



Complaints Policy

Person responsible for policy: Chief Executive

Revised: July 2025

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River Learning Trust

Complaints Policy

Introduction

It is in everyone's interest that complaints about the River Learning Trust or a school in the trust are resolved at the earliest possible stage. The experience of the first contact between the complainant and the school is crucial in determining whether the complaint will escalate. We must therefore be clear about the procedures we will apply when we receive a complaint.

The River Learning Trust is governed by a Board of Trustees who are responsible for, and oversee, the management and administration of schools within the Trust. The River Learning Trust appoints each Local Governing Body, including elected parent governors, to which is delegated responsibility for oversight and management of the school.

The Trust Board and Governors of schools within the River Learning Trust have adopted the following procedure to deal with formal complaints from parents/carers regarding their child. Complaints from people who are not parents/carers of children at the school will be dealt with respectfully and expediently by following Stage 1 of this procedure only. This procedure is to be used only when informal attempts to resolve problems have been unsuccessful.

This policy should be read in conjunction with the DfE's Best practice guidance for academies complaints procedures (2021) [here](#).

2. Framework of Principles

This procedure is designed to:

- be well publicised and easily accessible
- be simple to understand and use
- be impartial
- be non-adversarial
- allow swift handling with established time limits for action and keeping people informed of the progress
- ensure a fair investigation by an independent person, where necessary
- allow for a hearing of a panel of Governors, where appropriate
- respect people's desire for confidentiality, wherever possible
- address all points of issue, provide an effective response and appropriate redress where necessary
- provide information to the school's Senior Leadership Team so that services can be improved.

3. When should I complain to the School?

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 a general issue such as:

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

or about wider issues, such as:

- the overall running of the school

- a school policy
- the management of the school budget
- the use of school facilities
- services delivered by the school such as adult learning or childcare

4. Initial concerns - the informal stage

We need to be clear about the difference between a concern and a complaint. **Taking informal concerns seriously at the earliest stage will reduce the number that develop into formal complaints.**

The underlying principle is that concerns ought to be handled, if at all possible, without the need for formal procedures.

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'*.

In most cases the class teacher/form tutor or year leader/Head of Year will receive the first approach. If the concern is not handled to the satisfaction of the person who has raised the issue then a member of the Senior Leadership Team can be contacted (details on the school website).

There is no rigid time-scale for resolving concerns and complaints at this stage, given the importance of dialogue through informal discussions, however it is expected that most concerns will be resolved within **10 school days**. Should the nature or complexity of the concern mean that more time is required, the school will write to the complainant within 10 school days informing them of the reason for the delay and confirming a revised date for resolution.

How to raise a concern or make a complaint

A concern or complaint can be made in person, in writing or by telephone (after which this must be followed up in writing by the complainant). They may also be made by a third party acting on behalf of a complainant, as long as they have appropriate consent to do so.

Complaints against school staff (except the head teacher) should be made in the first instance, to the head teacher via the school office (marked as Private and Confidential).

Complaints that involve or are about the head teacher should be addressed to the Chair of Governors, via the school office (marked as Private and Confidential).

Complaints about the Chair of Governors, any individual governor or the whole governing body should be addressed to the Clerk to the Governing Body via the school office (marked as Private and Confidential).

Complaints about the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) or a trustee of River Learning Trust, should be addressed to the Chair of Trustees, via the trust office (marked as Private and Confidential).

For ease of use, a template complaint form is included at Annex 1 of this policy. If help is required in completing the form, the school office can be contacted. Help can also be requested from a third-party organisation, for example Citizens Advice.

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

locations.

Anonymous complaints

We will not normally investigate anonymous complaints. However, the head teacher, Chair of Governors or Chair of Trustees, as appropriate, will determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation.

