

# Complaints Procedure

**RIDGEWAY EDUCATION TRUST**

Approved by Trust Board: 09 December 2019

Review by: December 2021

## Who can make a complaint?

This complaints procedure is not limited to parents or carers of children who are registered at a school within Ridgeway Education Trust. Any person, including members of the public, may make a complaint to a school within Ridgeway Education Trust about any provision of facilities or services that we provide.

## 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. The schools within Ridgeway Education Trust take concerns seriously and will make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.

## Scope of this Complaints Procedure

This procedure covers all complaints about any provision of community facilities or services by schools within Ridgeway Education Trust, 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><li>• Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs</li><li>• School re-organisation proposals</li></ul>	Concerns about admissions, statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs, or school re-organisation proposals should be raised with Oxfordshire County Council: <a href="https://www2.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/content/contact-school-admissions-team">https://www2.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/content/contact-school-admissions-team</a>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation</li></ul>	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 or the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH). <a href="https://www.oscb.org.uk/reporting-concerns/">https://www.oscb.org.uk/reporting-concerns/</a>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Exclusion of children from school*</li></ul>	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> .  <i>*complaints about the application of the behaviour policy can be made through the complaints procedure.</i>

<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 whistleblowers 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 school's internal grievance procedures.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Staff conduct</li> </ul>	<p>Complaints about staff will be dealt with under 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>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Complaints about services provided by other providers who use school premises or facilities</li> </ul>	<p>Providers have their own complaints procedure to deal with complaints about service. Please contact them direct.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>National Curriculum - content</li> </ul>	<p>Please contact the Department for Education at: <a href="http://www.education.gov.uk/contactus">www.education.gov.uk/contactus</a></p>

### Dealing with concerns at the earliest opportunity

If parents, pupils or members of the public have concerns they should:

- ➔ 1. Discuss their concerns with the member of staff most directly involved *and, if not satisfied*;
- ➔ 2. Discuss their concerns with a senior member of staff *and, if not satisfied*;
- ➔ 3. Discuss their concerns with the Headteacher.

At each stage in the procedure, schools will want to keep in mind ways in which a concern or complaint can be resolved. It might be sufficient to acknowledge that the concern or complaint is valid in whole or in part. In addition, it may be appropriate to 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.

DfE guidance draws a distinction between Informal and formal stages. Points 1 and 2 are informal and Point 3 is the first formal stage.

## 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.

Complainants should be encouraged to state what actions they feel might resolve the problem at any stage. An admission that the school could have handled the situation better is not the same as an admission of negligence. Equally, an effective procedure will identify areas of agreement between the parties. It is also of importance to clarify any misunderstandings that might have occurred as this can create a positive atmosphere in which to discuss any outstanding issues.

If a parent or guardian is concerned about SEND provision for their child, initial contact should be made with the school's SENCo. A meeting will be arranged, to discuss the concern. Parents can, instead or in addition, request an appointment with the Headteacher directly. The Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Information Advice and Support Service - SENDIASS (formerly known as The Parent Partnership Service) is available to support parents in meetings concerning their child's progress and welfare (website: <https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/public-site/sendias-oxfordshire-formerly-parent-partnership> , call 01865 810516 (term-time only), text 07786524294, or email [sendiass@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:sendiass@oxfordshire.gov.uk)). In the event of a formal complaint concerning SEND provision, parents/guardians are advised to contact the Headteacher in the first instance.

This is the second formal stage in the DfE model

**Only where all these avenues have been tried and found unsatisfactory should the complainant take a complaint to the Chair of Governors or Clerk to the Governing Body.**

If the Headteacher considers s/he can do no more to resolve the complaint it should be stated explicitly that the complainant can write to the Chair of Governors at the relevant school address if not satisfied. Complainants should be encouraged to take this step because an unresolved complaint can become a festering sore. The envelope should be marked 'For Immediate Action' and staff in the school office must ensure that the letter is forwarded without delay.

Complaints that involve or are about the Headteacher, the school's Chair of Governors, any individual governor or the whole governing body of one of the schools within Ridgeway Education Trust should be addressed to the Clerk to the Governing Body via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

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 2 of the procedure.

The complainant will be asked to complete a complaint form (Annex 1) if they have not already done so. The Clerk will offer to help an individual to complete the form if appropriate. They can also ask third party organisations like the Citizens Advice to help complete the form.

On receipt of the complaint form the Clerk to the Governing Body will:

- clarify the nature of the complaint and what remains unresolved;
- meet with the complainant or contact them (if unsure or further information is necessary);
- clarify what the complainant feels would put things right.

