

Red Hall Primary

Complaints Policy and Procedure



Document History	
Originally Written:	July 2014
Updated:	May 2016 February 2019 March 2021
By:	HT
Additional guidance added:	February 2019; The new model reflects the DfE's <u>updated guidance on complaints procedures for maintained schools</u> . March 2021; To reflect other changes made within the DfE's model complaints procedure.
Approved by Governing Body:	<i>May 2016</i> <i>7th March, 2019</i> <i>15th March, 2021</i>
Next Review Date:	<i>March, 2023</i>

1. Aims

Our school aims to meet its statutory obligations when responding to complaints from parents of pupils at the school, and others.

When responding to complaints, we aim to:

1. Be impartial
2. Facilitate a full and fair investigation by an independent person or panel, where necessary
3. Address all the points at issue and provide an effective and prompt response
4. Respect complainants' desire for confidentiality
5. Treat complainants with respect
6. Ensure that any decisions we make are lawful, rational, reasonable, fair and proportionate, in line with the principles of administrative law
7. Keep complainants informed of the progress of the complaints process
8. Consider how the complaint can feed into school improvement evaluation processes

We try to resolve concerns or complaints by informal means wherever possible. Where this is not possible, formal procedures will be followed.

Parents/guardians are always welcome to discuss any concerns with the appropriate member of staff. We need to know as soon as possible if there is any cause for dissatisfaction. We recognise that a difficulty that is not resolved quickly and fairly can soon become a cause of resentment, which could be damaging to relationships and also to our school culture. We intend that parents and pupils should never feel – or be made to feel – that a complaint will be taken amiss or will adversely affect a pupil or his/her opportunities.

The school will aim to give the complainant the opportunity to complete the complaints procedure in full.

To support this, we will ensure we publicise the existence of this policy and make it available on the school website.

Throughout the process, we will be sensitive to the needs of all parties involved, and make any reasonable adjustments needed to accommodate individuals.

2. Legislation and guidance

This document meets the requirements of section 29 of the [Education Act 2002](#), which states that schools must have and make available a procedure to deal with all complaints relating to their school and to any community facilities or services that the school provides.

It is also based on [guidance for schools on complaints procedures](#) from the Department for Education (DfE).

In addition, it addresses duties set out in the [Early Years Foundation Stage statutory framework](#) with regards to dealing with complaints about the school's fulfilment of Early Years Foundation Stage requirements.

3. Definitions and scope

The DfE guidance explains the difference between a concern and a complaint.

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

The school will resolve concerns through day-to-day communication as far as possible.

A **complaint** is defined as “an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action”.

The school intends to resolve complaints informally where possible, at the earliest possible stage.

There may be occasions when complainants would like to raise their concerns formally. This policy outlines the procedure relating to handling such complaints.

This policy does not cover complaints procedures relating to:

- Admissions
- Statutory assessments of special educational needs (SEN)
- Safeguarding matters
- Exclusion
- Whistle-blowing
- Staff grievances
- Staff discipline

Please see our separate policies for procedures relating to these types of complaint.

Arrangements for handling complaints from parents of children with SEN about the school’s support are within the scope of this policy. Such complaints should first be made to the **SENCO or Headteacher**; they will then be referred to this complaints policy. Our **SEND policy and information report** includes information about the rights of parents of pupils with disabilities who believe that our school has discriminated against their child.

Complaints about services provided by other providers who use school premises or facilities should be directed to the provider concerned.

It is in everyone’s interest that complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. The experience of the first contact between the complainant and the school can be crucial in determining whether the complaint will escalate. To that end, all staff will be made aware of the complaints procedure so that they know what to do when they receive a complaint.

