Sheffield South East Trust

Complaints Policy

Last reviewed on:	22/07/2025
Next review due by:	21/07/2027

Who can make a complaint?
This complaints procedure is not limited to parents or carers of children that are registered at the school. Any person, including members of the public, may make a complaint to Sheffield South East Trust about any provision of facilities or services that we provide. Unless complaints are dealt with under separate statutory procedures (such as appeals relating to exclusions or admissions), we will use this complaints procedure.

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*'.

Sheffield South East Trust will always aim to ensure that complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. Wherever possible, we would look to resolve any issues informally, without the need to use the formal stages of the complaints procedure. Sheffield South East 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, we will respect your views. 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 member of staff. 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.

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

How to raise a concern or make a complaint
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 of a complainant, as long as they have appropriate consent to do so.

- 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 Chair of Governors or Trust CEO, via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.
- Complaints about the any individual governor should be addressed to the Chair of Governors to investigate via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.
- Complaints about the Chair of Governors or the whole Governing Body should be addressed to the CEO of the Trust via the Trust office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.
- Complaints about the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) or a Trustee of the Trust, should be addressed to the Chair of Trustees, via the Trust office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.
- Complaints against the Chair of Trustees should be addressed to the Vice Chair of Trustees via the Trust office. Please mark them as private and confidential.

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

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

Anonymous complaints
We will not normally investigate anonymous complaints. However, the Headteacher , CEO or Chair of Governors, if appropriate, will determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation.

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

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

Scope of this complaints procedure
This procedure covers all complaints about any provision of community facilities or services by Sheffield South East Trust, other than complaints that are dealt with under other statutory procedures, including those listed below.

Exceptions	Who to contact
Admissions to schools	Concerns about admissions should be handled through a separate process – either through the appeals process or via Sheffield City Council.
Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation	Complaints about child protection matters are handled under our child protection and safeguarding policy and in accordance with relevant statutory guidance. If you have serious concerns, you may wish to contact the local authority designated officer (LADO) who has local responsibility for safeguarding.
Exclusion of children from school*	Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at: www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions. **complaints about the application of the school's behaviour policy can be made through the school's complaints procedure.*
Whistleblowing	We have an internal whistleblowing procedure for all our employees, including temporary staff and contractors. The Secretary of State for Education is the prescribed person for matters relating to education for whistleblowers 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 the Trust or its schools should complain through the Trust's complaints procedure. You may also be able to complain direct to Sheffield City Council or the Department for Education (see link above), depending on the substance of your complaint.

Staff grievances	Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the school's internal grievance procedures.
Staff conduct	Complaints about staff will be dealt with under the school's internal disciplinary procedures, if appropriate. Complainants will not be informed of any disciplinary action taken against a staff member as a result of a complaint. However, the complainant will be notified that the matter is being addressed.

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

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

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

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

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

Complaints Procedure

Stage 1 – Informal complaints
It is to be hoped that most concerns can be expressed and resolved on an informal basis and as early as possible, without the need for formal procedures. Parents and carers need not only to be listened to but also to feel that they have been listened to. Nevertheless, anyone receiving a complaint should ensure that a record of the complaints and its outcome are maintained.

Concerns should be raised with either the class teacher or Headteacher. Complainants should not approach individual governors to raise concerns or complaints. They have no power to act on an individual basis and it may also prevent them from considering complaints at Stage 3 of the procedure.

It may be unclear as to whether a parent or carer is asking a question or expressing an opinion, rather than making a complaint. Similarly, a parent or carer may want a preliminary discussion or be seeking clarification in order to decide whether they wish to take the matter further.

If the member of staff first approached cannot deal with the matter immediately, then they should make a clear note of the date, the name of the complainant and contact address/telephone number provided. The Headteacher should be informed accordingly. A members of staff should be aware of the procedure for referring a complaint and ensure that when a referral has been made, that this is followed through.

The school should inform staff that they have the right to advice or representation from their Trade Union at any stage of the complaints procedure, once it becomes clear that a complaint is being made about a member of staff.

At the conclusion of an investigation, the appropriate person investigating the complaint will provide an informal written response within 10 school days of the date of receipt of the complaint. If the issue remains unresolved, the next step is to make a formal complaint. Parents and carers should be given clear information both verbally and in writing about how to progress their complaint and any independent advice available to them.

Stage 2 – Formal complaints
At this stage, it will be apparent that a formal complaint has been registered and an appropriate response will be required. Formal complaints must be made to the Headteacher (unless they are about the Headteacher), via the school office. This may be done in person or in writing (preferably on the Complaint Form). Schools should be sensitive to particular needs of parents or carers who may have difficulty in making a written complaint or for who English is not their first language.