Time scales

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

Complaints received outside of term time

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

Scope of this complaints procedure

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

Exceptions	Who to contact
· Admissions to schools	Concerns about admissions should be handled through a separate process – either through the appeals process or via the local authority.
· Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation	Complaints about child protection matters are handled under our child protection and safeguarding policy and in accordance with relevant statutory guidance. If you have serious concerns, you may wish to contact the local authority designated officer (LADO) who has local responsibility for safeguarding or the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH).
· Exclusion of children from school*	Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at: www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusion s . <i>*complaints about the application of the behaviour policy can be made through the school's complaints procedure.</i>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Whistleblowing 	<p>We have an internal whistleblowing procedure for all our employees, including temporary staff and contractors.</p> <p>The Secretary of State for Education is the prescribed person for matters relating to education for whistle-blowers in education who do not want to raise matters direct with their employer. Referrals can be made at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus.</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 directly 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"> Staff grievances 	<p>Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the school's internal grievance procedures.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff conduct 	<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>

If a complainant makes a complaint which is in the scope of any of the procedures above this will be made clear to them in writing and the complaint process will not be initiated.

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

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

Withdrawal of a complaint

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

5. Making a Formal Complaint

5.1 Stage 1

Every endeavour must be made to resolve a complaint informally but where informal attempts have been unsuccessful in resolving a complaint, the matter will be formally investigated by an appropriate person from the school.

If the matter is about the day-to-day running of the school or the interpretation of school policies, by members of staff of the school or the actions or inactions of staff at the school, the matter will be

investigated by the head teacher or a member of senior staff nominated by the head teacher. If the matter is about school policies as determined by the Governing Body or the actions or inactions of the Governing Body, then the matter will be dealt with by the Chair of Governors or a Governor nominated by the Chair.

5.2 Resolving the Complaint

Once a complainant has instigated the formal procedure the school will record the date the complaint is received and will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email). The school will report to the complainant the progress of any complaint and the final outcome. It is necessary that at each stage, the person investigating the complaint (the designated person) makes sure that they:

- establish what has happened so far, and who has been involved;
- 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.
- interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, 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 interviews.

At each stage in the procedure, we will want to keep in mind 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.

Complainants will 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. Whatever the outcome, it is important to reassure the complainant that the matter has been thoroughly investigated.

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

If the investigator 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 school will take to resolve the complaint.

The investigator will advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 1 by referring them to this complaints policy

If the complaint is about the head teacher the Chair of Governors will complete all the actions at Stage 1. If

the complaint is about a member of the governing body (including the Chair or Vice-Chair), a suitably skilled governor will be appointed to complete all the actions at Stage 1. Should the Chair of Governors be compromised in any way (e.g. because of a personal relationship or detailed prior knowledge of the situation or incident which led to the complaint) they will nominate a member of the governing body with the skills and experience necessary to undertake the investigation.

Complaints about the head teacher or 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 referred to the CEO of the Trust.

Complaint Investigation Process

The nominated investigator should arrange or request the Clerk to arrange a meeting with the complainant and any teachers or other members of the school connected to the reason for the complaint in order to gain a full and balanced understanding of the complaint.

A copy of the complaint letter and associated statements should be provided to each person the investigator interviews ahead of any meeting.

The investigator should discuss any stated desired outcomes the complainant has requested with the complainant and other interviewees, with the aim of reaching agreement on some or all of the desired outcomes.

Once the complaint investigation is completed, the investigator will produce a report within 5 school days. Should additional time be required, the complainant and those interviewed should be updated with the timeframe of the report.

The investigation report should contain details of meetings undertaken and information gathered as part of the investigation. It should include a summary of information provided by the complainant and those interviewed, the investigator's view on any potential inaccuracies or misunderstandings, details of any agreement on desired outcomes or statement detailing why these could not be met, details of the investigator's conclusions and should state the investigator's final decision on whether the complaint is upheld or not.

A copy of the investigation report should be sent to the Clerk for distribution to the Chair of Governors and the complainant.

The CEO may intervene or mediate at this stage should the circumstances of the issue make this a better solution rather than proceeding to a Stage 2 panel.