4. Roles and responsibilities

The complainant

The complainant will get a more effective and timely response to their complaint if they:

- Follow these procedures
- Co-operate with the school throughout the process, and respond to deadlines and communication promptly
- Ask for assistance as needed
- Treat all those involved with respect
- Not publish details about the complaint on social media

The investigator

An individual will be appointed to look into the complaint, and establish the facts. They will:

- Interview all relevant parties, keeping notes
- Consider records and any written evidence and keep these securely
- Prepare a comprehensive report to the headteacher or complaints committee which includes the facts and potential solutions

Clerk to the governing board

The clerk will:

- Be the contact point for the complainant and the complaints committee, including circulating the relevant papers and evidence before complaints committee meetings
- Arrange the complaints hearing
- Record and circulate the minutes and outcome of the hearing

Committee chair

The committee chair will:

- Chair the meeting, ensuring that everyone is treated with respect throughout
- Make sure all parties see the relevant information, understand the purpose of the committee, and are allowed to present their case

5. Principles for investigation

When investigating a complaint, we will try to clarify:

- What has happened
- Who was involved
- What the complainant feels would put things right

We also intend to address complaints as quickly as possible. To achieve this, realistic and reasonable time limits will be set for each action within each stage.

Time scales

The complainant must raise the complaint within 3 months of the incident. If the complaint is about a series of related incidents, they must raise the complaint within 3 months of the last incident.

We will consider exceptions to this time frame in circumstances where there were valid reasons for not making a complaint at that time and the complaint can still be investigated in a fair manner for all involved.

When complaints are made out of term time, we will consider them to have been received on the first school day after the holiday period.

If at any point we cannot meet the time scales we have set out in this policy, we will:

- Set new time limits with the complainant
- Send the complainant details of the new deadline and explain the delay

Complaints about our fulfilment of Early Years requirements

We will investigate all written complaints relating to the school's fulfilment of the Early Years Foundation Stage requirements, and notify the complainant of the outcome within 28 days of receiving the complaint. The school will keep a record of the complaint (see section 9) and make this available to Ofsted on request.

Parents and carers can notify Ofsted if they believe that the school is not meeting Early Years Foundation Stage requirements, by calling 0300 123 4234 or 0300 123 4666, or by emailing enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk. An online contact form is also available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted#org-contacts>.

We will notify parents and carers if we become aware that the school is to be inspected by Ofsted. We will also supply a copy of the inspection report to parents and carers of children attending the setting on a regular basis.

6. Stages of complaint (not complaints against the Headteacher or Governors)

Stage 1: Informal

The school will take informal concerns seriously and make every effort to resolve the matter quickly. It may be the case that the provision or clarification of information will resolve the issue.

1. Concerns: Most concerns, where a parent/carer seeks intervention, reconsideration or

some other action to be taken, can be resolved informally. Examples might include dissatisfaction about some aspect of teaching, disciplinary matters or issues outside the classroom. Parents/carers should raise the concern initially with the Class Teacher or the Headteacher as appropriate. The school will ensure that informal complaints are resolved within 10 working days of being raised and provide a response

The informal stage will involve a meeting between the complainant and the Headteacher and/or the subject of the complaint, as appropriate.

2. Unresolved concerns: A concern which has not been resolved by informal means within 10 working days from the receipt of the complaint will be escalated to a formal complaint.

3. Record of concerns: In the case of concerns raised under Stage 1 of this procedure, the only record of the concern and its resolution will be file notes or CPOMs records kept by the person dealing with the complaint and/or file correspondence between the person raising the concern and the respondent.

Stage 2: Formal

How to raise a complaint?

Formal complaints can be raised:

- By letter or email
- Over the phone
- In person
- By a third party acting on behalf of the complainant

The complainant should provide details such as relevant dates, times, and the names of witnesses of events, alongside copies of any relevant documents, and what they feel would resolve the complaint.

If complainants need assistance raising a formal complaint, they can contact the school office on 01325 254770

The Headteacher (or designated member of the senior leadership team) will call a meeting to clarify concerns, and seek a resolution. The complainant may be accompanied to this meeting, and should inform the school of the identity of their companion in advance.

