



RIDGEWOOD
SCHOOL

Complaints Policy

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Revision History

Revision Number	Modifications	Date
1.0	Initial Policy	December 2014
2.0	Vexatious complaints and Appendix 4: Policy for Handling unreasonably persistent, harassing or abusive complaints	November 2015
3.0	Total re-work	January 2018
4.0	Introduction updated sections 1.2, 1.3 plus 5.7 and other general amendments	January 2019
5.0	Expansion of section 11	March 2019

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 This academy strives to provide an excellent education for all our children. The headteacher, governors and staff work diligently to build positive relationships with parents, carers and all stakeholders.
- 1.2 However, if parents, carers or other stakeholders* have a concern this policy sets out the procedure to be followed in such cases.
*although, technically, any person, including members of the general public, may make a complaint about any aspect of a school's facilities or services (unless, as specified below, separate statutory procedures apply) it is normally the case that concerns and complaints will only be submitted by those who have a personal reason for involvement, and in practice this will include not only parents and carers but may also extend to, for example, those resident in the immediate vicinity of the school or other members of the local community.
- 1.3 It should be noted at the outset that any concerns or complaints submitted by members of staff should be dealt with under the academy's grievance procedure. The remit of this policy is therefore limited to concerns or complaints emanating from an external source in relation to facilities or services provided by the academy.
- 1.4 The academy is committed to developing a robust, transparent and reflective approach to remedy any identified concerns or complaints. There is a similar commitment to ensuring that the academy is an exemplar of the very highest of standards.
- 1.5 The majority of issues raised are concerns rather than complaints. 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', in contrast, may be generally defined as 'an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about actions taken or about a lack of appropriate action'. A concern may turn into a complaint if it is not addressed seriously or sensitively.
- 1.6 It is in the interest of all parties that both concerns and complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. Many issues are capable of informal resolution, without the need to resort to formal procedures, and the academy is committed to taking concerns seriously at the earliest stage without the need to necessarily instigate formal procedures. However, depending on the nature of the concern or complaint, the complainant may wish to follow (or may be asked to follow) the academy's formal complaints procedure.
- 1.7 All schools are required to have a procedure for dealing with complaints relating to the school (or to any community facilities or services that the school may offer) and this policy is compliant with recommendations from the Department for Education and government legislation (The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2014).
- 1.8 For complaints from parents or carers of pupils (other than those relating to admissions, exclusions, statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs (SEN), allegations of child protection, or breach of trust or misconduct – for all of which specific protocols are in place) this procedure should comply with recommendations from the Department for Education and government legislation (Section 29 of the Education Act 2002) in offering:
 - an opportunity to resolve the complaint with the school on an informal basis, for example through discussion with the class teacher in the first instance

- a formal complaint stage should the complainant be dissatisfied with the response at the informal stage
 - a formal appeal hearing with a panel set up by the academy, comprising at least three persons, none of whom has been directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint, and (at least) one of whom must be wholly independent of the management and running of the academy.
- 1.9 The academy will at all times be conscious of the requirement to make special provision where the complainant may have particular needs or requirements due to disability or to limited facility in use of the English language. Further information in relation to this may be available on the school website.
- 1.10 For the academy to be able to investigate a complaint, it must be brought to the attention of the academy within three months of the incident occurring (or coming to light should this be later). If a complaint is not made within 3 months of the relevant incident occurring or coming to light it is unlikely to be investigated (unless the circumstances are exceptional).
- 1.11 Similarly, escalation (to the next stage) of a concern or complaint is dependent upon the submission of written notification from the complainant* of his or her continuing dissatisfaction within ten working days of receiving a written (or verbal) response to either the informal (stage 1) or formal (stage 2) process. If no such notification is received within this timescale the complaint shall be deemed to have lapsed and will not be investigated further.
- *if the complainant has a relevant disability the requirement for notification to be in writing should be waived (and see also clause 4.8)
- 1.12 All complainants should be made aware that publicising their complaint through social media or any other means of communication will be likely to prejudice any investigation and may make it impossible to explore their complaint further.

