Central Schools Trust

INCORPORATING BALSALL COMMON PRIMARY SCHOOL AND DAMSON WOOD NURSERY & INFANT SCHOOL

SCHOOL COMPLAINTS POLICY

Document Control

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This policy should be read in conjunction with the Trust's

- Serial and Unreasonable Complaints Policy
- Parents and Visitors Code of Conduct Policy

Central Schools Trust
Concerns and Complaints Policy flowchart

Step One – Raising a Concern

Raising a concern

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

This can be made in person, telephone or in writing and would normally be raised with the class teacher, the Phase Leader or the Assistant Headteacher.

It is hoped that reassurances can be given at this first step which does not require escalation. However, if escalation is required, you can move to Step Two below.

Step Two – Raising an Informal Complaint at Stage 1

Raising an Informal Complaint

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction about actions taken or lack of action.

This can be made in person, telephone or in writing and would normally be raised with the Headteacher, if assurances sought in Step One above have not been achieved.

It is hoped that this stage will provide the necessary answers and/or actions.

However, if further escalation is required, you can move to Step Three below, which is a Formal Complaint at Stage 1

Step Three – Raising a Formal Complaint at Stage 1

Raising a Formal Complaint

A Formal Complaint should be made in writing using the Complaint Template within the Complaints Policy.

It is hoped that this stage will provide the necessary answers and/or actions.

The person to whom the complaint is made will vary depending on the nature of the complaint. Please see the flow chart below.

Who to send the 'Formal Complaint' to

Complaint about a **teacher or a member of the school staff?**	Complaint about the **Headteacher?**	Complaint about the **Chair of a Local Committee, Governors or any individual Governor?**	Complaint about the **CEO** or a **Trustee of the Trust?**
In writing to the **Headteacher,** addressed FAO the Clerking Professional and handed in to the school office	In writing to the **CEO,** addressed FAO the Clerking Professional and handed in to the school office. This moves immediately to Stage 2	In writing to the **Chair of Trustees** addressed FAO the Clerking Professional and handed in to the school office. This moves immediately to Stage 2	In writing to the **Chair of Trustees** addressed FAO the Clerking Professional and handed in to the school office. This moves immediately to Stage 2

Step Four – Escalating a Formal Complaint to Stage 2

Escalating a Formal Complaint to Stage 2

If the outcome of the Stage 1 Complaint is still not satisfactory, then the Complaint can be escalated to Stage 2

The person who will be responsible for working on this complaint is outlined below and will vary depending on the nature of the complaint. Please see the flow chart below.

Escalated to the **CEO** addressed FAO the Clerking Professional and handed in to the school office	Escalated to the **CEO** addressed FAO the Clerking Professional and handed in to the school office	Escalated to the **Chair of Trustees** addressed FAO the Clerking Professional and handed in to the school office	Escalated to the **Chair of Trustees** addressed FAO the Clerking Professional and handed in to the school office

Step Five – Escalating a Stage 2 Complaint to a Stage 3 Panel Hearing

Escalating a Stage 2 Complaint to a Stage 3 Panel Hearing

If the outcome of the Stage 2 Complaint is still not satisfactory, then the Complaint can be escalated to a Stage 3 Panel Hearing.

This is the final stage of the complaints procedure.

If unresolved, this can be escalated to a **Trustee Panel Hearing** FAO the Clerking Professional via the school office

If unresolved, this can be escalated to a **Trustee Panel Hearing** FAO the Clerking Professional via the school office

If unresolved, this can be escalated to a **Trustee Panel Hearing** FAO the Clerking Professional via the school office

If unresolved, this can be escalated to an **Independent Committee Panel Hearing** FAO the Clerking Professional via the school office

If the complainant believes Central Schools Trust, or one of the Central Schools Trust Schools, did not handle their complaint in accordance with the published complaints procedures, they can contact the ESFA, but only after they have completed the Stage 3 process.