- For ease of use, a complaint form is included at the end of this procedure. If you require help in completing the form, please contact the school office.

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 or Chair of Governors, if appropriate, will determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation.

### **Time scales**

The complainant 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 term time**

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

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 a complainant commences legal action against a school within Ridgeway Education Trust in relation to their complaint, we will consider whether to suspend the complaints procedure in relation to their complaint until those legal proceedings have concluded.

### **Resolving complaints**

#### **Withdrawal of a Complaint**

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

#### **Stage 1**

Formal complaints must be made to the Headteacher (unless they are about the Headteacher), via the school office. This may be done in person, in writing (using the Complaint Form in Annex 1), or by telephone.

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 Headteacher will 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.

*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 within five 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 specific school 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 (including the Chair or Vice-Chair), a Ridgeway Education Trust Director, not connected with the school in question, will be appointed to complete all the actions at Stage 1.

Complaints about the Headteacher or an individual member of the governing body must be made to the Clerk via the 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 1 will be considered by an independent investigator appointed by the governing body. At the conclusion of their investigation, the independent investigator will provide a formal written response.

## **Stage 2**

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome at Stage 1 and wishes to take the matter further, they can escalate the complaint to Stage 2 – a meeting with members of the governing body's complaints committee, which will be formed of the first three, impartial, governors available. This is the final stage of the complaints procedure.

A request to escalate to Stage 2 must be made to the Clerk, via the school office, within 10 school days of receipt of the Stage 1 response.

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.

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

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 2 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.

The complaints committee will consist of at least three governors 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 from the school in question available, the Clerk will source any additional, independent governors through Ridgeway Education Trust schools, 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.*

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

At least 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, 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 3 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. Further written material in bullet point 2 above will be circulated as soon as it is received. 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 the school within Ridgeway Education Trust a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within 5 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 school within Ridgeway Education Trust.

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 heard by a committee of independent governors.

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 within Ridgeway Education Trust will take to resolve the complaint.

The response will also advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied.

### **Next Steps**

If the complainant believes the school 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 for Education after they have completed Stage 2.

The Department for Education will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by the school. They will consider whether the school 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](http://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

## ANNEX 1

### Complaint Form

Please complete and return to the Clerk of the Governing Body 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>

**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 whom:**

**Complaint referred to:**

**Date:**

## **ANNEX 2**

### **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.

#### **Clerk to the Governing Body**

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 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.

## ANNEX 3

### Format of a Panel Hearing

1. Complainant and Headteacher will enter the room where the hearing is taking place together.
2. The chair will introduce the panel members and the clerk and outline the process.
3. The complainant is invited to explain the complaint.
4. The Headteacher may question the complainant.
5. The panel will question the complainant.
6. The Headteacher is then invited to explain the school's actions.
7. The complainant may question the Headteacher.
8. The panel will question the Headteacher.
9. The complainant is then invited to sum up their complaint.
10. The Headteacher is then invited to sum up the school's actions and response to the complaint.
11. The chair explains that both parties will hear from the panel within five working days.
12. The chair checks that both parties have said all they wanted to say and that they feel they have had a fair hearing. If either party says 'no' the chair should attempt to rectify that before the hearing ends.
13. Both parties leave together while the panel decides on the issues.
14. The clerk will remain with the panel to clarify

### Notes

The hearing should be made as unthreatening as possible to all parties.

The panel may ask questions at any point if an immediate question will help to clarify a point. However, panel member discipline in following the format listed above will set a good example to the other parties about respecting the structure of the process. Panel members must find ways to ask probing questions while maintaining an air of impartiality.

The Headteacher must have no contact with members of the governors' complaints panel except when the complainant is present to preserve the principle of neutrality. This means that Headteacher and complainant enter and leave the room where the hearing is held together.

The chair of the panel should discourage the introduction of fresh documentary evidence at the hearing – there should be every encouragement to produce the evidence in advance so that both sides have time to study it. However, if new and relevant evidence is accepted by the chair, the chair will adjourn the hearing for a few minutes to allow everyone to read the document. Both parties must leave the hearing room during the adjournment.

#### **Some notes on exceptional circumstances**

For the sake of clarity, the description above does not cover exceptional circumstances which might include:

**1. The chair of governors may not be able to find three governors who have no prior knowledge of the case**

If a case has become a major talking point around the community, the chair can nominate three governors with minimal prior knowledge

If there are still insufficient governors able to sit on a panel, the governing body in consultation with the Local Authority or Diocese will put in place an alternative fair process.