2. Purpose and scope

- 2.1 The primary aim of this policy is to resolve any complaints received from parents or other stakeholders (any complaints or concerns emanating from staff, as stated in clause 1.3, being more appropriately addressed under the academy's grievance procedure) as fairly and speedily, and as near to the point of origin, as possible.
- 2.2 Both concerns and complaints (whether or not formal) will be dealt with in a sensitive, impartial and confidential manner.
- 2.3 Any complaints relating to the conduct of academy staff will be handled in accordance with the academy's internal disciplinary procedures.
- 2.4 There are three stages within the standard procedure of this policy:
- Stage 1 - the informal stage in which a concern (or complaint) is raised with a staff member* and is hopefully resolved.
- *ideally the matter should be raised with the individual against whom the complaint is directed although provision is made for an alternative (normally senior) member of staff to be approached should this be felt appropriate – this may (particularly in larger schools) be a nominated complaints co-ordinator

- Stage 2 - should the complainant submit an indication (normally in writing) that he or she remains dissatisfied with the outcome at the conclusion of Stage 1 then formal procedures are invoked and the complaint is reviewed by the headteacher.
- Stage 3 - should the complainant submit an indication (normally in writing) that he or she remains dissatisfied with the outcome at the conclusion of Stage 2 then the complaint is heard by the governing body complaints appeal panel.

2.5 A modified procedure (outlined in sections 6 to 8) is applicable in instances where the concern or complaint is directed specifically against the headteacher.

3. 'Unreasonable' (serial, persistent, vexatious or anonymous) complaints

3.1 'Serial' or 'persistent' complaints are defined as those which are in pursuance of a desire to reopen a matter which has already been explored in accordance with this policy until the final stage of the process has been concluded (see section 10). Such complaints need not be responded to by the academy (although care must be taken that these labels are not applied to the complainant in person: they can only be applicable to (the nature of) the complaint itself).

3.2 Before making a considered decision to stop responding to a complainant the academy should consider whether:

- it has taken every reasonable step to address the complainant's needs
- the complainant has been given a clear statement of the academy's position and their options (if any)
- the complainant is contacting the academy repeatedly but making substantially the same points each time.

3.3 In this respect the academy is significantly less likely to be open to criticism (for failing to respond) if:

- there is reason to believe the complainant is deliberately causing disruption or inconvenience
- the complainant has been abusive or aggressive (whether in person or via either telephone or written communication)
- the complainant has made insulting personal comments or has threatened staff

3.4 Vexatious* complaints will not be entertained by the academy.

*use of the word 'vexatious' is not recommended by the Department of Education (for fear it could be viewed as inflammatory) but the terminology has legal recognition, having been defined by the Upper Tribunal (in relation to the Freedom of Information Act) as the 'manifestly unjustified, inappropriate or improper use of a formal procedure'.

3.5 Anonymous complaints may be considered by the academy but (dependent on the circumstances of the matter raised) will not necessarily be investigated further.

4. Raising a concern

Stage 1: the informal stage

4.1 Concerns can be raised with the academy at any time and should generate an immediate response, which will often resolve the concern. The academy requests that parents make their first contact with the pupil's teacher or, where this is not possible or is deemed

inappropriate, either a nominated complaints co-ordinator or the headteacher. (For complaints against the headteacher please refer to the modified procedure in section 6 below.)

