



## Complaints procedure

**For all schools within The Learning Alliance:**

Black Firs Primary School, Castle Primary School, Cheshire Studio School, Congleton High School, Egerton Primary School, Knutsford Academy, Sir William Stanier School, The Oaks Academy

Approved by:	Trust Board
Date from:	May 2021 v2
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## Who can make a complaint?

This complaints procedure is limited to parents or carers of children that are registered at any school within The Learning Alliance. These are: Black Firs Primary School, Castle Primary School, Cheshire Studio School, Congleton High School, Egerton Primary School, Knutsford Academy, Sir William Stanier School and The Oaks Academy. Unless complaints are dealt with under separate statutory procedures (such as appeals relating to exclusions or admissions), we will use this complaints procedure.

## Complaints Procedure

We aim to deal with all complaints in compliance with guidance/regulations set out by the Department of Education. We have a three-stage process for dealing with complaints:

- Stage 1 – Informal complaint reviewed by a member of staff
- Stage 2 – Formal Complaint reviewed by head teacher or other nominated member of staff/governor
- Stage 3 – Appeal to Complaint Panel

## The difference between an informal complaint and a formal complaint

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

A formal 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 both informal and formal 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. The Learning Alliance takes both informal and formal complaints seriously and will make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.

If you have difficulty discussing an informal complaint with a particular member of staff, we will respect your views. In these cases the staff member dealing with the informal complaint will refer you to another staff member. Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels unable to deal with an informal complaint, the staff member dealing with the informal complaint 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 informal complaint objectively and impartially is more important.

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

Please note that at all times a complainant, whether raising an informal or formal complaint, must act courteously. Where a complainant is aggressive and/or abusive in behaviour or in written communications The Learning Alliance at its absolute discretion reserves the right to postpone the handling of the complaint until an appropriate apology is made and assurances as to future conduct are made.

## How to raise an informal or formal complaint

An informal complaint can be made in writing, the preferred method of communication is email. 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. A third party must put the complaint in writing.

Complaints about a school (except in relation to the head teacher) should be made in the first instance, to the head teacher of your child's school via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Complaints that involve or are about the head teacher should be addressed to the Chair of the local governing board of the relevant school, via [governorsclerk@thelearningalliance.co.uk](mailto:governorsclerk@thelearningalliance.co.uk) Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Complaints about the Chair of the local governing body, any individual governor or the whole local governing board of the relevant school should be addressed to the Clerk to the local governing board via [governorsclerk@thelearningalliance.co.uk](mailto:governorsclerk@thelearningalliance.co.uk) 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. Where the complaint is about the Chair of Trustees please address the complaint to the vice Chair of Trustees via the trust office. This can be done by email to: [governorsclerk@thelearningalliance.co.uk](mailto:governorsclerk@thelearningalliance.co.uk) or sent in writing to the trust office address as follows: For the attention of the Clerk to Governors, c/o Knutsford Academy, Bexton Road, Knutsford, Cheshire, WA16 0EA.

For ease of use, a template complaint form is included at the end of this procedure. If you require help in completing the form, please contact the school office of the relevant school. You can also ask a third-party organisation for example 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 head teacher or Chair of the local governing board, if appropriate, will determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation. In exceptional circumstances the matter may be referred to the Chair of Trustees to determine whether an investigation is required into an anonymous complaint.

## Time scales

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

## Complaints received outside of term time or whilst schools are closed

We will consider complaints made outside of term time or when schools are closed, to have been received on the first school day after the holiday period or on the first school day when schools reopen.

## Scope of this complaints' procedure

This procedure covers all complaints about any provision of community facilities or services by The Learning Alliance, other than complaints that are dealt with under other statutory procedures, including those listed below.

