.

9 Complaints received outside of term time

Complaints made outside of term time will be considered to have been received on the first school day after the holiday period.

10 Scope of this complaints procedure

This procedure covers all complaints about any provision of community facilities or services by academies within the Bonitas Multi-Academy Trust other than complaints that are dealt with under other statutory procedures, including those listed below:

Exceptions	Who to contact
Admissions to schools	Concerns about admissions should be dealt with through a separate process – either through the appeals process or via the local authority.
Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs School re-organisation proposals	Concerns about statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs, or school re-organisation proposals should be raised with sen.education@bracknell-forest.gov.uk .
Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation	Complaints about child protection matters are handled under the child protection and safeguarding policy and in accordance with relevant statutory guidance. If you have serious concerns, you may wish to contact the local authority designated officer (LADO) who has local responsibility for safeguarding LADO@bracknell-forest.gov.uk or the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) MASH@bracknell-forest.gov.uk .
Suspension or exclusion of children from school*	Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at: www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions . <i>*complaints about the application of the behaviour policy of an academy within the trust can be made through the complaints procedure.</i>
Whistleblowing	The trust has an internal whistleblowing procedure for all of its employees, including temporary staff and contractors. The Secretary of State for Education is the prescribed person for matters relating to education for whistle-blowers in education who do not want

	to raise matters direct with their employer. Referrals can be made at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus Volunteer staff who have concerns about an academy within the trust, should complain through the complaints procedure. It may also be possible to complain direct to the LA or the Department for Education (see link above), depending on the substance of the complaint.
Staff grievances	Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the trust's internal grievance procedures.
Staff conduct	Complaints about staff will be dealt with under the trust's internal disciplinary procedures, if appropriate. Complainants will not be informed of any disciplinary action taken against a staff member as a result of a complaint. However, the complainant will be notified that the matter is being addressed.
Complaints about services provided by other providers who may use school premises or facilities	Providers should have their own complaints procedure to deal with complaints about service. Please contact them direct.
National Curriculum - content	Please contact the Department for Education at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus

If other bodies are investigating aspects of the complaint, for example the police, local authority (LA) safeguarding teams or Tribunals, this may impact on the ability to adhere to the timescales within this procedure, or result in the procedure being suspended until those public bodies have completed their investigations. If this happens, the complainant will be informed of a proposed new timescale.

If a complainant commences legal action against the Bonitas Multi-Academy Trust, or an individual academy within the trust, in relation to their complaint, consideration will be given to whether to suspend the complaints procedure in relation to their complaint until those legal proceedings have concluded.

11 Resolving complaints

At each stage in the procedure, there is a commitment to resolving the complaint. If appropriate, the trust, or the relevant academy within the trust, will acknowledge that the complaint is upheld in whole or in part. In addition, one or more of the following may be offered:

- an explanation
- an admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better
- an assurance that we will try to ensure the event complained of will not recur
- an explanation of the steps that have been or will be taken to help ensure that it will not happen again and an indication of the timescales within which any changes will be made
- an undertaking to review school policies in light of the complaint
- an apology.

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

12 Withdrawal of a complaint

Complainants wishing to withdraw their complaint will be asked to confirm this in writing.

13 Vexatious complaints and unreasonable complainant behaviour

Please refer to the Bonitas Trust Policy for Managing Serial and Unreasonable Complaints.

14 Investigating complaints

At each stage, the person investigating the complaint must ensure 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 (where clarification or further information is necessary);
- clarify what, in the complainant's view, 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.

15 Record keeping and confidentiality

A written record will be kept of all complaints, including at what stage they were resolved. Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except where access is requested by the Secretary of State or where disclosure is required in the course of an academy inspection or under other legal authority.

16 Framework for dealing with complaints

Informal Stage – initial complaints and minor concerns

In most cases, complaints can be quickly resolved without the need to escalate to a formal complaint. The majority of issues can be addressed through simple clarification or by providing relevant information. We strongly encourage this informal approach as it fosters open communication and promotes a collaborative resolution.