- 4.2 The recipient of the concern may be able to respond immediately. However, on some occasions the concern raised may require investigation, or discussion with others, in which case the academy will endeavour to provide an informal response (which may be either verbal or written) within two working days. It is anticipated that most concerns will be satisfactorily dealt with in this manner.
- 4.3 However, if the complainant is not satisfied with the result at the completion of Stage 1, they are entitled to progress their concern to the status of an official complaint.
- 4.4 At this stage they should be provided with a copy of the academy's complaints policy (or signposted to this via the academy's website if this is acceptable to them).
- 4.5 They should also be requested, at this point, to complete an official complaint form (Appendix 1) which should be returned to the headteacher within ten working days of the complainant receiving an initial response (whether verbal or written). The official complaint form should, ideally, present an opportunity to communicate the complainant's expectations as to how their complaint might best be satisfactorily resolved.
- 4.6 On receipt of the official complaint form, the complaint will be logged by the academy, including the date of receipt. The academy will then progress the complaint to the next (formal) stage.
- 4.7 Schools cannot insist on the complainant completing an official complaint form. If the academy is in receipt of a notification (this is interpreted to include not only email but also verbal communication – see following clause) which could reasonably be regarded as constituting an official complaint it is still under an obligation to treat this seriously. The academy must record the communication and respond appropriately, including escalating the matter to the formal process if it becomes clear that the complainant remains dissatisfied by informal attempts to reach a resolution.
- 4.8 Schools must ensure that they comply at all times with their obligations under the Equality Act 2010. Although it is common practice to ask for complaints to be made in writing (ideally by using an official complaint form) it is possible that the complainant may have different communication preferences due to disability or learning difficulties or unfamiliarity with the English language (etc) and where this is of relevance schools must allow alternative methods of contact.

5. Dealing with complaints – formal process

Stage 2: complaint formally reviewed by the headteacher

- 5.1 If the matter has not been resolved at Stage 1, as evidenced by receipt of further communication to this effect, the headteacher will further review the complaint by considering all relevant written material and by discussion with the appropriate member(s) of staff and/or the complainant.

- 5.2 The aim will be to resolve the matter as quickly as possible and an appropriate response will normally be in writing, in which event it should be despatched within five working days of the written complaint having been received.
- 5.3 The academy may wish to extend to the complainant an opportunity to meet with the person appointed to deal with the complaint in order to explore the matter further (unless there are circumstances where it is felt that this might place any party at risk).
- 5.4 Any such meeting will normally take place within five working days of the written complaint having been received, and an appropriate response in writing should then be provided within a further five working days, but the timescale may be extended if, as may be the case, this meeting cannot reasonably be arranged within this period.
- 5.5 However, if the complainant remains dissatisfied with the result at the completion of Stage 2 they should write* to the chair of governors within ten working days of receipt of said correspondence to confirm that the complaint has not yet been resolved to their satisfaction. *if the complainant has a relevant disability the requirement for notification to be in writing should be waived (and see also clause 5.8)
- 5.6 Once again any such communication will be logged by the academy, including the date of receipt. The academy will then progress the complaint to the next (appeal) stage.

6. Appeal mechanism

Stage 3: complaint heard by the governing body Complaints Appeal Panel

- 6.1 If the matter has not been resolved at Stage 2, as evidenced by receipt of further communication to this effect, the chair of governors will then convene a Complaints Appeal Panel.
- 6.2 The Complaints Appeal Panel will comprise three persons (normally governors), none of whom has been directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint. Two of these persons may be academy governors with no previous involvement in the case but (at least) one person on the panel must be wholly independent of the management and running of the academy. The latter may be a member of the governing body of a neighbouring establishment or a local business person of good standing.
- 6.3 If the entire governing body is aware of the substance of a complaint before the final stage has been completed, schools should arrange for a wholly independent panel to hear the complaint. In such instances a different school may be approached for assistance in constituting an appeal panel.
- 6.4 Complainants have the right to request an independent panel if they believe there is likely to be bias in the proceedings. Schools should consider such requests but any decision to have recourse to an independent panel is entirely at the discretion of members of the governing body.
- 6.5 The Complaints Appeal Panel should meet within a maximum of ten working days of receipt of said communication. Both the complainant and the headteacher (representing the academy) will be invited to attend the appeal hearing and all parties will be issued with relevant documentation (that will be referred to in the hearing) no less than five working days in advance of the hearing.