Exceptions	Who to contact
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Admissions to schools</li> </ul>	<p>Concerns about admissions should be handled through a separate process – either through the appeals process or via the local authority.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation</li> </ul>	<p>Complaints about child protection matters are handled under our child protection and safeguarding policy and in accordance with relevant statutory guidance.</p> <p>If you have serious concerns, you may wish to contact the local authority designated officer (LADO) who has local responsibility for safeguarding or the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH).</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Exclusion of children from school*</li> </ul>	<p>Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at: <a href="http://www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions">www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions</a>.</p> <p><i>*complaints about the application of the behaviour policy can be made through the school's complaints procedure.</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Whistleblowing</li> </ul>	<p>We have an internal whistleblowing procedure for all our employees, including temporary staff and contractors.</p> <p>The Secretary of State for Education is the prescribed person for matters relating to education for whistle-blowers in education who do not want to raise matters direct with their employer. Referrals can be made at: <a href="http://www.education.gov.uk/contactus">www.education.gov.uk/contactus</a>.</p> <p>Volunteer staff who have concerns about our school should complain through the school's complaints procedure. You may also be able to complain direct to the LA or the Department for Education (see link above), depending on the substance of your complaint.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Staff grievances</li> </ul>	<p>Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the Trust's internal grievance procedures.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Staff conduct</li> </ul>	<p>Complaints about staff may be referred to the school's internal disciplinary procedures, if appropriate.</p> <p>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.</p>

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. In any event the timescales set down are aspirational and there may be reasons beyond the parties' control that mean timescales are extended.

If a complainant commences legal action against The Learning Alliance in relation to their complaint, the Board of Trustees will consider in their absolute discretion whether to suspend the complaints procedure until those legal proceedings have concluded.

## Confidentiality

Please note, in line with data protection responsibilities, all correspondence statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential. Personal details will only be shared internally where it is essential for responding to and resolving the complaint.

## Resolving complaints

At each stage in the procedure, The Learning Alliance 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. The complainant may not then re-open the complaint at a later stage.

## Stage 1 – Informal complaints

It is to be hoped that most concerns can be expressed and resolved on an informal basis. Concerns should be raised with either the class teacher, year head or subject head.

If you wish to raise an informal complaint, this should be in writing addressed to the head teacher marked private and confidential and sent via the school office marked private and confidential. The head teacher will appoint an investigator to consider the complaint.

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.

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

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

## Stage 2 – Formal complaints

Formal complaints must be in writing (preferably on the complaint form) preferably by email, or by letter, to the head teacher of the relevant school (unless they are about the head teacher), via the school office.

The head teacher will ensure that a record of the date the complaint is received is made, and an acknowledgment of receipt of the complaint is sent in writing (either by letter or email) within 10 school days.

Within this response, the head teacher or delegated investigator may seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, ask what remains unresolved and what outcome the complainant would like to see. The head teacher/investigator can consider whether a face to face meeting is the most appropriate way of doing this.

*Note: The head teacher may delegate the investigation to another senior member of the staff but not the decision to be taken.*

During the investigation, the head teacher (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 head teacher will aim to provide a written response within 10 school days of the date of receipt of the complaint.

If the head teacher 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 Learning Alliance or the relevant school within the trust will take to resolve the complaint.

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

If the complaint is about the head teacher, or a member of the local governing board (including the Chair or Vice-Chair), a suitably skilled governor from within the trust will be appointed to complete all the actions at Stage 2.

Complaints about the head teacher or member of the local governing board must be made to the Clerk to Governors, via the relevant school office.

If the complaint is:

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

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

## 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. The complainant will need to set out in writing why they remain dissatisfied with the outcome at stage 2 and reiterate and/or clarify what resolution they are seeking.

A request to escalate to Stage 3 must be made to the Clerk to governors, via [governorsclerk@thelearningallinace.co.uk](mailto:governorsclerk@thelearningallinace.co.uk) within 10 school days of receipt of the stage 2 response. Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.

A panel hearing consisting 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. This is the final stage of the complaints procedure.

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.

The Clerk will then advise the school that the complainant remains dissatisfied and give the school 10 days to respond to the escalation to Stage 3. At the same time, the Clerk will write to the complainant to inform them of the potential date of the meeting. They will aim to convene a meeting within 15 school days of receipt of the Stage 3 request. If this is not possible, the Clerk will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed.