If a complaint involves the trust itself, the matter should be raised directly with the Company Secretary. This can be done via email, letter, telephone, or in person by appointment, as arranged through the trust office. If the complaint involves a staff member of the trust, we recommend first addressing the issue directly with that individual through the same communication channels. The aim is always to resolve matters informally at the earliest stage possible.

For complaints related to a child attending an academy, the best course of action is to communicate directly with the child's class/form teacher, head of year, a senior member of staff, or the Headteacher. Again, this communication can be via email, letter, phone, or by appointment. Engaging in informal discussions with these key staff members often leads to quick and satisfactory resolutions.

When the complaint involves a member of academy staff, the preferred initial step is to communicate with that staff member directly. Again, this communication can be via email, letter, phone, or by appointment. By addressing the issue informally and promptly, we aim to maintain open dialogue and mutual understanding, preventing the need for escalation.

Informal meetings and discussions are invaluable, and parents are strongly encouraged to communicate directly with staff as soon as concerns arise. Our aim is to ensure that all issues are resolved quickly, respectfully, and informally wherever possible.

In cases where serious concerns arise, these should be taken directly to the Headteacher (or to the CEO of the trust, via the Company Secretary, if the complaint is about a Headteacher or Chair of Governors, or the Chair of Trustees if the complaint is about the CEO). For guidance on who to contact, you can seek advice from the Clerk to the Board of Trustees.

It is anticipated that most complaints will be resolved at this informal stage within 15 working school days of an academy/the trust being notified of the complaint. However, should an issue remain unresolved or if a parent is unsatisfied with the informal response, they are entitled to proceed to Stage 1 of the formal procedure.

Stage 1: Formal Stage

If a concern or complaint is not resolved to the satisfaction of the complainant at the informal stage, or if a complainant expresses a wish for the complaint to be dealt with immediately as a formal complaint, the complaint must be made to the headteacher (unless they are about the head teacher), via the academy's office. This may be done in person or in writing (preferably using the Complaint Form).

The headteacher will record the date the complaint is received and will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 5 school days.

Within this response, the head teacher will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, ask what remains unresolved, what outcome the complainant would like to see and to explore the possibility of an informal resolution. The head teacher can consider whether a face-to-face meeting is the most appropriate way of doing this. If a complainant accepts an invitation to attend a meeting, they may be accompanied by one other person such as a relative or friend, who should not be legally qualified, to assist in explaining the nature of the concerns. Where possible, this meeting will take place within 10 school days of receipt of the written complaint.

Note: The headteacher may delegate the investigation to another member of the academy's senior leadership team but not the decision to be taken.

Note: If a complaint involves conflicts of interest within the governing body or trust, an independent investigator will be appointed to ensure impartiality and a fair investigation, and those with conflicts will not participate in the complaint's handling or decision-making process.

During the investigation, the headteacher (or investigator) will:

- if necessary, interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish
- keep a written record of any meetings/interviews in relation to their investigation.

At the conclusion of their investigation, the headteacher will provide a formal written response within 10 school days of the date of receipt of the complaint.

If the headteacher is unable to meet this deadline, they will provide the complainant with an update and revised response date.

The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions the academy will take to resolve the complaint.

The headteacher will advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 1.

If the complaint is about the headteacher, or a member of the governing body it should be made to the Chair of Governors, via the academy office, following which a suitably skilled governor will be appointed to complete all the actions at Stage 2.

Complaints about the Chair or Vice Chair of Governors should be made to the CEO of the Bonitas Trust, via the Company Secretary at the following address:

Bonitas Multi-Academy Trust,
c/o Ranelagh School
Ranelagh Drive,
Bracknell,
RG12 9DA

Complaints about the CEO should be sent to the Chair of the Bonitas Trust, via the Company Secretary (contact details shown above).

If the complaint is about:

- the Chair of Trustees
- jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair of trustees
- the entire board of trustees or
- the majority of the board of trustees

Stage 1 will be considered by an independent investigator appointed by the trust. At the conclusion of their investigation, the independent investigator will provide a formal written response.

Following investigation, the Headteacher, CEO or Chair of Governors / Trustees (as appropriate) will notify the complainant in writing of their decision and the reasons for it. Where possible, this will be within 15 school days of receipt of the complaint.