5.3 Stage 2

Where the complainant is still not satisfied that their complaint has been dealt with fully and properly, they may choose to take it to Stage 2. This stage will be referred to a panel of Governors established as outlined in **Annex 2**. The complainant will need to make the request for escalation to Stage 2 to the Clerk within five school days of receiving the outcome of Stage 1.

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. The meeting will then proceed in the complainant's absence on the basis of written submissions from both parties.

If the complaint is:

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

Stage 2 will be heard by a panel of trustees with an independent panel member.

The Chair of the panel will be elected by the panel members and will be responsible for following the further procedure as outlined in **Annex 2**.

5.4 Timescales

Complaints need to be considered and resolved as quickly and efficiently as possible. An effective complaints process must have realistic time limits for each action within each stage, and this will be communicated to the complainant. Where further investigations are necessary, new time limits can be set and the complainant sent details of the new deadline and an explanation for the delay.

6. Mediation

If, at any time, throughout the procedure from informal to the final decision of the panel, the school feels that mediation would help resolve the complaint, this can be arranged. By agreement the mediator can be a member of the Governing Body (for complaints not relating to the actions/inactions of the Governing Body) or a member of the Trust Board (for complaints relating to the actions/inactions of the Governing Body).

7. Monitoring Complaints

As well as addressing an individual's complaint, the process of listening to and resolving complaints should 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 in evaluating the school's performance. Any discussion of complaints by the Governing Body should not name or be able to identify individuals.

8. Policy for Unreasonable Complainants

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

The River Learning Trust defines unreasonable complainants as *'those who, because of the frequency or nature of their contacts with the school, hinder our consideration of their or other people's complaints'*.

A complaint may be regarded as unreasonable when the person making the complaint:-

- refuses to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcomes sought by raising the complaint, despite offers of assistance;
- refuses to co-operate with the complaints investigation process while still wishing their complaint to

be resolved;

- refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of a complaints procedure;
- insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the adopted complaints procedure or with good practice;
- introduces trivial or irrelevant information and expects it to be taken into account and commented on, or raises large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions, and insists they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales;
- makes unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues, and seeks to have them replaced;
- changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds;
- repeatedly makes the same complaint (despite previous investigations or responses concluding that the complaint is groundless or has been addressed);
- refuses to accept the findings of the investigation into that complaint where the school's complaint procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed including referral to the Department for Education (if the complainant thinks the complaint process has not been followed properly);
- seeks an unrealistic outcome;
- makes excessive demands on school time by frequent, lengthy, complicated and/or stressful contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and/or by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with.

A complaint may also be considered unreasonable if the person making the complaint does so either face-to-face, by telephone or in writing or electronically:-

- maliciously;
- aggressively;
- using threats, intimidation or violence;
- using abusive, offensive or discriminatory language;
- knowing it to be false;
- using falsified information;
- publishing unacceptable information in a variety of media such as in social media websites and newspapers.

A complainant should limit their communications with a school while their complaint is being progressed. It is not helpful if repeated correspondence is sent (either by letter, phone, email or text) as it could delay the outcome being reached.

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

If the behaviour continues, the Headteacher or Chair of Governors will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and asking them to change it. For complainants who excessively contact the School causing a significant level of disruption, we may specify methods of communication and limit the number of contacts in a communication plan. This will usually be reviewed after 6 months.

In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, the concerns and actions taken will be put in writing immediately and the police informed. This may include banning an individual from the school site.

9. Complaints about the Trust, CEO or Trustee

If a complainant wishes to complain directly about the trust, then the complaint should be sent to the CEO to be investigated.

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

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

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

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

If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of the previous stage, the complainant should write to the Head of Governance and Compliance asking for the complaint to be heard before a Complaint Panel, within five school days of receipt of the outcome.

If the complaint is:

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

Stage 2 will be heard by a completely independent committee panel.

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

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

The Complaint Panel hearing will proceed according to the procedure at Annex 2.