Complaints Team
Department for Education
Cheylesmore House
5 Quinton Road
Coventry
CV1 2WT

Who can make a complaint?
This complaints procedure is not limited to parents or carers of children that are registered at the school. Any person, including members of the public, may make a complaint to Central Schools Trust Schools about any provision of facilities or services that we provide. Unless complaints are dealt with under separate statutory procedures (such as appeals relating to exclusions or admissions), the Trust will use this complaints procedure.

The difference between a concern and a complaint
A concern may be defined as

- *`an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought'*.

A complaint may be defined as

- *`an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about actions taken or a lack of action'*.

If you have difficulty discussing a concern with a particular member of staff, we will respect your views. In these cases, the Headteacher will refer you to another staff member. Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels unable to deal with a concern, the Headteacher may refer you to another, more appropriate staff member. The member of staff may be more senior but does not have to be. The ability to consider the concern objectively and impartially is more important.

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

Unreasonable and Serial Complaints

The 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 our schools. However, in cases where complaints are persistent, vexatious or unreasonable, the Trust reserves the right to follow the procedures set out in our separate CST Serial and Unreasonable Complaints Policy. This supplementary policy outlines how we manage repetitive or abusive correspondence to protect the wellbeing of staff and pupils while ensuring due process is followed.

AI Assisted Submissions

While complainants may utilise digital tools or artificial intelligence (AI) to assist in drafting their correspondence, it remains the personal responsibility of the complainant to ensure that all information submitted is accurate, truthful, and directly relevant to the matters being raised. The Trust reserves the right to request clarification, standard form completion, or a personal statement in the complainant's own words if an AI generated submission lacks clarity, contains repetitive generic arguments, or obscures the specific factual grievances unique to the case.

Anonymous Complaints

The Trust takes all concerns seriously, including those that are submitted anonymously. However, please note that a formal investigation under this multi-stage complaints procedure cannot typically proceed without a verifiable contact route for feedback and evidence gathering. Anonymous concerns will be reviewed contextually by the Headteacher or Trust Executive Team – particularly where they relate to child protection, statutory safeguarding, or health and safety – to determine if an internal inquiry is warranted. Where insufficient details or contact routes are provided, it may not be possible to follow up or report back on the outcome.

Accessibility and Alternative Formats

If you require this policy, or any associated complaints documentation, in an alternative format (such as large print, Braille, audio format, or translated into another language) to accommodate specific accessibility needs, please contact the individual school office and we will be happy to provide it.

Step One - How to Raise a Concern

It is in everyone's interest that concerns are resolved at the earliest possible stage. Central Schools Trust schools take concerns seriously and will make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.

Many issues can be resolved through talking through a concern, without the need to use the formal stages of the complaints procedure.

It is hoped that, if a concern is raised through the 'Raising a Concern Process' the concern is successfully addressed and that there is no further need to move to the 'Informal Complaints Process' at Stage 1 of the Complaints Policy. Indeed, most concerns that are expressed in this way are solved using the 'Raising a Concern Process'.

Initially, concerns should be raised with either the class teacher, Phase Leader or the Assistant Headteacher, either in person, in writing or by telephone. A concern can be made by a third party acting on behalf of a complainant, as long as they have appropriate consent to do so.

However, if a satisfactory conclusion is not reached using the 'Raising a Concern' stage, the complainant can move this to an 'Informal Complaint' at Stage 1.

Step Two - How to raise an Informal Complaint at Stage 1

If a concern has been raised with the class teacher, Phase Leader or the Assistant Headteacher, and has not been addressed to the satisfaction of the complainant, the next stage is to raise this informally with the Headteacher. (If the compliant is about the Headteacher, it should be directed to the CEO). ***This can be made in person, telephone or in writing and would normally be raised with the Headteacher.***

Complainants should not approach individual governors to raise concerns, informal complaints or formal complaints. They have no power to act on an individual basis and it may also prevent them from considering complaints at Stage 3 of the procedure.