If, in the early stages of the investigation, the Headteacher/CEO considers that the complaint is best dealt with immediately at Stage 2, it will be passed to the Chair of Governors / Trustees and the complainant will be informed of this action without delay.

Stage 2: Review Panel Hearing

If a complainant is dissatisfied with the decision of the Headteacher/Chair of Governors (in the case of individual academy complaints), CEO/Chair of Trustees (in the case of complaints which relate to the Bonitas Multi-Academy Trust), at Stage 1, it is possible to request that a Review Panel of the governing body is convened to reconsider the complaint. A request will only be considered if the complainant has completed the relevant procedures at Stages 1.

A request to escalate to Stage 2 must be made in writing to the Clerk to the Governing Body / Board of Trustees within 10 school days of receipt of the Stage 1 response. Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.

The complainant should ensure that

- they provide copies of all relevant documentation;
- state all the grounds for the complaint;
- state the outcome that they are seeking.

The Clerk will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 5 school days of receipt.

The Clerk will write to the complainant to inform them of the details of the meeting; date, time, place of hearing and brief details of the Panel members who will be present. They will aim to convene a meeting within 20 school days of receipt of the Stage 2 request. If this is not possible, the Clerk will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed. Fair consideration will be given to any bona fide objection to a particular member of the Panel.

If the complainant rejects the offer of three proposed dates, without good reason, the Clerk will decide when to hold the meeting. It will then proceed in the complainant's absence on the basis of written submissions from both parties.

The complaints committee will consist of at least three governors or trustees with no prior involvement or knowledge of the complaint. Prior to the meeting, they will decide amongst themselves who will act as the Chair of the Complaints Committee. If there are

fewer than three governors or trustees available, the Clerk will source any additional, independent governors or trustees through another local school or trust or through their LA's Governor Services team, in order to make up the committee. Alternatively, an entirely independent committee may be convened to hear the complaint at Stage 2.

The committee will decide whether to deal with the complaint by inviting parties to a meeting or through written representations, but in making their decision they will be sensitive to the complainant's needs.

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

Note: Complaints about staff conduct will not generally be handled under this complaints procedure. Complainants will be advised that any staff conduct complaints will be considered under staff disciplinary procedures, if appropriate, but outcomes will not be shared with them.

The Clerk or nominated deputy will also attend the hearing in order to keep a record of the proceedings.

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

At least 7 school days before the meeting, the Clerk will:

- confirm and notify the complainant of the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that, if the complainant is invited, the dates are convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible
- request copies of any further written material the complainant wishes the panel to consider be submitted at least 5 school days before the meeting.

The committee will not normally accept, as evidence, recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.

A copy of the complaint and any other documentation provided by the complainant in support of their complaint, or by the academy/trust in defence of the complaint, will be provided to the Panel as soon as practicable upon receipt. Copies of these documents shall also be provided to the complainant and Headteacher/ CEO (as applicable) at least 3 school days before the hearing. The Panel reserves the right not to consider any documentation presented by either the complainant or the academy/trust, less than 3 school days prior to the hearing.

The panel will not review any new complaints at this stage or consider evidence unrelated to the initial complaint to be included. New complaints must be dealt with from Stage 1 of the procedure.

The review will be conducted by a panel of at least three people. No governor/trustee may sit on the panel if they have had prior involvement in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it. In the case of complaints to an academy, the panel will include no more than two governors of the academy. In the case of complaints to the Bonitas Trust, the panel will include no more than two trustees. In both cases, at least one other member of the panel must be independent of the management and running of the trust/academy.

If the complaint is:

- jointly about the governing body Chair and Vice Chair or
- the entire governing body or
- the majority of the governing body

Stage 2 will be heard by a committee of one trustee and two independent, co-opted governors / trustees.

If the complaint is:

- jointly about the Trust Board Chair and Vice Chair or
- the entire trust board or
- the majority of the trust board

Stage 2 will be heard by a committee of independent, co-opted trustees.

The meeting will be held in private. Electronic recordings of meetings or conversations are not permitted unless a complainant's own disability or special needs require it. Prior knowledge and consent of all parties attending must be sought before meetings or conversations take place. Consent will be recorded in any minutes taken.