After the Stage 2 panel hearing

The conclusion of the Stage 2 panel hearing marks the end of the school's complaints procedure.

If a complainant feels that the school has acted unreasonably during the complaint process or not followed the correct complaint procedure, they can write to the CEO of River Learning Trust.

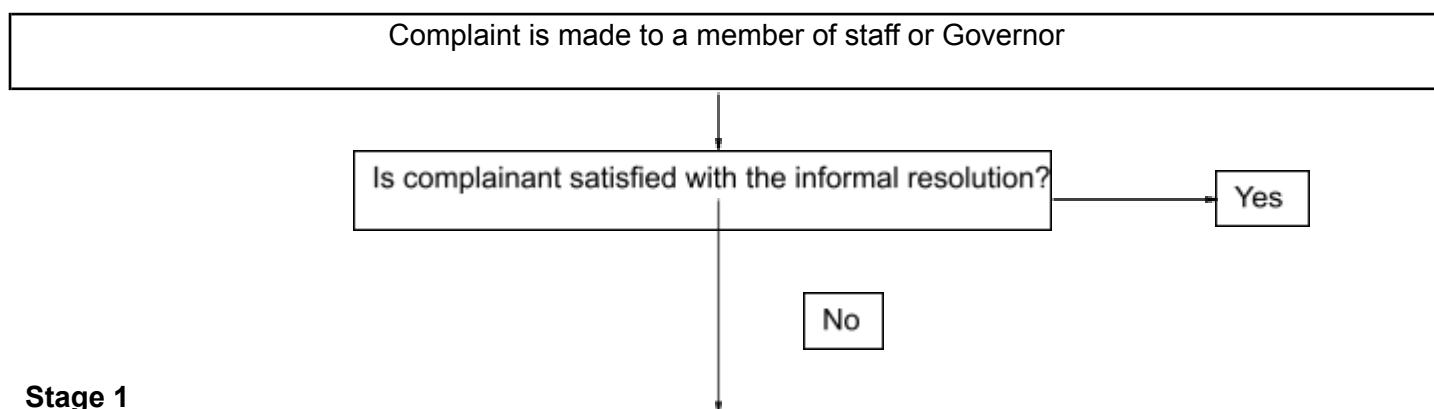
If a complainant believes the school/trust did not handle their complaint in accordance with the published complaints procedure or they acted unlawfully or unreasonably in the exercise of their duties under education law, they can contact the Department for Education after Stage 2 has been completed.

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 and whether they have followed [Part 7 of the Education \(Independent School Standards\) Regulations 2014](#).