In some instances, the Headteacher may have already been involved in looking at the matter, in others, it will be their first involvement. Headteachers should make arrangements to ensure that their involvement does not predominate at each stage of a particular complaint. Arrangements may be made for other staff to deal with parent and carer concerns at Stage 1, allowing for the Headteacher involvement at Stage 2, should this be necessary. At any stage, the Headteacher, may designate another member of staff to collect information and prepare are response.

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 3 school days.

Within this response, the Headteacher will provide a brief outline of the complaints procedure and an expected date for the provision of a response (usually within 10 school days), seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, ask what remains unresolved and what outcome the complainant would like to see. The Headteacher can consider whether a face to face meeting is the most appropriate way of doing this.

If the response time proves to be unworkable, the complainant should be provided with an explanation for the delay and provided with a revised date for the provision of a response.

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

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 explaining the conclusion reached, the reasons for this conclusion and where appropriate, any actions the school will take to resolve the complaint. This should be done within 10 school days of the complaint being received.

If the complaint concerns a member of staff and action is to be taken against the member of staff concerned, the phrase 'appropriate action has or will be taken', should be used.

The Headteacher will advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 2. They should be advised that should they find the Headteacher's response inadequate and wish to take matters further, that they should notify the Chair of the Local Governing Body within 10 school days of receipt.

If a complaint is about the Headteacher or a member of the Local Governing Body, arrangements should be made for the initial investigation to be conducted by the Chair of the Local Governing Body, CEO of the Trust or a suitably constituted Governing Body Complaints panel who will undertake Stage 2 of these procedures.

If the complaint is:

- about the Chair of the Governing Body
- the entire governing body or
- the majority of the governing body

Stage 2 will be escalated to the CEO of the Trust.

If the complaint is:

- about the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) or
- a Trustee of the Trust

Stage 2 will be escalated to the Chair of Trustees.

If the complaint is:

- about the Chair of Trustees

Stage 2 will be escalated to the Vice Chair of Trustees

Stage 3 – Panel Hearing
If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome at Stage 2 and wishes to take the matter further, they can escalate the complaint to Stage 3. It is anticipated that complaints will rarely reach this stage.

Stage 3 consists of a panel hearing made up of at least three people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint with one panel member who is independent of the management and running of the school/Trust. This is the final stage of the complaints procedure. Every effort should therefore be made to mediate or conciliate in order reach a resolution.

A request to escalate to Stage 3 must be made to the Trust Governance Professional in writing, via the Trust office, within 10 school days of receipt of the Stage 2 response. In exceptional circumstances, the school may consider progressing a verbal complaint where there are believed to be sufficient grounds to do so. Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.

The appeal should state clearly why it is felt that the complaint has not been resolved satisfactorily and wherever possible, supported by documentary evidence or witness statements. In the unlikely event of pupils needing to be interviewed, care will need to be taken to ensure that parental permission is obtained.

The Trust Governance Professional will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 3 school days.

The complainant will be informed that the panel will aim to convene a meeting within 20 school days of receipt of the request. If this is not possible, an anticipated date will be provided and the complainant kept informed. If the complainant rejects the offer of three proposed dates, without good reason, the Trust Governance Professional in cooperation with the Panel Chair, 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 Trust Governance Professional should ensure that the panel hears the complaint within 20 school days of receiving the request. All relevant correspondence regarding the complaint should be given to each panel member as soon as the composition of the panel has been determined.

If the complaint is:

- about the Chair of Governors
- the entire governing body or
- the majority of the governing body

Stage 3 will be heard by Trustees and an independent panel member.

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

- confirm and notify the complainant of the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that, if the complainant is invited, the dates are convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible
- request copies of any further written material to be submitted to the committee at least 5 school days before the meeting.
- inform the complainant that they may bring someone along to the panel meeting to provide support. This can be a relative or friend. Generally, we do not encourage either party to bring legal representatives to the appeals meeting. However, there may be occasion when legal representation is appropriate e.g. if a school employee is called as a witness in a complaint meeting, they may wish to be supported by union and/or legal representation. Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

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 (Human Resources) staff disciplinary procedures, if appropriate, but outcomes will not be shared with them.