In certain circumstances, the school may need to refuse a request for a particular individual to attend any such meeting – for example, if there is a conflict of interest. If this is the case, the school will notify the complainant as soon as they are aware, so that the complainant has the opportunity to arrange alternative accompaniment.

The Headteacher (or other person appointed by the Headteacher for this purpose) will then conduct their own investigation. The written conclusion of this investigation will be sent to the complainant within 15 working days. Please note that any complaint received during a school holiday or within 15 working days of the end of term or half term may take longer to resolve.

Written records will be kept of any meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint.

If the complainant wishes to proceed to the next stage of the procedure, they should inform the clerk to the Governing Body.

How to escalate a complaint?

Complaints can be escalated by contacting the clerk to the Governing Body via the School Office:

- By letter or email
- Over the phone
- In person
- Through a third party acting on behalf of the complainant

The clerk will need the details of the complaint as set out above, as well as details from the complainant on how they feel the previous stage of the procedure has not addressed their complaint sufficiently, and what they feel would resolve the complaint.

If the complainant wishes to proceed to the next stage of the procedure, they should inform the clerk to the governing board in writing within 5 school days. Requests received outside of this time frame will be considered in exceptional circumstances.

Stage 3: Submit the complaint to the review panel

The review panel consists of members of the governing board without direct knowledge of the complaint. These individuals will have access to the existing record of the complaint's progress.

The complainant must have reasonable notice of the date of the review panel; however, the review panel reserves the right to convene at their convenience rather than that of the complainant. At the review panel meeting, the complainant and representatives from the school, as appropriate, will be present. Each will have an opportunity to set out written or oral submissions prior to the meeting.

The complainant must be allowed to attend the panel hearing and be accompanied by a suitable companion if they wish.

At the meeting, each individual will have the opportunity to give statements and present their evidence, and witnesses will be called as appropriate to present their evidence.

The panel, the complainant and the school representative will be given the chance to ask and reply to questions. Once the complainant and school representatives have completed presenting their cases, they will be asked to leave and evidence will then be considered.

The panel must then put together its findings and recommendations from the case. The panel will also provide copies of the minutes of the hearing and the findings and recommendations to the complainant and, where relevant, the subject of the complaint, and make a copy of the findings and recommendations available for inspection by the Headteacher.

The school will inform those involved of the decision in writing within 3 working days.

7. Complaints against the Headteacher, a governor or the governing board

Complaints made against the Headteacher should be directed to the chair of Governors. Where a complaint is against the chair of Governors, any member of the governing board, or the entire governing board, it should be made in writing to the school in the first instance who will deliver it to the Chair.

8. Referring complaints on completion of the school's procedure

If the complainant is unsatisfied with the outcome of the school's complaints procedure, they can refer their complaint to the School Complaints Unit (SCU), which investigates complaints relating to maintained schools on behalf of the secretary of state.

The SCU will not re-investigate the matter of the complaint. It will look at whether the school's complaints policy and any other relevant statutory policies that the school holds were adhered to. The SCU also looks at whether the school's statutory policies adhere to education legislation. It may direct the school to re-investigate the complaint where it is clear the school has acted unlawfully or unreasonably.

For more information or to refer a complaint, see the following webpage:

<https://www.gov.uk/complain-about-school>

9. Persistent complaints

Where a complainant tries to re-open the issue with the school after the complaints procedure has been fully exhausted and the school has done everything it reasonably can in response to the complaint, the chair of Governors (or other appropriate person in the case of a complaint about the chair) will inform the complainant that the matter is closed.

If the complainant subsequently contacts the school again about the same issue, the school can choose not to respond. The normal circumstance in which we will not respond is if:

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

However, this list is not intended to be exhaustive.