If the complainant feels that a satisfactory conclusion has not been reached using the 'Informal Complaints' stage, the complainant can move this to a 'Formal Complaint' at Stage 1.

Step Three - Formal Complaints

If a satisfactory outcome has not been achieved by using the 'Concerns' or 'Informal Complaint' stages referred to above, then the formal process of complaints is reached.

A formal complaint should be made in writing using the complaints template within this policy. If you require help in completing the form, please contact the school office. You can also ask third party organisations like Citizens Advice to help you.

Complaints that involve a member of school staff should be made to the Headteacher, should be addressed FAO (For the attention of) the Clerking Professional via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Complaints that involve, or are about, a Headteacher within the trust should be made to the CEO, should be addressed FAO (for the attention of) the Clerking Professional via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Complaints about the Chair of Governors, any individual governor or the whole governing body should be made to the Chair of Trustees, should be addressed FAO (for the attention of) the Clerking Professional via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Complaints about the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) or a trustee of the Trust, should be made to the Chair of Trustees and should be addressed to the Clerking Professional via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

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.

Audio or video evidence
Complainants should make sure they obtain informed consent from all parties present before recording conversations or meetings.

Unless exceptional circumstances apply, the trust will not accept recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without informed consent of all parties being recorded, as referred to in both the Serial and Unreasonable Complaints Policy and the Parents and Visitors Code of Conduct Policy.

Anonymous complaints
The Trust will not normally investigate anonymous complaints. However, the Headteacher, the CEO or Chair of Trustees, if appropriate, will determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation.

Time scales
You must raise the complaint within three months of the incident or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within three months of the last of these incidents. *We will consider complaints made outside of this time frame only 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 Central Schools Trust Schools, 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). Solihull LADO http://solihulllscb.proceduresonline.com/chapters/p_lado_contacts.html
• Exclusion of children from school	Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at: www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions. **complaints about the application of the behaviour policy can be made through the school's complaints procedure. The CST Management of Behaviour Policy is available from the CST website at www.centralschoolstrust.co.uk*
• Whistleblowing	We have an internal whistleblowing procedure for all our employees, including temporary staff and contractors. The Secretary of State for Education is the prescribed person for matters relating to education for whistleblowers in education who do not want to raise matters directly with their employer. Referrals can be made at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus. Volunteer staff who have concerns about schools within the trust should complain through the school's complaints procedure. You may also be able to complain direct to the LA or the Department for Education (see link above), depending on the substance of your complaint.
• Staff grievances	Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the school's internal grievance procedures.
• Staff conduct	Complaints about staff will be dealt with under the school's internal disciplinary procedures, if appropriate. 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.

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

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

Resolving complaints

At each stage in the procedure, Central Schools Trust schools want to resolve the complaint. If appropriate, we will acknowledge that the complaint is upheld in whole or in part. In addition, we may offer one or more of the following:

- an explanation
- an admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better
- an assurance that we will try to ensure the event complained of will not recur
- an explanation of the steps that have been or will be taken to help ensure that it will not happen again and an indication of the timescales within which any changes will be made
- an undertaking to review school policies in light of the complaint
- an apology.

Withdrawal of a Complaint

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

Stage 1 – Formal Complaints
Once the complaint enters the Formal Stage, the ***complaint should be made in writing****,* using the template within this document, marked for the attention of the Clerking Professional and delivered to the school office.

If the complaint is about the Headteacher, or a member of the governing body (including the Chair or Vice-Chair), the CEO will be appointed to complete all of the actions outlined below using the Stage 2 Formal Complaints process. Complaints about the Headteacher or member of the governing body must be sent to the Clerking Professional, 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.

Complainants should not approach individual governors to raise concerns, informal complaints or formal complaints. They have no power to act on an individual basis and it may also prevent them from considering complaints at Stage 3 of the procedure.

The office will record the date the complaint is received and pass this on to the Clerking Professional, who will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 5 school working days.