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

The committee will also not review any new complaints at this stage or consider evidence unrelated to the initial complaint to be included. New complaints must be dealt with from Stage 1 of the procedure.
The meeting will be held in private. Electronic recordings of meetings or conversations are not normally permitted unless a complainant's own disability or special needs require it. Prior knowledge and consent of all parties attending must be sought before meetings or conversations take place. Consent will be recorded in any minutes taken.

Should either party wish to produce previously undisclosed or uncirculated documentation, it is in the interests of natural justice to adjourn the meeting to allow sufficient time for each party to consider and respond to this.

The committee will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented. The committee can:

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

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

- decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint
- where appropriate, recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future. These will be made to the Governing Body of the school at an appropriate time.

Should any action need to be taken against a member of staff, in order to protect their rights, the phrase 'appropriate action has or will be taken' should be used.

The Chair of the Committee will provide the complainant and the school with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within 15 school days.

The letter to the complainant will include details of how to contact the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled by the school.

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

The panel will ensure that those findings and recommendations are sent by electronic mail or otherwise given to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about. Furthermore, they will be available for inspection on the school premises by the proprietor and the Headteacher.

A written record will be kept of all complaints, and of whether they are resolved at the preliminary stage or proceed to a panel hearing.

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

Complaints escalated to/about the Trust, CEO or Trustee
If a complaint is escalated to Sheffield South East Trust or if a complainant wishes to complain directly about the Trust, then the complaint should be sent to the CEO to be investigated.

The CEO will write to the complainant acknowledging the complaint within 3 school days of the date that the written request was received. The acknowledgement will confirm that the complaint will now be investigated under Stage 2 of this Complaints Policy and will confirm the date for providing a response to the complainant.

Following the investigation, the CEO will write to the complainant confirming the outcome within 10 school days of the date that the letter was received. If this time limit cannot be met, the CEO will write to the complainant explaining the reason for the delay and providing a revised date.

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

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

If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of the previous stage, the complainant should write to the Trust Governance Professional asking for the complaint to be heard before a Complaint Panel, within 10 school days.

The Trust Governance Professional will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 3 school days.

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

The Trust Governance Professional will write to the complainant to inform them of the date of the meeting. They will aim to convene a meeting within 20 school days of receipt of the request. If this is not possible, the Trust Governance Professional will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed.

If the complainant rejects the offer of three proposed dates, without good reason, the Trust Governance Professional in cooperation with the Panel Chair, 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.

If the complaint is:

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

Stage 3 will be heard by a completely independent committee panel.

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

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

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

- confirm and notify the complainant of the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that, if the complainant is invited, the dates are convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible
- request copies of any further written material to be submitted to the committee at least 5 school days before the meeting.
- inform the complainant that they may bring someone along to the panel meeting to provide support. This can be a relative or friend. Generally, we do not encourage either party to bring legal representatives to the appeals meeting. However, there may be occasion when legal representation is appropriate e.g. if a Trust employee is called as a witness in a complaint meeting, they may wish to be supported by union and/or legal representation. Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

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 (Human Resources) staff disciplinary procedures, if appropriate, but outcomes will not be shared with them.

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

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

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

The committee will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented. The committee can:

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

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

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

The Chair of the Committee will provide the complainant and Sheffield South East Trust with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within 15 school days.

The letter to the complainant will include details of how to contact the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled by the Trust.

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

The panel will ensure that those findings and recommendations are sent by electronic mail or otherwise given to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about. Furthermore, they will be available for inspection on the school premises by the proprietor and the Headteacher.

A written record will be kept of all complaints, and of whether they are resolved at the preliminary stage or proceed to a panel hearing.

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

Next Steps
If the complainant believes the school/Trust did not handle their complaint in accordance with the published complaints procedure or they acted unlawfully or unreasonably in the exercise of their duties under education law, they can contact the ESFA after they have completed Stage 3.

The ESFA will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by Sheffield South East Trust. They will consider whether the necessary education legislation has been adhered to and any statutory policies connected with the complaint and whether they have followed Part 7 of the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

The complainant can refer their complaint to the ESFA online at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus, by telephone on: 0370 000 2288 or by writing to:

Academy Complaints and Customer Insight Unit
Education and Skills Funding Agency
Cheylesmore House
5 Quinton Road
Coventry
CV1 2WT

Annex A - Managing serial and unreasonable complaints

Sheffield South East Trust is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, and to providing a high quality service to those who complain. We will not normally limit the contact complainants have with our schools. However, we do not expect our staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour and will take action to protect staff from that behaviour, including that which is abusive, offensive or threatening.

There will be occasions when, despite all stages of the complaint procedure having been followed, the complainant remains dissatisfied. If a complainant tries to re-open the same issue, they should be informed that the procedure has been completed and that the matter is now closed.