The school will be most likely to choose not to respond if:

- We have reason to believe the individual is contacting the school with the intention of causing disruption or inconvenience, and/or
- The individual's letters/emails/telephone calls are often or always abusive or aggressive, and/or
- The individual makes insulting personal comments about, or threats towards, school staff

Unreasonable behaviour which is abusive, offensive or threatening may constitute an unreasonably persistent complaint.

Once the school has decided that it is appropriate to stop responding, the complainant will be informed in writing, either by letter or email.

The school will ensure when making this decision that complainants making any new complaint are heard, and that the school acts reasonably.

Complaint campaigns

Where the school receives a large volume of complaints about the same topic or subject, especially if these come from complainants unconnected with the school, the school may respond to these complaints by:

- Publishing a single response on the school website
- Sending a template response to all of the complainants

If complainants are not satisfied with the school's response, or wish to pursue the complaint further, the normal procedures will apply.

10 Record-keeping

The school will record the progress of all complaints, including information about actions taken at all stages, the stage at which the complaint was resolved, and the final outcome. The records will also include copies of letters and emails, and notes relating to meetings and phone calls.

This material will be treated as confidential and held centrally, and will be viewed only by those involved in investigating the complaint or on the review panel.

This is except where the secretary of state (or someone acting on their behalf) or the complainant requests access to records of a complaint through a freedom of information (FOI) request or through a subject access request under the terms of the Data Protection Act, or where the material must be made available during a school inspection.

Records of complaints will be kept securely, only for as long as necessary and in line with data protection law, our privacy notices and records management policy

The details of the complaint, including the names of individuals involved, will not be shared with the whole governing board in case a review panel needs to be organised at a later point.

Where the governing board is aware of the substance of the complaint before the review panel stage, the school will (where reasonably practicable) arrange for an independent panel to hear the complaint.

Complainants also have the right to request an independent panel if they believe there is likely to be bias in the proceedings. The decision to approve this request is made by the governing board, who will not unreasonably withhold consent.

11. Learning lessons

The Governing Body will review any underlying issues raised by complaints with the Headteacher/Senior Leader, where appropriate, and respecting confidentiality, to determine

whether there are any improvements that the school can make to its procedures or practice to help prevent similar events in the future.