The appointed investigating officer will then contact the complainant and seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, ask what remains unresolved and what outcome the complainant would like to see. The investigating officer can consider whether a face to face meeting is the most appropriate way of doing this.

Note: The investigating officer may delegate the investigation to an appropriate person, but not the decision to be taken.

During the investigation, the investigating officer will:

- if necessary, interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish
- keep a written record of any meetings/interviews in relation to their investigation.

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

If the investigating officer is unable to meet this deadline, the investigating officer will write to the Complainant within 10 school working days of the date that the letter was received, explaining the reason for the delay and providing a revised 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 Central Schools Trust schools will take to resolve the complaint.

The investigating officer will advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of the Stage 1 Formal Complaints process. If the complainant wished to escalate the complaint to the next stage, Stage 2, ***the complainant should put this request in writing,*** marked for the attention of the Clerking Professional and delivered to the school office within 5 school working days of receiving the investigating officer's report.

<u>Timescales</u>

Clerking Professional acknowledges the complaint	Within 5 school days of receipt of the complaint
Investigating officer sends outcome of investigation to complainant	Within 10 school days of receipt of the complaint
Complainant notifies the Clerking Professional that he/she wished to move the complaint to the next stage	Within 5 school days of receiving the investigating officer's report, *and in writing.*

Stage 2 – Formal Complaints
If a complaint is escalated to Central Schools Trust, or if a complainant wishes to complain directly about the trust, the investigating officer at this stage will be either the CEO or the Chair of Trustees.

A request to escalate the complaint ***should be made in writing,*** marked for the attention of the Clerking Professional and delivered to the school office.

Note: The investigating officer may delegate the investigation to an appropriate person, but not the decision to be taken.

The CEO or the Chair of Trustees will write to the complainant acknowledging the complaint within 5 school working days of the date that the written request was received. The acknowledgement will confirm that the complaint will now be investigated under Stage 2 of this Complaints Policy.

Following the investigation, the CEO or the Chair of Trustees will write to the complainant confirming the outcome within 20 school working days of the date that the letter was received. If this time limit cannot be met, the CEO will write to the Complainant within 20 school working 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.

The investigating officer will advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint further should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of the Stage 2 Formal Complaints process. If the complainant wishes to escalate the complaint to the next stage, Stage 3, the complainant should put this request in writing, marked for the attention of the Clerking Professional and delivered to the school office within 5 school working days of receiving the investigating officer's report.

Timescales

CEO or Chair of Trustees acknowledges the complaint	Within 5 school days of receipt of the complaint
CEO or Chair of Trustees notifies the complainant of the outcome of the investigation	Within 20 school days of receipt of the complaint
Complainant notifies the Clerking Professional that he/she wishes to move the complaint to a Stage 3 Panel Hearing	Within 5 school days of receiving the investigating officer's report, and in writing

Stage 3 – Panel Hearing
If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome at Stage 2, and wishes to take the matter further, they can escalate the complaint to Stage 3, a Panel Hearing, consisting of at least three people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint, with one panel

member who is independent of the management and running of the school. This is the final stage of the complaints procedure.

A request to escalate the complaint ***should be made in writing,*** marked for the attention of the Clerking Professional and delivered to the school office within 5 school working days of receipt of the Stage 2 response.

The Clerking Professional will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 5 school working days.

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

The Clerking Professional will write to the complainant to inform them of the date of the meeting. They will aim to convene a meeting within 20 school working days of receipt of the Stage 3 request. If this is not possible, the Clerking Professional will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed.

If the complainant rejects the offer of three proposed dates, without good reason, the Clerking Professional will decide when to hold the meeting. It will then proceed in the complainant's absence on the basis of written submissions from both parties.

If the complaint is:

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

Stage 3 will be heard by the trustees and an independent panel member.