The aim of the hearing is for the Panel to review the decision reached at Stage 2 with a view to resolving the complaint and achieving reconciliation between the academy/trust and the

complainant. The Panel will be conducted in such a way as to ensure that all those present have the opportunity to ask questions and make comments in an appropriate manner. The Panel is under no obligation to hear oral evidence from witnesses but may do so and/or may take written statements into account.

After due consideration of all facts and evidence the Panel considers relevant, the Panel will reach a decision on the balance of probabilities as to whether or not the complaint is substantiated.

The committee can:

- uphold the complaint in whole or in part
- dismiss the complaint in whole or in part.

If the complaint is upheld in whole or in part, the committee will:

- decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint
- where appropriate, recommend changes to the school’s systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future.

The Chair of the Committee will provide the complainant and academy / trust with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within 7 school days.

The letter to the complainant will include details of how to contact the Department for Education if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled by the academy / trust.

Note: The response to Stage 2 panels heard by a committee of independent governors will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions the academy / trust will take to resolve the complaint. The response will also advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied.

All complaints data will be handled in strict compliance with the Data Protection Act 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). This means that any personal data collected as part of the complaint process will be kept confidential, securely stored, and only accessed by those involved in handling the complaint. Data will be processed lawfully and fairly, ensuring it is used solely for the purpose of resolving the complaint.

All individuals involved in the complaints procedure will be informed of their legal rights and obligations, including those under relevant legislation such as the Data Protection Act (DPA) 2018, GDPR, school complaints regulations, education law, the Equality Act 2010, and the Freedom of Information Act 2000. We are committed to ensuring that every person understands their duties to protect data privacy, uphold equality, and act in compliance with relevant laws throughout the process.

Every effort will be made to meet the timelines recorded in this policy however, exceptional circumstances may arise that may warrant deviation from the standard complaints procedure timelines.

Exceptions	Reason
Ongoing External Investigations	If the complaint is related to an incident being investigated by external bodies (e.g., police, child protection services), the school may need to wait for their findings before proceeding.
Complexity of the Complaint	A complex complaint involving multiple parties or extensive evidence may require additional time to investigate thoroughly

Key Personnel Unavailability	If key individuals involved in the investigation or resolution process are unexpectedly unavailable due to illness, leave, or other urgent commitments, delays may be necessary.
Legal Proceedings	If legal action has been initiated in relation to the complaint, the school may suspend the complaints procedure until the case is resolved.
Health or Welfare of Parties Involved	If the complainant, those involved, or their representatives are unable to participate due to health issues, more time may be granted to accommodate their circumstances.

17 Next steps

If the complainant believes the academy/trust did not handle their complaint in accordance with the published complaints procedure or they acted unlawfully or unreasonably in the exercise of their duties under education law, they can contact the Department of Education after they have completed Stage 2.

The Department of Education will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by the academy/trust. They will consider whether the academy/trust has adhered to education legislation and any statutory policies connected with the complaint.

The complainant can refer their complaint to the Department for Education online at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus, by telephone on: 0370 000 2288 or by writing to:
 Department for Education
 Piccadilly Gate
 Store Street
 Manchester
 M1 2WD

18 Monitoring procedures

The Local Governing Body and Bonitas Board of Trustees will monitor the level and nature of complaints within an academy and across the trust. They will review the outcomes on a regular basis to ensure the effectiveness of the policy and procedures.

Complaint Form

Please complete and return to <Name> (*either Headteacher / Clerk / Company Secretary*) who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

Your name:
Pupil's name (if relevant):
Your relationship to the pupil (if relevant):
Address: Postcode: Day time telephone number: Evening telephone number: Email address:
Please give details of your complaint, including whether you have spoken to anybody at the school about it.

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

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

Signature:

Date:

Official use

Date acknowledgement sent:

By who:

Complaint referred to:

Action taken:

Date:

Roles and Responsibilities

Complainant

The complainant can help ensure a more effective resolution by:

- Providing a clear and detailed explanation of the complaint as early as possible
- Cooperating with the school to seek a solution
- Responding promptly to requests for information, meetings, or agreements on the details of the complaint
- Requesting assistance when needed
- Treating everyone involved in the complaint process with respect
- Maintaining confidentiality and refraining from sharing the details of the complaint on social media.