- 6.6 The invitation should state that due consideration will be given to any relevant disabilities which might affect the complainant's ability to attend or partake in the hearing, such as mobility or communication issues.
- 6.7 The academy must extend to the complainant the right to be accompanied in a panel hearing.
- 6.8 At this point the complainant may (if unwilling or unable to attend in person) elect to submit a written statement for consideration by the panel in their absence.
- 6.9 The invitation to attend the hearing should additionally make clear that if the complainant fails to respond by confirming their intention (either to attend the hearing or to elect to have the complaint heard in their absence) the complaint will not be investigated further and the process will cease at this point.
- 6.10 The appeal hearing will be held within the academy (unless a suitable alternative venue is agreed by all parties) and will be minuted (normally by the clerk to governors). The panel chair should conduct the hearing in accordance with the guidance set out in Appendix 3.
- 6.11 The aim of the Complaints Appeal Panel hearing is to resolve the complaint impartially and to achieve reconciliation between the academy and the complainant. All parties will be notified in writing of the panel's decision within five working days of the date of the hearing.
- 6.12 This stage is the last school-based stage of the complaints procedure and the decision of the Complaints Appeal Panel is final.

7. Raising a concern in relation to the headteacher (modified procedure)

Stage 1: the informal stage

- 7.1 The academy requests that parents initially address their concern with the headteacher. If, however, this is not possible, or is deemed inappropriate, they may address their concern (either verbally or in writing) to the chair of governors.
- 7.2 The concern raised is highly likely to require investigation, or discussion with others, in which case the chair will endeavour to provide an informal response (which may be either verbal or written) within five working days. It is anticipated that most concerns will be satisfactorily dealt with in this manner.
- 7.3 However, if the complainant is not satisfied with the result at the completion of Stage 1, they are entitled to progress their concern to the status of an official complaint.
- 7.4 At this stage they should be provided with a copy of the academy's complaints policy (or signposted to this via the academy's website if this is acceptable to them).
- 7.5 They should also be requested, at this point, to complete an official complaint form (Appendix 1) which should be returned to the chair of governors within ten working days of the complainant receiving an initial response (whether verbal or written). The official complaint form should, ideally, present an opportunity to communicate the complainant's expectations as to how their complaint might best be satisfactorily resolved.

- 7.6 On receipt of the official complaint form, the complaint will be logged by the chair of governors, including the date of receipt. The chair of governors will then progress the complaint to the next (formal) stage.
- 7.7 Schools cannot insist on the complainant completing an official complaint form. If the academy is in receipt of a notification (this is interpreted to include not only email but also verbal communication – see following clause) which could reasonably be regarded as constituting an official complaint it is still under an obligation to treat this seriously. The academy must record the communication and respond appropriately, including escalating the matter to the formal process if it becomes clear that the complainant remains dissatisfied by informal attempts to reach a resolution.
- 7.8 Schools must ensure that they comply at all times with their obligations under the Equality Act 2010. Although it is common practice to ask for complaints to be made in writing (ideally by using an official complaint form) it is possible that the complainant may have different communication preferences due to disability or learning difficulties or unfamiliarity with the English language (etc) and where this is of relevance schools must allow alternative methods of contact.

8. Dealing with complaints – formal process

(modified procedure for complaints in relation to the headteacher)