A complainant may bring someone along to the panel meeting to provide support. This can be a relative or friend. Generally, the Trust does not encourage either party to bring legal representatives to the committee meeting. However, there may be occasions when legal representation is appropriate, for instance, if a school employee is called as a witness in a complaint meeting, they may wish to be supported by union and/or legal representation.

Note: Complaints about staff conduct will not generally be handled under this complaints procedure. Complainants will be advised that any staff conduct complaints will be considered under (Human Resources) staff disciplinary procedures, if appropriate, but outcomes will not be shared with them.

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

At least 10 school days before the meeting, the Clerking Professional will:

- confirm and notify the complainant of the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that the complainant is invited, that the dates are convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible
- request copies of any further written material to be submitted to the committee at least 6 school working days before the meeting.

Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least 5 school days before the date of the meeting. The committee will not normally accept, as evidence, recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.

The committee will also not review any new complaints at this stage or consider evidence unrelated to the initial complaint to be included. New complaints must be dealt with from Stage 1 of the procedure.

The meeting will be held in private. Electronic recordings of meetings or conversations are not normally permitted unless a complainant's own disability or special needs require it. Prior knowledge and consent of all parties attending must be sought before meetings or conversations take place. Consent will be recorded in any minutes taken.

The committee will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented. The committee can:

- uphold the complaint in whole or in part
- dismiss the complaint in whole or in part.

If the complaint is upheld in whole or in part, the committee will:

- decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint
- where appropriate, recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future.

The Chair of the Committee will provide the complainant and Central Schools Trust schools with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within 10 school days.

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 Central Schools Trust schools will take to resolve the complaint.

The panel will ensure that those findings and recommendations are sent by electronic mail or otherwise given to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about. Furthermore, they will be available for inspection on the school premises by the proprietor and the Headteacher.

A written record will be kept of all complaints, and of whether they are resolved at the preliminary stage or proceed to a panel hearing, along with what actions have been taken, regardless of the decision.

All correspondence statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential, except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the 2008 Act requests access to them.

Timescales

Clerking Professional acknowledges the complainant's request for a Panel Hearing	Within 5 school days of receipt of the complaint
Clerking Professional notifies complainant of date for the Panel Hearing	Within 20 school days of receipt of the escalation request
Clerking Professional confirms the date for the Panel Hearing	At least 10 school days before the date of the Hearing
Written papers for the panel to consider	Must be received by the Clerking Professional at least 6 school days before the date of the Hearing
Clerking Professional circulates papers	At least 5 school days before the date of the Hearing
Full explanation of decision sent to the complaint and the school	Within 10 school days of the Panel Hearing taking place

Final Steps

If the complainant believes the Central Schools Trust, or the Central Schools Trust Schools did not handle their complaint in accordance with the published complaints procedure or they acted unlawfully or unreasonably in the exercise of their duties under education law, they can contact the ESFA after they have completed Stage 3.

The ESFA will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by Central Schools Trust or Central Schools Trust schools. They will consider whether the

trust and/or trust schools have adhered to education legislation and any statutory policies connected with the complaint and whether they have followed Part 7 of the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014. The complainant can refer their complaint to the ESFA online at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus, by telephone on: 0370 000 2288 or by writing to:

Complaints Team
Department for Education
Cheylesmore House
5 Quinton Road
Coventry
CV1 2WT

Complaint Form

Please complete and return to the Clerking Professional, who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

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

What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?
Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details.
Signature: **Date:**
Official use
Date acknowledgement sent:
By who:
Complaint referred to:
Action taken:
Date:

Roles and Responsibilities

Complainant
The complainant will receive a more effective response to the complaint if they:

- explain the complaint in full as early as possible
- co-operate with the school in seeking a solution to the complaint
- respond promptly to requests for information or meetings or in agreeing the details of the complaint
- ask for assistance as needed
- treat all those involved in the complaint with respect
- refrain from publicising the details of their complaint on social media and respect confidentiality.