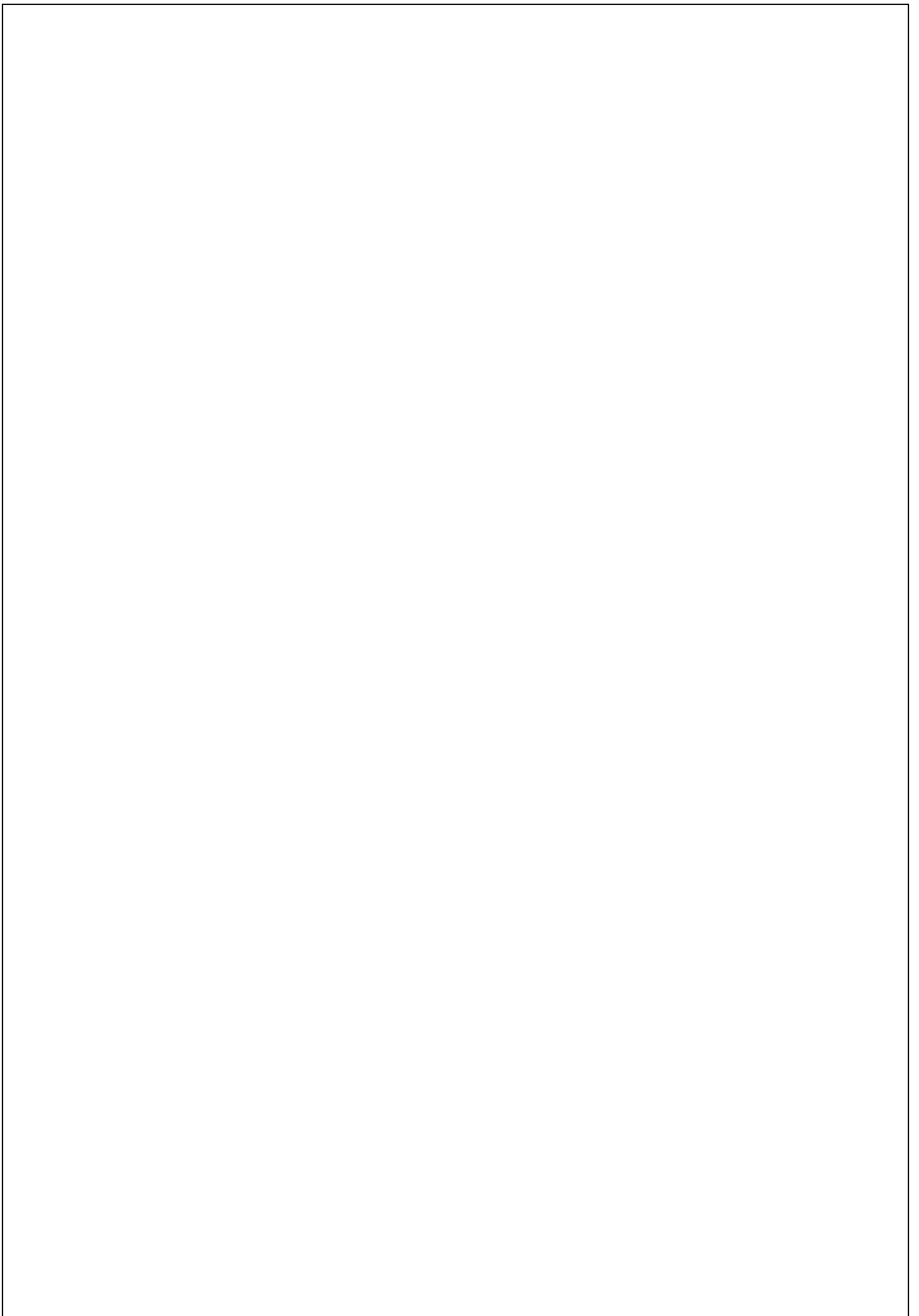
12. Monitoring arrangements

The Governing Body will monitor the effectiveness of the complaints procedure in ensuring that complaints are handled properly. The Governing Body will track the number and nature of complaints, and review underlying issues as stated in section 10.