Stage 2: complaint formally reviewed by the chair of governors

- 8.1 If the matter has not been resolved at Stage 1, as evidenced by receipt of further communication to this effect, the chair of governors will formally review the complaint by considering all relevant written material and by discussion with the headteacher and/or the complainant.
- 8.2 The aim will be to resolve the matter as quickly as possible and an appropriate response will normally be in writing, in which event it should be despatched within five working days of the written complaint having been received.
- 8.3 This timescale may be extended if, as may often be the case, a review meeting with the complainant requires to be arranged at this point to explore the matter further. The academy may wish to extend to the complainant an opportunity to meet with the chair of governors (unless there are circumstances where it is felt that this might place any party at risk).
- 8.4 Any such meeting will normally take place within five working days of the written complaint having been received, and an appropriate response in writing should then be provided within a further five working days, but the timescale may be extended if, as may be the case, this meeting cannot reasonably be arranged within delay.
- 8.5 As before, the aim will be to resolve the matter as quickly as possible. However, if the complainant remains dissatisfied with the result at the completion of Stage 2 they should write* to the chair of governors within ten working days of receipt of formal response to confirm that the complaint has not yet been resolved to their satisfaction.
*if the complainant has a relevant disability the requirement for notification to be in writing should be waived (and see also clause 8.8)
- 8.6 Once again any such communication will be logged by the academy, including the date of receipt. The chair of governors will then progress the complaint to the next (appeal) stage.

9. Appeal mechanism

(modified procedure for complaints in relation to the headteacher)

Stage 3: complaint heard by the governing body Complaints Appeal Panel

- 9.1 If the matter has not been resolved at Stage 2, as evidenced by receipt of further communication to this effect, the chair of governors will then convene a Complaints Appeal Panel.
- 9.2 The Complaints Appeal Panel will comprise three persons (normally governors), none of whom has been directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint. Two of these persons may be academy governors with no previous involvement in the case but (at least) one person on the panel must be wholly independent of the management and running of the academy. The latter may be a member of the governing body of a neighbouring establishment or a local business person of good standing.
- 9.3 If the entire governing body is aware of the substance of a complaint before the final stage has been completed, schools should arrange for a wholly independent panel to hear the complaint. In such instances a different school may be approached for assistance in constituting an appeal panel.
- 9.4 Complainants have the right to request an independent panel, if they believe there is likely to be bias in the proceedings. Schools should consider such requests but any decision to have recourse to an independent panel is entirely at the discretion of members of the governing body.
- 9.5 The Complaints Appeal Panel should meet within a maximum of ten working days of receipt of said communication. Both the complainant and the chair of governors (representing the academy) will be invited to attend the appeal hearing and all parties will be issued with relevant documentation (that will be referred to in the hearing) no less than five working days in advance of the hearing.
- 9.6 The invitation should state that due consideration will be given to any relevant disabilities which might affect the complainant's ability to attend or partake in the hearing, such as mobility or communication issues.
- 9.7 The academy must extend to the complainant the right to be accompanied in a panel hearing.
- 9.8 At this point the complainant may (if unwilling or unable to attend in person) elect to submit a written statement for consideration by the panel in their absence.
- 9.9 The invitation to attend the hearing should additionally make clear that if the complainant fails to respond by confirming their intention (either to attend the hearing or to elect to have the complaint heard in their absence) the complaint will not be investigated further and the process will cease at this point.
- 9.10 The appeal hearing will be held within the academy (unless a suitable alternative venue is agreed by all parties) and will be minuted (normally by the clerk to governors). The panel chair should conduct the hearing in accordance with the guidance set out in Appendix 3.

9.11 The aim of the Complaints Appeal Panel hearing is to impartially resolve the complaint and to achieve reconciliation between the academy and the complainant. All parties will be notified in writing of the panel's decision within five working days of the date of the hearing.

9.12 This stage is the last school-based stage of the complaints procedure and the decision of the Complaints Appeal Panel is final.

10. Complaints unresolved at conclusion of process

10.1 There will be occasions when, despite all stages of the procedures having been followed, the complainant remains dissatisfied. If the complainant attempts to reopen the same issue following the Complaints Appeal Panel hearing, the chair of the governing body should inform them in writing that the procedure has been exhausted and that the matter is now closed.

10.2 Any such correspondence may wish to point out that the complainant remains at liberty to consult the Department for Education website (www.education.gov.uk) to assess whether their complaint might be capable of being pursued by alternative means, should they so desire.