Investigator
The investigator's role is to establish the facts relevant to the complaint by:

- providing a comprehensive, open, transparent and fair consideration of the complaint through:
  - sensitive and thorough interviewing of the complainant to establish what has happened and who has been involved
  - interviewing staff and children/young people and other people relevant to the complaint
  - consideration of records and other relevant information
  - analysing information
- liaising with the complainant and the complaints co-ordinator as appropriate to clarify what the complainant feels would put things right.

The investigator should:

- conduct interviews with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning
- keep notes of interviews or arrange for an independent note taker to record minutes of the meeting
- ensure that any papers produced during the investigation are kept securely pending any appeal
- be mindful of the timescales to respond
- prepare a comprehensive report that sets out the facts, identifies solutions and recommends courses of action to resolve problems.
- If the complaint is escalated to Stage 3, the panel will determine whether to uphold or dismiss the complaint and communicate that decision to the complainant, providing the appropriate escalation details.

Complaints Co-ordinator
(This could be the Headteacher or CEO/ designated complaints governor or trustee or other staff member providing administrative support)

The complaints co-ordinator should:

- ensure that the complainant is fully updated at each stage of the procedure
- liaise with staff members, Headteacher, CEO, Chair of Governors, Chair of Trust or the Clerking Professional to ensure the smooth running of the complaints procedure
- be aware of issues regarding:
  - sharing third party information
  - additional support
    - This may be needed by complainants when making a complaint including interpretation support or where the complainant is a child or young person
- keep records.

Clerking Professional
The Clerking Professional is the contact point for the complainant and the committee and should:

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

Panel Chair
The Panel chair, who is nominated in advance of the complaint meeting, should ensure that:

- both parties are asked (via the Clerking Professional) to provide any additional information relating to the complaint by a specified date in advance of the meeting
- the meeting is conducted in an informal manner, is not adversarial, and that, if all parties are invited to attend, everyone is treated with respect and courtesy
- complainants who may not be used to speaking at such a meeting are put at ease
    - this is particularly important if the complainant is a child/young person
- the remit of the committee is explained to the complainant
- written material is seen by everyone in attendance, provided it does not breach confidentiality or any individual's rights to privacy under the DPA 2018 or GDPR
    - if a new issue arises, it would be useful to give everyone the opportunity to consider and comment upon it; this may require a short adjournment of the meeting
- both the complainant and the school are given the opportunity to make their case and seek clarity, either through written submissions ahead of the meeting or verbally in the meeting itself
- the issues are addressed
- key findings of fact are made
- the committee is open-minded and acts independently
- no member of the committee has an external interest in the outcome of the proceedings or any involvement in an earlier stage of the procedure
- the meeting is minuted
- they liaise with the Clerking Professional (and complaints co-ordinator, if the school has one).

Panel Member
Panel members should be aware that:

- the meeting must be independent and impartial, and should be seen to be so
    - no governor/trustee may sit on the committee if they have had a prior involvement in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it
- the aim of the meeting should be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant
    - We recognise that the complainant might not be satisfied with the outcome if the meeting does not find in their favour
    - It may only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations
- many complainants will feel nervous and inhibited in a formal setting
    - parents/carers often feel emotional when discussing an issue that affects their child
- extra care needs to be taken when the complainant is a child/young person and present during all or part of the meeting

    - careful consideration of the atmosphere and proceedings should ensure that the child/young person does not feel intimidated.
    - the committee should respect the views of the child/young person and give them equal consideration to those of adults.
    - if the child/young person is the complainant, the committee should ask in advance if any support is needed to help them present their complaint
    - where the child/young person's parent is the complainant, the committee should give the parent the opportunity to say which parts of the meeting, if any, the child/young person needs to attend
    - however, the parent should be advised that agreement might not always be possible if the parent wishes the child/young person to attend a part of the meeting that the committee considers is not in the child/young person's best interests
- the welfare of the child/young person is paramount.