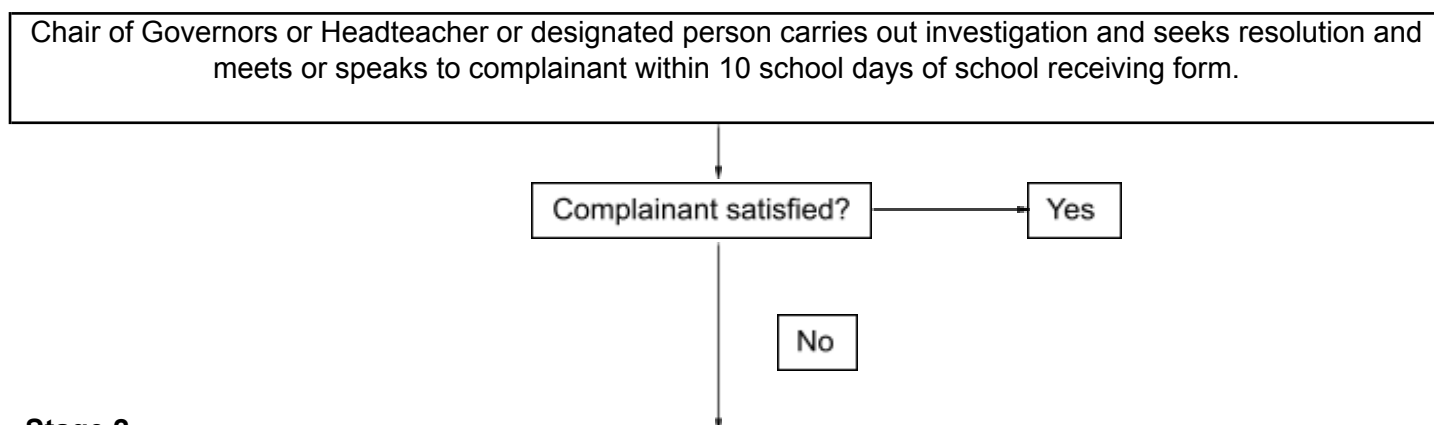
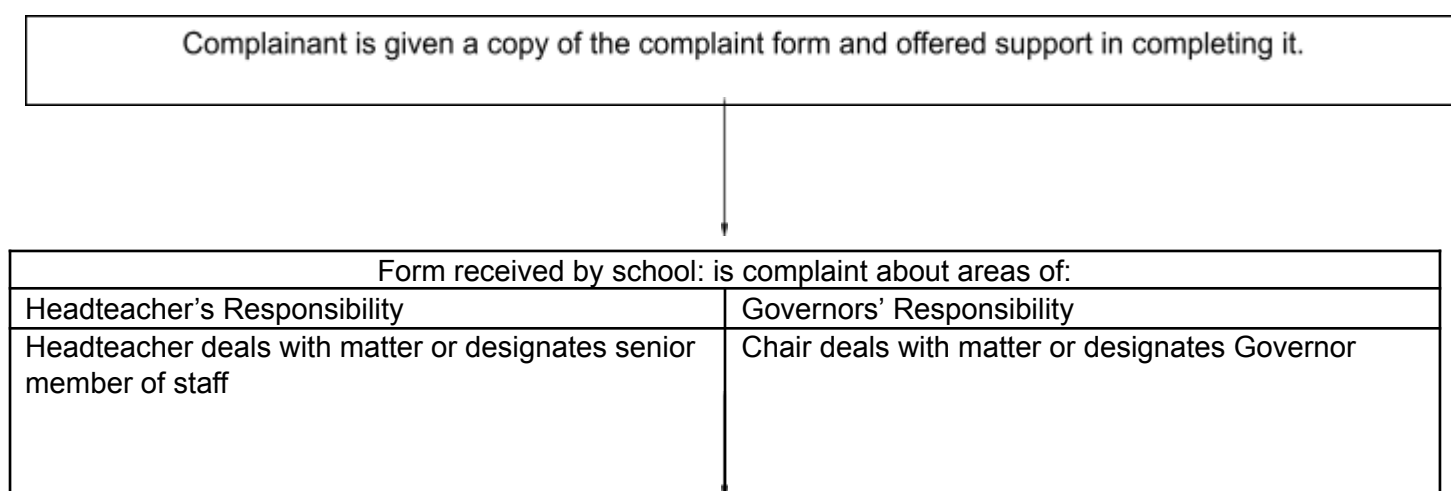
A complainant can contact the Department of Education by following this link:
<https://www.gov.uk/complain-to-dfe>