11. Documentation of complaints – storage and confidentiality

11.1 All documentation (correspondence, statements and any other records) relating to individual complaints of a formal nature will be stored in an appropriate manner and will be kept confidential, other than as specifically stated below and/or where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the 2008 Act requests access to them.

11.2 In the event that a Complaints Appeal Panel makes findings and recommendations a copy of those findings and recommendations will be provided to the complainant (and, where relevant, to the individual or body complained about) and will be made available for inspection on the school premises by the headteacher and the governing body.

11.3 A written record will be kept of all formal complaints, and this will specify, firstly, whether they are resolved following a formal procedure or proceed to an appeal panel hearing, and, secondly, will record any action taken by the academy as a result of those complaints (regardless of whether they are upheld).

Appendix 1

School Complaint Form

Please complete and return to Complaints Co-ordinator/Headteacher/Chair of Governors who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

Your name:

Pupil's name:

Your relationship to the pupil:

Address:

Postcode:

Day time telephone number:

Evening telephone number:

Please give details of your complaint:

What action, if any, have you already taken to try and resolve your complaint? (Who did you speak to and what was the response?)

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:

Appendix 2

Guide for Staff Investigating a complaint*

It is suggested that, at each stage, the person investigating the complaint makes sure that they:

- establish what has happened so far, and who has been involved
- take details of the complaint to clarify the nature of the complaint and what remains unresolved
- meet with the complainant or contact them (if unsure or if further information is necessary)
- clarify what the complainant feels would put things right
- interview all persons identified by the complainant as being relevant to the matter (and any others deemed appropriate) allowing them to be accompanied if they wish
- conduct the interview with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning
- keep notes of the interview.

An appointment to discuss the issue should normally be offered as quickly as possible, as this will give both parties time to talk about it calmly and politely without being interrupted. Complaints need to be considered and resolved, as quickly and efficiently as possible, however where further investigation is necessary, new time limits can be set and the complainant sent details of the new deadline and an explanation for the delay.

At each stage in the procedure it is appropriate to consider ways in which a complaint can be resolved. It might be sufficient to acknowledge that the complaint is valid in whole or in part*. In addition, it may be appropriate to offer one or more of the following:

- an apology
- an explanation
- an admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better
- an assurance that the event complained of will not recur
- an explanation of the steps that have been taken to ensure that it will not happen again
- an undertaking to review school policies in light of the complaint and, if found appropriate,
- to modify practice and protocols accordingly.

It may be instructive to encourage complainants 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†.

An effective complaints procedure will identify areas of agreement between the parties. It is also of equal importance to clarify any misunderstandings that might have occurred as this can create a more positive atmosphere in which to discuss any outstanding issues.

*All staff investigating a complaint should have received (through CPD) appropriate instruction on how to conduct an enquiry.

†If a complaint is upheld which does lead to disciplinary action being taken against a member of staff, such detailed information cannot be divulged to the complainant, who should merely be informed that 'appropriate management action has been taken'.

Appendix 3

Guidance for Governing Body Complaints Appeal Panel Hearing

The Complaints Appeal Panel will consist of three persons with no previous involvement in the case, two of whom will normally be governors but at least one of whom must be wholly independent of the management and running of the academy. The latter may be a member of the governing body of a neighbouring establishment or a local business person of good standing.

Normally the panel will be chaired by the chair of governors although another governor may be nominated to lead the process (and this may be necessary when the complaint is directed against the headteacher).

It is important that the appeal hearing is independent and impartial. No individual may sit on the appeal panel if they have had a prior involvement in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it.

The aim of the hearing, which should be held in private, is to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant. However, it has to be recognised that the complainant may not be satisfied with the outcome if the hearing does not find in their favour. It may only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations which will satisfy the complainant that his or her complaint has been taken seriously.