If the complainant contacts the school again on the same issue, the correspondence may then be viewed as 'serial' or 'persistent' and the school may choose not to respond. A complaint will not be marked as 'serial' before the complainant has completed the procedure.

Under no circumstances should a complainant be marked as 'serial' for exercising their right to refer their complaint to their MP, regardless of which stage the complaint has reached.

The school may receive complaints considered to be vexatious. The Office of the Independent Adjudicator defines the characteristics of a 'frivolous' or 'vexatious' complaint as:

- complaints which are obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific, repetitious
- insistence upon pursuing unmeritorious complaints and/or unrealistic outcomes beyond all reason
- insistence upon pursuing meritorious complaints in an unreasonable manner
- complaints which are designed to cause disruption or annoyance
- demands for redress that lack any serious purpose or value

Sheffield South East Trust will not refuse to accept further correspondence or complaints from an individual it has had repeat or excessive contact with. The application of a 'serial or persistent' marking should be against the subject or complaint itself rather than the complainant.

Sheffield South East Trust defines unreasonable behaviour as that which hinders our consideration of complaints because of the frequency or nature of the complainant's contact with the school, such as, if the complainant:

- refuses to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcomes sought by raising the complaint, despite offers of assistance
- refuses to co-operate with the complaints investigation process
- refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of the complaints procedure
- insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the complaints procedure or with good practice
- introduces trivial or irrelevant information which they expect to be taken into account and commented on
- raises large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions, and insists they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales
- makes unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues, and seeks to have them replaced
- changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds
- repeatedly makes the same complaint (despite previous investigations or responses concluding that the complaint is groundless or has been addressed)
- refuses to accept the findings of the investigation into that complaint where the school's complaint procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed including referral to the Department for Education
- seeks an unrealistic outcome

- makes excessive demands on school time by frequent, lengthy and complicated contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with
- uses threats to intimidate
- uses abusive, offensive or discriminatory language or violence
- knowingly provides falsified information
- publishes unacceptable information on social media or other public forums.

Complainants should try to limit their communication with the school that relates to their complaint, while the complaint is being progressed. It is not helpful if repeated correspondence is sent (either by letter, phone, email or text), as it could delay the outcome being reached.

Whenever possible, the Headteacher or Chair of Governors will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying an '*unreasonable'* marking.

If the behaviour continues, the Headteacher will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and ask them to change it. For complainants who excessively contact the school, causing a significant level of disruption, we may specify methods of communication and limit the number of contacts in a communication plan. This will be reviewed after six months.

In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, we will immediately inform the police and communicate our actions in writing. This may include barring an individual from the school.

Annex B - Complaint Form

Please complete and return to the school office addressed to either the Headteacher, Chair of Governors, CEO, Chair of Trustees or Vice Chair of Trustees, depending on who the complaint is about, who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken. Please mark the letter private and confidential.

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. It may help to summarise into key points, which you wish to be addressed.
Point 1
Point 2
Point 3
Point 4

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:

Annex C - Roles and Responsibilities

Complainant
The complainant will receive a more effective response to the complaint if they:

- explain the complaint in full as early as possible
- co-operate with the school in seeking a solution to the complaint
- respond promptly to requests for information or meetings or in agreeing the details of the complaint
- ask for assistance as needed
- treat all those involved in the complaint with respect
- refrain from publicising the details of their complaint on social media and respect confidentiality.

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

- providing a comprehensive, open, transparent and fair consideration of the complaint through:
  - sensitive and thorough interviewing of the complainant to establish what has happened and who has been involved
  - interviewing staff and children/young people and other people relevant to the complaint
  - consideration of records and other relevant information
  - analysing information
- liaising with the complainant and the complaints co-ordinator as appropriate to clarify what the complainant feels would put things right.

The investigator should:

- conduct interviews with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning
- keep notes of interviews or arrange for an independent note taker to record minutes of the meeting
- ensure that any papers produced during the investigation are kept securely pending any appeal
- be mindful of the timescales to respond
- prepare a comprehensive report for the Headteacher or complaints committee that sets out the facts, identifies solutions and recommends courses of action to resolve problems.
- The Headteacher or complaints committee will then determine whether to uphold or dismiss the complaint and communicate that decision to the complainant, providing the appropriate escalation details.