Flow Chart of Complaint Stages

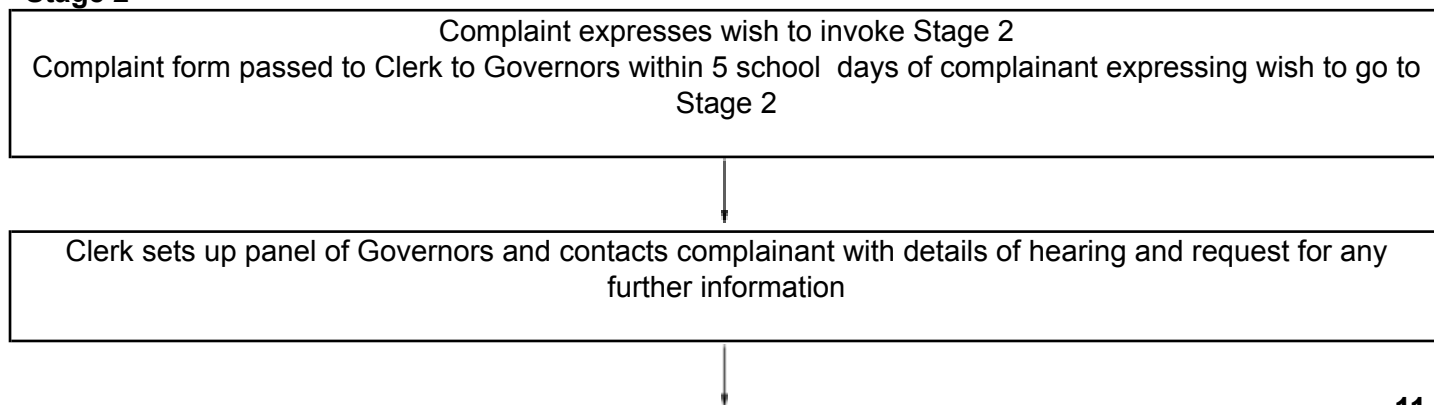
Informal



Stage 1



Stage 2



<p>Panel meets within 15 school days of clerk receiving the form and makes decisions Outcome letter is sent within 5 school days of the panel hearing</p>

At any stage mediation may be considered

Annex 1: The River Learning Trust Complaint Form

Please complete and return to the school office in an envelope marked for the attention of the Headteacher, the Chair of Governors or Clerk to the Governors. The Headteacher, the Chair of Governors or Clerk to the Governors will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

Your name:

School name:

Name of Child/ren Name (If Applicable):

Address:

Postcode:

Email address

Daytime 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?)

Your relationship to the school, e.g. parent, carer, member of public:

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 Complaint Received:

Date acknowledgement sent:

By Whom:

Complaint referred to:

Date:

Outcome:

Annex 2: Establishing a complaints panel

- The Clerk to the Governors will make arrangements for the complaints panel to be appointed. The panel will consist of three members, one of whom must be independent of the management and running of the school. This person may be a governor from another LGB in the Trust.
- When the Clerk to the Governors receives a copy of the complaint form they will inform the governing body that a complaint has been received and that it has been passed to the panel to deal with. No further information about the complaint should be shared with other governors.
- If the complainant is a governor they will be required to step down from the Local Governing Body.

There are several points which any governor sitting on a complaints panel needs to remember:

- It is important that the complaints panel is independent and impartial and that it is seen to be so. No governor may sit on the panel if they have had a prior involvement in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it. In deciding the make-up of the panel, governors need to try and ensure that it is a cross-section of the categories of governor.
- The aim of the hearing, which needs to be held in private, will always be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant.
- 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 governors sitting on the panel need to familiarise themselves with the complaints procedure.
- Panel members should not discuss the complaint outside of the meeting.

Checklist for a Panel Hearing:

- The panel needs to take the following points into account:
- Evidence should be provided to the hearing in writing. The Clerk is responsible for obtaining papers from both parties. They may request papers from both parties before a date has been set for the hearing to ensure that all the papers are circulated in time. Written papers must be provided to all participants in the panel hearing at least five days prior to the hearing itself.
- The hearing is as informal as possible.
- The complainant has the right to be accompanied to the hearing by another person e.g. a friend or relative who will offer moral support only.
- The attendance of witnesses is not encouraged. Witnesses are only required to attend for the part of the hearing in which they give their evidence.
- The following will attend the panel hearing: the Clerk, complainant, head teacher, investigator from stage 1 (if not the head teacher), any witnesses for the part of the hearing in which they give their evidence.
- 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.
- It may be necessary to have an adjournment to allow for reflection or to seek additional supporting evidence, it shall be for the Panel Chair to decide if such an adjournment is necessary.

Format of a Panel Hearing

All parties should enter the room together.