Please consult Governor Services 01865 492047 in the first instance.

**2. In exceptional circumstances, it is possible that the complaint is not against the Headteacher**

A complaint to the governors' complaints panel will never be against a junior member of staff (it may be against the way the Headteacher handled a complaint against a junior member of staff) but it is conceivable that a senior manager will appropriately stand in for the Headteacher. That would need to be considered very carefully but if agreed the senior manager would be 'the Headteacher' for the purpose of the panel.

There may be exceptional circumstances in which the complaint is against the chair of governors – e.g. for wilfully refusing to deal with a complaint. In those circumstances the procedure above would be adapted and every reference to 'Headteacher/Head of School' would be read as 'chair of governors'.

**3. The complainant and/or the Headteacher may wish to call witnesses**

The use of witnesses is discouraged. In nearly every case, a complaints panel will want to work with **written** witness statements if appropriate, but there may be particular circumstances where the presence of witnesses is necessary to establish key facts. In those cases, witnesses must be agreed in advance. They will remain outside the hearing room until called in to give their evidence. They can be questioned by the panel members and the other party. They will leave the room when their evidence is completed.

**4. The complainant may be a pupil at the school**

Good schools encourage pupils to raise concerns and would expect to resolve them before it becomes a formal complaint to the governing body. If it is not resolved it would be very unusual if parents have not by picked it up and made it a parental complaint. However, if a pupil is the complainant, panel members will wish to ensure that the same process is followed but special consideration is given to ensuring that the child is supported and does not feel intimidated. The panel needs to give the views of the child equal consideration to those of adults.

### **Writing the decision letter**

The Clerk should ensure that s/he has clear wording stating the panel decision about each of the issues that the panel considered before the panel is allowed to finish. The clerk will use that wording to draft the decision letter. This should be sent to all members of the panel for checking. Once approved by all three panel members, it should be sent to the complainant with a copy to the Headteacher.

The letter should clearly express how seriously the panel considered the complaint.

The Clerk should be careful that the letter sticks to the facts and gives no hint of partiality.

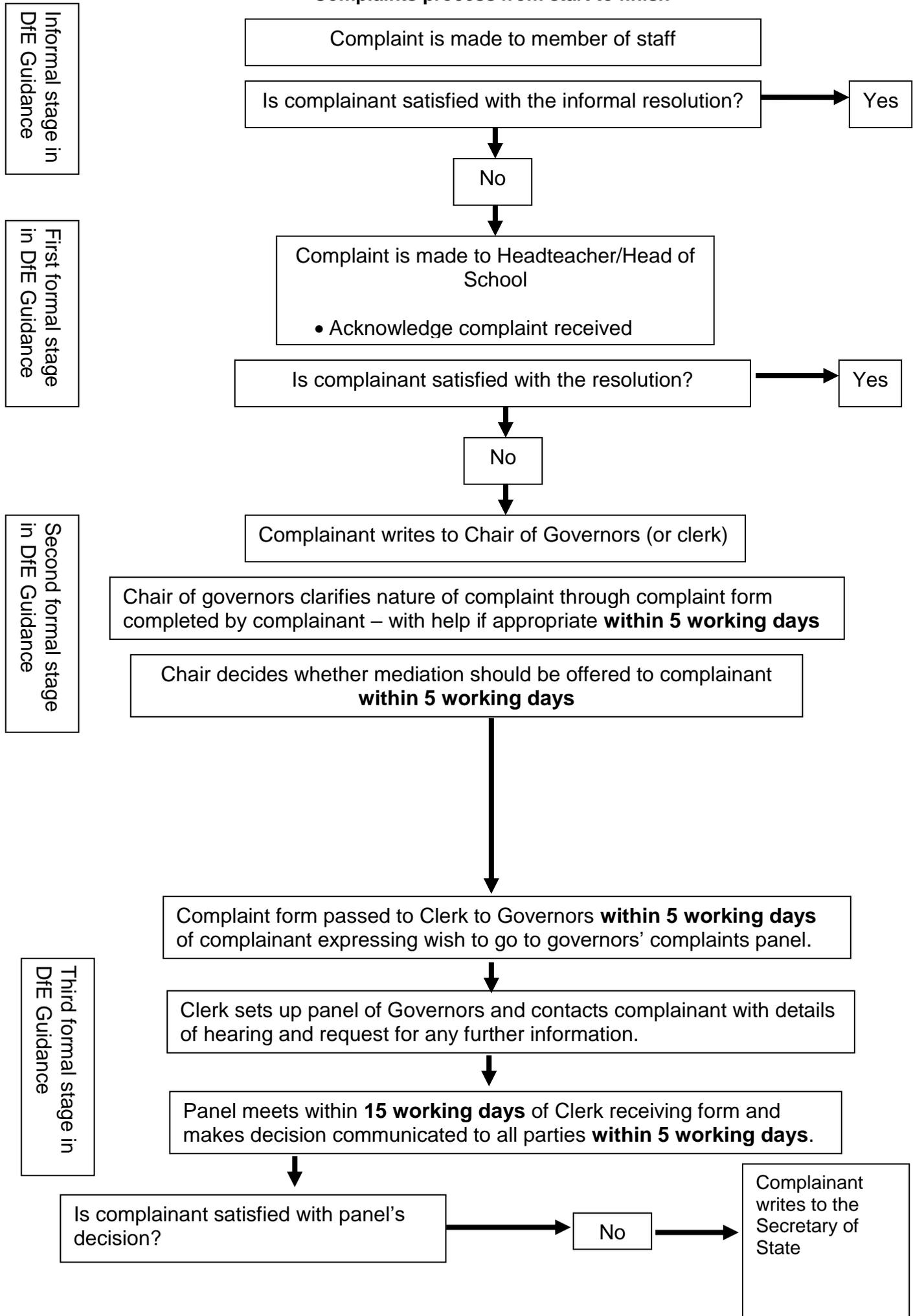
The clerk should ensure that the letter reaches the complainant and the Headteacher by the deadline stated in your policy and/or in a statement by the chair at the end of the hearing – usually five working days.