An effective panel will acknowledge that many complainants feel nervous and inhibited in a formal setting. Parents often feel emotional when discussing an issue that affects their child. The parent or carer may, should they wish, be accompanied at the hearing. The panel chair will ensure that the proceedings are as welcoming as possible. The layout of the room will set the tone and care is needed to ensure the setting is informal and not adversarial.

The clerk is the contact point for the complainant and is required to:

- set the date, time and venue of the hearing, ensuring that the dates are convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible
- collate any written material and send it to the parties in advance of the hearing, ensuring that complainants are aware that they may be accompanied
- meet and welcome the parties as they arrive at the hearing
- record the proceedings
- notify all parties of the panel's decision

The Role of the Chair of the Panel

The chair of the panel has a key role, ensuring that:

- the remit of the panel is explained to the parties and each party has the opportunity of putting their case without undue interruption
- the issues are addressed (and that in the event of a new issue arising during the course of the hearing, all parties are afforded the opportunity to consider and comment on it)
- key findings of fact are made
- parents and others who may not be used to speaking at such a hearing are put at ease
- the hearing is conducted in a manner that allows each party to treat the other with respect and courtesy
- the panel is open minded and acting independently

- no member of the panel has a vested interest in the outcome of the proceedings or has had any involvement in an earlier stage of the procedure
- each side is given the opportunity to state their case and ask questions
- written materials are seen by all parties

Before the meeting:

- the formal complaints letter should be passed to the vice-chair if the chair will be unable to receive the letter within 5 days
- members of the panel should have no prior knowledge of the complaint and it is, therefore, unlikely that staff governors will be members of the panel
- the letter inviting the parent/carer to attend should indicate that they may be accompanied by a friend

At the meeting:

- the panel must be made up of three members, who are accompanied by a clerk
- one member of the panel (in an academy or independent school) must be completely independent of the school
- although this is a formal meeting, every effort should be made to make it as informal as possible for all concerned and the parent or carer put at ease - the parent or carer may, should they wish, be accompanied at the hearing
- the clerk should take notes of the meeting, listing who is present, and should make everyone aware of the confidential nature of the process
- the chair of the panel should open the meeting, introducing panel members and stating the purpose and the format of the meeting to clarify this to all in attendance – the chair should note that the meeting will be minuted and that its outcome will be final, whilst indicating that a record of the complaint and its outcome will be forwarded to the complainant
- other persons present should introduce themselves stating their reason for being at the meeting
- the chair of the panel should request a verbal statement from the complainant in support of his or her written letter of complaint and why he or she feels the issue has not been resolved
- the panel members can ask questions to make sure they understand the issue from the parent's point of view
- the chair of the panel should request a verbal statement from the headteacher (or his or her representative) in support of his or her written account of the complaint and the steps taken to resolve the issue
- the panel members can ask questions to make sure they understand the issue from the headteacher's point of view
- members of the panel should make sure they fully understand the issues and ask any further questions to clarify any points that may still not be clear to them
- the chair of the panel must ask the complainant and the headteacher (or his or her representative) if they are satisfied that they have provided all the information they wanted to present or if there is something they wish to add and if they feel they have had a fair hearing
- when the panel members understand all the issues, the chair will ask all parties to leave except the panel members and the clerk

After the meeting:

- the panel members will need to consider the information presented in order to come to a decision and suggest a way to resolve the issue taking into account the best interests of the child or children
- the panel members will discuss the issues in private and the clerk will remain to record their decision
- the panel can:
 - dismiss the complaint in whole or in part
 - uphold the complaint in whole or in part
 - decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint
 - recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not recur
- when the panel have reached a decision the clerk will inform everyone concerned in writing as soon as possible but in any event within five working days of the panel meeting
- the outcome letter will also contain advice as to what the complainant should do if they wish to take the matter further, although it should be noted that, as long as the correct procedure has been followed, the decision of the panel will be final
- a record should be kept of the outcome of the hearing
- written records of complaints will be kept and reported on an annual basis to governors