Complaints Co-ordinator
(this could be the anyone within the Trust providing administrative support)

*T*he complaints co-ordinator should:

- ensure that the complainant is fully updated at each stage of the procedure
- liaise with staff members, Headteacher, CEO, Chair of Governors, Chair of Trust or Vice Chair of the Trust to ensure the smooth running of the complaints procedure
- be aware of issues regarding:
  - sharing third party information
  - additional support. This may be needed by complainants when making a complaint including interpretation support or where the complainant is a child or young person
- keep records.

Trust Governance Professional
The Trust Governance Professional is the contact point for the complainant and the Panel and should:

- ensure that all people involved in the complaint procedure are aware of their legal rights and duties, including any under legislation relating to school complaints, education law, the Equality Act 2010, the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act (DPA) 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)
- set the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that the dates are convenient to all parties (if they are invited to attend) and that the venue and proceedings are accessible
- collate any written material relevant to the complaint (for example: stage 1 paperwork, school and complainant submissions) and send it to the parties in advance of the meeting within an agreed timescale
- record the proceedings
- circulate the minutes of the meeting
- notify all parties of the Panel's decision.

Committee Chair
The committee's chair, who is nominated in advance of the complaint meeting, should ensure that:

- both parties are asked to provide any additional information relating to the complaint by a specified date in advance of the meeting
- the meeting is conducted in an informal manner, is not adversarial, and that, if all parties are invited to attend, everyone is treated with respect and courtesy
- complainants who may not be used to speaking at such a meeting are put at ease. This is particularly important if the complainant is a child/young person
- the remit of the committee is explained to the complainant
- written material is seen by everyone in attendance, provided it does not breach confidentiality or any individual's rights to privacy under the DPA 2018 or GDPR.

  If a new issue arises it would be useful to give everyone the opportunity to consider and comment upon it; this may require a short adjournment of the meeting

- both the complainant and the school are given the opportunity to make their case and seek clarity, either through written submissions ahead of the meeting or verbally in the meeting itself
- the issues are addressed
- key findings of fact are made
- the committee is open-minded and acts independently
- no member of the committee has an external interest in the outcome of the proceedings or any involvement in an earlier stage of the procedure
- the meeting is minuted

Committee Member
Committee members should be aware that:

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

  No governor/trustee may sit on the committee if they have had a prior involvement in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it.

- the aim of the meeting should be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant.

  We recognise that the complainant might not be satisfied with the outcome if the meeting does not

find in their favour. It may only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations.

- many complainants will feel nervous and inhibited in a formal setting.

  Parents/carers often feel emotional when discussing an issue that affects their child.

- extra care needs to be taken when the complainant is a child/young person and present during all or part of the meeting.

  Careful consideration of the atmosphere and proceedings should ensure that the child/young person does not feel intimidated.

  The committee should respect the views of the child/young person and give them equal consideration to those of adults.

  If the child/young person is the complainant, the committee should ask in advance if any support is needed to help them present their complaint. Where the child/young person's parent is the complainant, the committee should give the parent the opportunity to say which parts of the meeting, if any, the child/young person needs to attend.

  However, the parent should be advised that agreement might not always be possible if the parent wishes the child/young person to attend a part of the meeting that the committee considers is not in the child/young person's best interests.

- the welfare of the child/young person is paramount.

Annex D - Guidance on Listening to Complaints

As soon as you realise you are listening to a complaint, remember the following points:

Take responsibility
Try not to keep transferring an angry person on from one place to another. Make sure you know the contact person for anything you cannot deal with yourself.

Don't be flippant
First impressions count. You and the school may be judged on your immediate reaction.

Treat all complaints seriously
However small or trivial an issue may seem to you, the complaint itself will be an important one for anyone who takes the trouble to complain.

Be courteous
Be sympathetic and helpful, but do not blame other colleagues.

Say who you are
If you are unknown to the complainant, introduce yourself.

Ask for their name and use it
Anonymous complaints are acceptable only in exceptional circumstances.

Take time to figure out exactly what the problem is
It is easy for someone to forget to tell you an important detail, particularly if they are upset or annoyed.

Don't take the complaint personally
To an angry parent or carer, you are the school and the only one they can put their feelings to right now.

Stay cool and calm
Do not argue with the complainant. Be polite and try to establish exactly what it is he or she is believes the issue to be.

Check you are being understood
Make certain that the parent or carer understands what you are saying. Avoid using jargon- it can cause confusion and annoyance to someone 'not in the know'.

Don't rush
Take your time. Let the complainant have their say and let off steam if they need to. Listen carefully and sympathetically to their problem before replying and attempting to find a solution or suggesting the next step.