- The chair will introduce the panel members and the clerk and outline the process.
- The complainant is invited to explain the complaint.

- The Headteacher may question the complainant.
- The panel will question the complainant.
- The Headteacher is then invited to explain the school's actions.
- The complainant may question the Headteacher. If they feel that the Headteacher's account and explanation of actions was factually incorrect, they can state this at this point.
- The panel will question the Headteacher.
- The complainant is then invited to sum up their complaint.
- The Headteacher is then invited to sum up the school's actions and response to the complaint.
- The chair explains that both parties will hear from the panel within five working days.
- 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.
- Both parties leave together while the panel decides on the issues.
- The clerk will remain with the panel.

Notes

The panel may ask questions at any point if an immediate question will help to clarify a point.

The head teacher must have no contact with members of the governors' complaints panel except when the complainant is present. This means that the head teacher and complainant must 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.

The purpose of the Stage 2 hearing is not to re-investigate Stage 1 but to use the Stage 1 investigation report as the basis for the panel's deliberations, along with any other evidence submitted by both parties.

The panel will 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 decision letter

The Clerk will ensure that they have clear wording stating the panel decision about each of the issues that the panel considered before the panel is allowed to finish.

The findings and recommendations of the panel shall be sent by electronic email or otherwise given to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about within five school days of the hearing. They will also be available for inspection on school premises by the proprietor and the head teacher.

The decisions the panel might make

The panel may decide to do one of the following:

- 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 problems of a similar nature do not recur.

It may also:

- consider and, if appropriate, criticise the way in which an operational decision was communicated – **but it cannot overturn the decision itself**;
- consider the thoroughness with which the head teacher investigated a complaint about a member of staff – **but cannot expect the head teacher to provide details about confidential discussions with that staff member**;
- consider the manner in which a complaint about any decision was addressed – **but cannot expect the head teacher to change the decision**;
- consider and, if appropriate, identify limitations in a policy or procedures – **but cannot make or improve policy**. (It can, however, recommend that the policy be reviewed by the governing body to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not recur, and individual panel members can subsequently play their part in improving the policy.)
- consider whether it should recommend that the governing body offer appropriate redress.

Exceptional circumstances

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

- The Clerk 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 Clerk may assign three governors with minimal prior knowledge. If there are still insufficient governors able to sit on a panel, the governing body in consultation with RLT will put in place an alternative fair process using independent governors from other, local RLT schools.
- The complaint may not be against the head teacher: A complaint to the governors' complaints panel will never be against a junior member of staff (it may be against the way the head teacher handled a complaint against a junior member of staff) but it is conceivable that a senior manager will appropriately stand in for the head teacher. That would need to be considered very carefully but if agreed the senior manager would be 'the head teacher' 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 'head teacher' would be read as 'chair of governors'.
- It is not necessary, and may not be appropriate, for all parties to be present during the whole process but all members of the panel must be present throughout. Where a breakdown of a relationship has occurred which makes it difficult for all members to attend the hearing at the same time, the Chair may make the decision to hear the parties separately. Having presented their case and answered questions the complainant may be asked to leave the room, should the panel Chair consider it appropriate.
- 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 LGB. However, if a pupil is the complainant, panel members will wish to ensure that the same process is followed but special consideration 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.

Records

The school will keep a written record of all concerns and complaints received whether they were resolved informally or formally at a preliminary stage, or having proceeded to a panel hearing. Action taken by the school as a result of those complaints (regardless of whether they are upheld) shall also be recorded.

The school will keep all correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints

confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the 2008 Act requests access to them. They will be kept in line with the retention periods specified in the trust's Record Management Policy and Guidance.

In line with the UK GDPR, someone can still make a Subject Access Request (SAR) to view personal information held about them which relates to a complaint. This does not, however, give them the right to view confidential records or other documentation relating to a third party.

Governors involved in a complaints panel meeting should hand their documents back to the school to be shredded following the completion of the process. A master copy of the paperwork will be retained in school.