Investigator

The investigator's role is to establish the facts related to the complaint by:

- Conducting a comprehensive, open, transparent, and fair review of the complaint, which includes:
 - Sensitively and thoroughly interviewing the complainant to understand what has occurred and who was involved
 - Interviewing relevant staff, children/young people, and others connected to the complaint
 - Reviewing records and any other pertinent information
 - Carefully analysing the gathered information
- Liaising with the complainant and the complaints co-ordinator, as needed, to clarify what the complainant believes would resolve the issue.

The investigator should:

- Conduct interviews with an open mind and be prepared to ask persistent and probing questions
- Keep detailed notes of interviews or arrange for an independent note taker to record the meeting minutes
- Ensure that all documents produced during the investigation are securely stored until the complaint process, including any appeals, is complete
- Be mindful of the response timescales and adhere to them
- Prepare a thorough report for the Headteacher or complaints committee, outlining the facts, identifying possible solutions, and recommending actions to resolve the issue

The Headteacher or complaints committee will then decide whether to uphold or dismiss the complaint and communicate this decision to the complainant, including information on further escalation options if needed.

Complaints Co-ordinator

(This could be the Headteacher, a designated complaints governor, or another staff member providing administrative support)

The complaints co-ordinator should:

- Ensure that the complainant is kept fully informed at each stage of the procedure
- Liaise with relevant staff members, the Headteacher, Chair of Governors, or the Clerk to facilitate the smooth operation of the complaints process
- Be mindful of specific considerations such as:
 - Sharing of third-party information
 - Providing additional support, such as interpretation services or assistance when the complainant is a child or young person
- Maintain accurate and secure records of the complaint and all related communications.

The Clerk to the Governing Body or Company Secretary is the point of contact for the complainant and the committee and should:

- ensure all individuals involved in the complaint procedure are aware of their legal rights and duties, including any under legislation relating to school complaints, education law, the Equality Act 2010, the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act (DPA) 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) (with attention to the handling, storage and sharing of sensitive personal data).
- set the date, time, and venue of the meeting, ensuring that the dates are convenient to all parties (if they are invited to attend) and the venue and proceedings are accessible and inclusive to all parties involved (e.g. wheelchair accessibility or providing language interpretation if necessary).
- collate all written materials relevant to the complaint including documentation from previous stages, submissions from both the school and complainant and any other relevant supporting documentation. Distribute the materials to all relevant parties in advance of the meeting ensuring compliance with agreed timescales.
- record the proceedings in note form and accurately prepare the minutes of the meeting giving an unbiased account of the proceedings.
- circulate the minutes of the meeting to all relevant parties within the agreed timeframe.
- notify all parties of the committee's decision as prepare by the chair and outline any next steps.

The Committee Chair, who is nominated in advance of the complaint meeting and should ensure:

- Both parties are formally requested (via the Clerk) to provide any additional evidence or information relevant to the complaint by a specified deadline well in advance of the meeting. These requests should be clear and specific and outline what is required to ensure comprehensive preparation.
- The meeting is conducted in a structured but informal manner, ensuring it is not adversarial. The Chair should foster a respectful and professional environment, making sure that all participants, including the complainant, school representatives, and committee members, are treated with dignity, respect, and courtesy, regardless of the nature of the complaint.
- Complainants who may not be accustomed to formal meetings, such as parents, children, or young people, are supported and put at ease. The Chair should ensure that the atmosphere is conducive to open communication and that any accommodations

necessary for the complainant's comfort and understanding are made (e.g., simplified language, visual aids, or translation services).