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.

If the complaint is:

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

Stage 3 will be heard by two trustees or governors and an independent panel member.

A complainant may bring someone along to the panel meeting to provide support. This can be a relative or friend. Legal representation is not allowed.

Please note that if a school employee is called as a witness in a complaint meeting, they may wish to be supported by union and/or be otherwise represented.

*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.*

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

As soon as is practically possible, but with 5 school days before the meeting, the Clerk will:

- confirm and notify the complainant of the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that 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 5 school days before the meeting.

Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least 5 school days before the date of the meeting. If there are special circumstances where written material cannot be circulated in advance, all parties will be given time at the start of the meeting to read through any additional material. 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 panel 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 panel will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented. The panel 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 panel 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 panel will provide the complainant with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within 10 school days.

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

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 Learning Alliance 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 head teacher.

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 such records will remain confidential.

## Complaints to/about the Trust, CEO or Trustee

If a complaint is above an individual school level 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 **10 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 aim to 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 within **10 school days** of the date that the letter was received, 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, the complaint will be referred to the Vice Chair 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 Clerk to the Trust Board within 10 school days asking for the complaint to be heard before a Complaint Panel. Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply. The complainant will need to set out in writing why they remain dissatisfied with the outcome and reiterate and/or clarify what resolution 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. The Clerk will then advise the relevant school that the complainant remains dissatisfied and give the trust/school 10 school days to respond to the escalation to Stage 3. At the same time

the Clerk will write to the complainant to inform them of the date of the meeting. They will aim to convene a meeting within 15 school days of receipt of the Stage 3 request. If this is not possible, the Clerk will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed.

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.

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, or have any detailed prior knowledge of the complaint.

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

A complainant may bring someone along to the panel meeting to provide support. This can be a relative or friend. Legal representation is not allowed.

If a trust employee is called as a witness in a complaint meeting, they may wish to be supported by union and/or otherwise represented.

*Note: Complaints about staff conduct may be referred to staff disciplinary procedures, if appropriate, but outcomes will not be shared with them.*

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

As soon as is practically possible, but within 5 school days before the meeting, the Clerk will:

- confirm and notify the complainant of the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that, , 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.

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

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

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 Learning Alliance 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 head teacher.

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 such records will remain 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

The complainant will have no further right to appeal this decision made by the appeal panel. However, if the complainant believes the school / trust did not handle their complaint in accordance with the published complaints procedure or they acted unlawfully or unreasonably in the exercise of their duties under education law, they can contact the ESFA after they have completed Stage 3.

The ESFA will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by The Learning Alliance. They will consider whether The Learning Alliance has adhered to education legislation and any statutory policies connected with the complaint and whether they have followed [Part 7 of the Education \(Independent School Standards\) Regulations 2014](#).

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

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

## Serial or persistent complainants

If at any level a complainant attempts to reopen an issue or a closely related issue that has already been dealt with under this complaints procedure, the chair of the academy trust may write to the complainant to inform him/her that the procedure has been exhausted and the matter closed, that continued correspondence on the same matter is vexatious and that the academy trust will not respond to any further correspondence on this issue or a closely related issue.

## Formal Complaint Form

Please complete and return to the appropriate individual/address outlined within the Complaints Procedure attached, who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

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

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 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/trust 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 head teacher or complaints committee that sets out the facts, identifies solutions and recommends courses of action to resolve problems.
- The head teacher 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 head teacher or CEO / designated complaints governor or trustee or other staff member providing administrative support)

The complaints co-ordinator should:

- ensure that the complainant is fully updated at each stage of the procedure
- ensure liaison with staff members, head teacher, CEO, Chair of Governors, Chair of Trust or the Clerk and to ensure the smooth running of the complaints procedure
- be aware of issues regarding:
  - sharing third party information and confidentiality
  - 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.

## Clerk to the Governing Body / Trust Board

**The Clerk is the contact point for the complainant and the committee and should:**

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

## Committee Chair

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

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

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

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

## 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.