13 Links with other policies

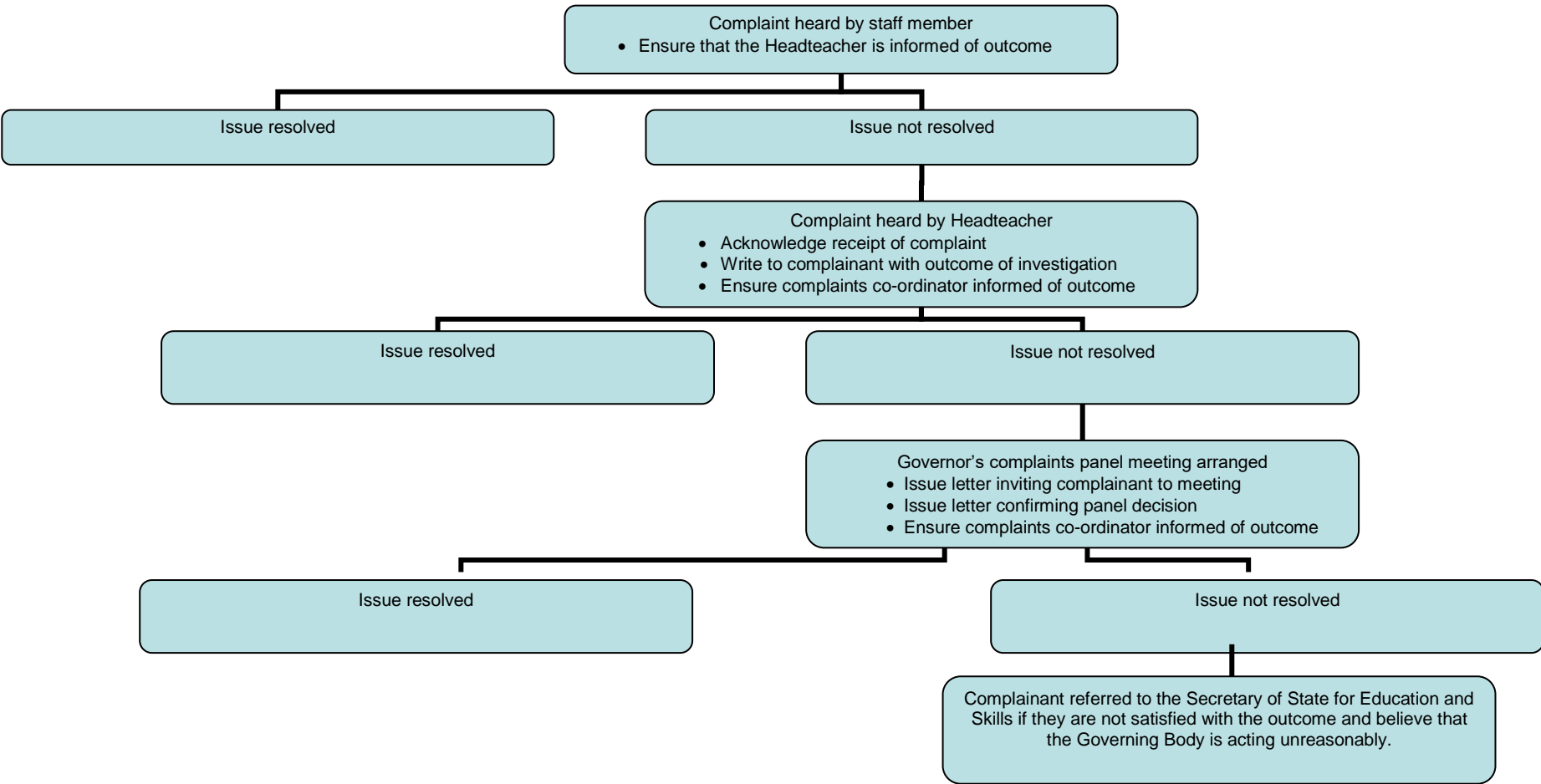
Policies dealing with other forms of complaints include:

- Safeguarding policy and procedures
- Admissions policy
- Exclusions policy
- Code of Conduct
- SEN policy and information report
- Privacy notices



Flowchart

Summary of Process for Dealing with Complaints





Annex 2

COMPLAINT FORM RED HALL PRIMAY SCHOOL

Please complete and return to the Headteacher 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 who:

Complaint referred to:

Date:



Red Hall Primary School

Complaints Procedure Staff Guidance and Good Practice

When approached by a parent with a complaint;

- Take the matter seriously. Never be dismissive, show irritation or impatience, even with attention seekers.
- Show that you are listening carefully and maintain eye contact.
- Be non-judgemental; gather information rather than offer opinion.
- Ask questions to clarify details.
- Decide if you are able to deal with the complaint personally, or whether you need to refer the matter to another member of staff.
- Make a note of the complainant's details, the date and contact number.
- Do not allow teaching and learning time or supervision levels to be compromised by lengthy complaints. Ask for an appointment to be made at a mutually agreeable time, preferably for the same working day.
- Ensure privacy. Never discuss complaints in front of other children or parents.
- When meeting, take notes, check details and assure the complainant you will investigate and feedback. Record any relevant information on CPOMS
- Never compromise personal safety. Always inform a colleague when and where you are meeting to discuss a complaint. If a complainant appears violent, never agree to meet with them alone. If you feel threatened or intimidated immediately send for the nearest available colleague and refer the complainant directly to the Headteacher.