- At the outset of the meeting, the remit, authority, and scope of the committee should be clearly explained to all attendees. This should include outlining the committee's role in fact-finding and decision-making, the boundaries of its jurisdiction, and what the complainant can expect in terms of outcomes.
- All written material relevant to the case is made available to all parties attending the meeting in advance, ensuring compliance with the Data Protection Act (DPA) 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Care should be taken that no material breaches confidentiality or privacy rights. Any redacted information should be clearly explained to avoid confusion.
- If new issues arise during the meeting, all parties must be given adequate time and opportunity to consider and respond. The Chair should manage this by suggesting an adjournment if necessary, to ensure the fairness of proceedings and allow for thorough consideration.
- Both the complainant and the school are given equal and sufficient opportunities to present their cases and seek clarity. This can be achieved through written submissions in advance, as well as oral presentations during the meeting. The Chair should actively facilitate this process, ensuring that both parties feel heard and respected.
- The meeting addresses the key issues raised by the complainant and all relevant points are explored and discussed, and unrelated matters minimised. Key findings of fact should be based on the evidence and testimonies presented. Any decisions should be rooted in these facts, with clear reasons provided for the committee's conclusions.
- The committee remains neutral, objective, and free from bias. Members should be open-minded, impartial, and act independently of any external influence. It is critical that no committee member has a vested interest in the outcome or was involved in earlier stages of the complaint.
- Detailed and accurate minutes be taken, recording all key discussions, evidence, and decisions. This ensures transparency and provides an official record of the proceedings, which can be referred to later if necessary.

The Chair should liaise closely with the Clerk (and the complaints coordinator, if applicable), ensuring that all procedural aspects of the meeting are followed correctly, from the scheduling to the final notification of the committee's decision.

After the meeting, the Chair should ensure that the complainant and all relevant parties receive formal written communication detailing the committee's decision, including the reasons for the decision. The Chair should also ensure that any agreed actions are followed up and documented.

Committee Members should be fully aware of their responsibilities and conduct throughout the complaint meeting, ensuring that:

- The meeting is both independent and impartial, and perceived as such by all parties, and that no governor or committee member has had prior involvement in the complaint or the circumstances surrounding it. Any potential conflict of interest, perceived bias, or connection with the complainant, school staff, or related events must be disclosed and addressed to maintain the integrity of the process.
- The primary aim of the meeting is to resolve the complaint in a way that achieves reconciliation between the school and the complainant. The committee should seek to understand the complainant's concerns and the school's position and reach a resolution that addresses the issues raised. The committee must acknowledge that full satisfaction may not be possible in all cases, particularly if the committee's decision does not align with the complainant's expectations. In some cases, the committee's role may be limited

to establishing the facts and making evidence-based recommendations to improve future practices or policies.

- Complainants, who may feel nervous, inhibited, or emotionally charged in the formal setting of a complaint meeting are put at ease. This is particularly important for parents and carers discussing issues that directly impact their child. Committee members should maintain a supportive and understanding tone, and an atmosphere where complainants feel heard and respected regardless of the outcome. Extra care and consideration must be taken when the complainant is a child or young person, particularly if they are present during any part of the meeting. The meeting's atmosphere and proceedings should be comfortable and supportive and not intimidate the child/young person. Communication style should be adjusted accordingly to make the child/young person feel understood and involved in an age-appropriate way. Respect and equal consideration should be given to the views of the child/young person as they would an adult.
- The committee asks in advance if the child/young person requires any additional support, such as an adult or translator, to assist them in presenting their complaint. This ensures that they are able to participate fully and without unnecessary stress.
- If a child or young person involved is the complainant the committee should work closely with the parent to determine which parts of the meeting, if any, the child/young person should attend. The parent/carer should be informed that, while the committee will take their views into account, the final decision on the child's attendance rests with the committee and will be based on whether it is in the best interest of the child/young person to be present, considering both their emotional well-being and the nature of the discussions. Above all, the welfare of the child or young person must be the committee's primary concern throughout the process.
- Committee members focus on carefully evaluating the evidence and testimonies provided during the meeting. Each point should be considered on its own merits, with the ultimate goal of reaching conclusions that are fact-based and fair to both the school and the complainant. This includes maintaining an open mind, avoiding preconceived notions, and adhering strictly to the evidence presented.
- Throughout the complaint process, committee members respect the confidentiality of the complainant, the child/young person (if applicable), and all other parties involved. Any sensitive information disclosed during the meeting should be handled in compliance with the Data Protection Act (DPA) 2018 and GDPR, ensuring that no unauthorised disclosures occur.