### **Monitoring Complaints**

As well as addressing an individual's complaint, the process of listening to and resolving complaints would contribute to school improvements. When individual complaints are heard, schools may identify issues that need to be addressed. The monitoring and review of complaints by the school and Governing Body can be useful to evaluating the school's performance. Any discussion of complaints by the Governing Body or others in the school community should not name or be able to identify individuals.

The flowchart overleaf summarises the complaints process.

### Complaints process from start to finish



## ANNEX 4

### Sharing your concerns about your child's education

#### A guide to parents

Ridgeway Education Trust recognises that at times things can go wrong. This guidance will help you understand how to resolve concerns you may have about your child's education.

The schools in Ridgeway Education Trust have procedures for dealing with concerns or complaints and we value any feedback about our services, including compliments and suggestions. If you are concerned about any aspect of your child's education, you should contact the Headteacher at the school.

The school's governing body has overall responsibility for the school and for ensuring the well-being of pupils and that all pupils receive an appropriate and high standard of education.

The Headteacher is responsible for making decisions on a daily basis about the school's internal management and organisation. So you should contact the school if you are concerned about an issue such as:

- your child's academic progress
- special education needs provision
- your child's welfare
- bullying
- something that has happened in school.

#### How do I complain to the school?

First, we hope you will speak to the relevant member of staff as soon as you have a concern. This will be the form tutor, subject teacher, or head of year (secondary). This informal approach is nearly always the quickest and most effective way of resolving your concerns.

If you feel that your concern has not been resolved, then it is important to speak to or write to the Headteacher who will look into your concern.

If you are unhappy with the Headteacher's response you should email or write with your complaint to the Clerk to the Governing Body at the school address. Mark your envelope 'FOR IMMEDIATE ATTENTION'.

#### This is how your complaint will be handled

**Within 5 school days** the Clerk will clarify the nature of your complaint by asking you to complete a complaint form and will offer help in completing the form, if appropriate.

The Clerk will set up a panel of governors to meet **within 15 school days** to consider your complaint. The clerk will provide details of the hearing and will request any further information you may wish to provide.

You will be able to bring a 'friend' with you to that hearing.

The complaints panel will consist of three governors who (as far as possible) will have no prior knowledge of the events being complained of. The panel will be supported by a clerk who will take notes during the hearing and will stay with the panel while they make their decision in case governors need to be reminded about responses to a particular question. The panel will hear the complaint impartially and make their decision without fear or favour.

**Five school days** before the hearing the clerk will send to you, the complainant, the Headteacher and the three panel members, copies of all papers submitted by both sides so that there is sufficient time to read the evidence before the hearing.

The format of the panel hearing is set out in Annex 3.

### **Can I take my complaint further?**

You **cannot** take your complaint to the local authority. The local authority cannot investigate school matters on a parent's behalf nor can it review how the school has dealt with your complaint.

However, if you feel that the school has acted unreasonably or not followed the correct procedures, you can write to the Secretary of State for Education  
<http://www.education.gov.uk/help/contactus/dfe>