

## Complaints Procedure

Policy Review Timescales: 3 Yearly  
 Review Body: Trust Board  
 Last updated: July 2021  
 Review Date:

<b>Policy Review dates</b>	<b>Changes made</b>	<b>By whom</b>	<b>Date Shared with staff</b>
<b>July 2024</b>	<b>New Policy</b>	<b>Trust Board</b>	<b>Summer Term 2021</b>
<b>Date of Policy Adoption by Trust Board:</b>			
<b>15<sup>th</sup> July 2021; statutory amendment 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2022</b>			
<b>Leaders responsible for implementation:</b>			
<b>Ian Yapp,</b> <b>Chief Executive Officer</b>  <b>Nick Sheppard,</b> <b>Chair of Trust Board</b>	<b>Miriam Oakley, Sherburn High School</b>  <b>Andrew Parkinson, Tadcaster Grammar School</b>  <b>Martyn Broom, Appleton Roebuck Primary School</b> <b>Allyson Buckton, Brayton CE Primary School</b>  <b>Melanie Lawrence, Kellington Primary School</b>  <b>Rebecca Cameron, Kirk Fenton Primary CE Primary School</b>  <b>Rick Weights, Monk Fryston CE and Saxton CE Primary Schools</b>  <b>Nick Styles, Riverside Primary School</b>  <b>Martyn Broom, Sherburn Hungate Primary School</b>  <b>Melanie Lawrence, South Milford Primary School</b>		

### **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 the STAR MAT 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), we 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'*.

It is in everyone's interest that concerns and complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. Many issues can be resolved informally, without the need to use the formal stages of the complaints procedure. Schools within the STAR MAT take concerns seriously and will make every effort to resolve matters as quickly as possible. Many concerns can be resolved at an informal stage.

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 will refer you to another 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, the STAR MAT will attempt to resolve the issue internally, through the stages outlined within this complaints procedure.

### **How to raise a concern or make a complaint**

A concern or complaint can be made in person, in writing or by telephone. They may also be made by a third party acting on behalf of a complainant, as long as they have appropriate consent to do so.

Complaints against school staff or complaints relating to provision of facilities or services should be directed to the Headteacher. (complaints in this case should be made referenced to the headteacher@ school email address)

Complaints that involve or are about the Headteacher/Executive Leadership should be addressed to Ian Yapp, STAR MAT CEO. Please mark them as Private and Confidential. (contact via [ceo@starmat.uk](mailto:ceo@starmat.uk) )

Complaints about the Chair of a Local Governing Board (LGB), any individual governor or the LGB as a whole should be sent to the Clerk to the LGB - [clerktogovs@starmat.uk](mailto:clerktogovs@starmat.uk) Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Complaints about the CEO should be addressed to the Chair of Trustees. Please mark them as Private and Confidential. (contact via [clerktogovs@starmat.uk](mailto:clerktogovs@starmat.uk))

For ease of use, a template complaint form is included at the end of this procedure. If you require help in completing the form, please contact the local school or MAT office. You can also ask third party organisations like the Citizens Advice to help you.

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 CEO, Headteacher or Chair of Trustees, if appropriate, will determine whether an anonymous 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 where 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 relevant holiday period.

### **Serial and Unreasonable Complaints Policy**

The Trust has a separate but related Policy with regard serial and unreasonable complaints. The full policy can be found on the STAR MAT website <https://web.starmat.uk/policies/>

### **Scope of this Complaints Procedure**

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

<b>Exceptions</b>	<b>Who to contact</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Admissions to schools</li> <li>• Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs</li> <li>• School re-organisation proposals</li> </ul>	<p>Concerns about admissions, statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs, or school re-organisation proposals should be raised with North Yorkshire County Council, County Hall, Northallerton, North Yorkshire, DL7 8AD</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation</li> </ul>	<p>Complaints about child protection matters are handled under our child protection and safeguarding policy and in accordance with relevant statutory guidance.</p> <p>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).</p> <p><b>Duty LADO (for consultations, new referrals and urgent matters: 01609 533080)</b></p>



<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Exclusion of children from school*</li></ul>	<p>Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at: <a href="http://www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions">www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions</a>.</p> <p><i>*complaints about the application of the behaviour policy can be made through the school's complaints procedure.</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Whistleblowing</li></ul>	<p>We have an internal whistleblowing procedure for all our employees, including temporary staff and contractors.</p> <p>The Secretary of State for Education is the prescribed person for matters relating to education for whistleblowers in education who do not want to raise matters direct with their employer. Referrals can be made at: <a href="http://www.education.gov.uk/contactus">www.education.gov.uk/contactus</a>.</p> <p>Volunteer staff who have concerns about our school should complain through the school's complaints procedure. You may also be able to complain direct to the LA or the Department for Education (see link above), depending on the substance of your complaint.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Staff grievances</li></ul>	<p>Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the school's internal grievance procedures.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Staff conduct</li></ul>	<p>Complaints about staff may be dealt with under the school's internal disciplinary procedures, if appropriate.</p> <p>Complainants will not be informed of any disciplinary action taken against a staff member as a result of a complaint. However, the complainant will be notified that the matter is being addressed.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Complaints about services provided by third parties who may use school premises or facilities</li></ul>	<p>Providers should have their own complaints procedure to deal with complaints about service. Please contact them directly.</p>

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

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

### Resolving complaints

At each stage in the procedure, the STAR MAT and its 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



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- 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.

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

## Retention of records

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.

## Stage 1 – Informal concerns/complaints

It is to be hoped that most concerns can be expressed and resolved on an informal basis.

Concerns should be raised with either the class teacher, year or subject leader or senior leadership.

At the conclusion of their investigation, the appropriate person investigating the complaint will provide an informal written response within **ten school days** of the date of receipt of the complaint.

If the issue remains unresolved, the next step is to make a formal complaint.

## Stage 2 – Formal complaints

Formal complaints must be made to the Headteacher (unless the complaint is about the Headteacher), via the preferred contact method (see page 2). This may be done in person or in writing (preferably using the Complaint Form).

The Headteacher will record the date the complaint is received and will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within **five school days**.

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

*Note: The Headteacher may delegate any investigation to another member of the school's senior leadership team but not the decision to be taken.*

During the investigation, the Headteacher (or investigator) will:

- if necessary, interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish

- keep a written record of any meetings/interviews in relation to their investigation.

At the conclusion of the investigation, the Headteacher will provide a formal written response within **20 school days** of the date of receipt of the complaint.

If the Headteacher is unable to meet this deadline, they will provide the complainant with an update and revised response date.

The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions the school will take to resolve the complaint.

The Headteacher will advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 2.

If the complaint is about the Headteacher, the CEO will complete all the actions at Stage 2 (as with Headteachers, the CEO may investigate the complaint or may commission another senior executive level employee, governor, Trustee or suitably skilled and experienced external person to carry out an investigation. In cases where such commissioning takes place, the CEO will retain responsibility and accountability and provide the formal response to the complainant).

Complaints about the Headteacher must be made to Ian Yapp, STAR MAT CEO (see page 2 for contact details).

If the complaint is about the CEO, the Chair of Trustees will appoint a suitably skilled Trustee to complete all the actions at Stage 2. Complaints about the CEO must be made to the Chair of the Trustees via the contact details on page 2.

If the complaint is about a governor of the Local Governing Board (LGB), a suitably skilled governor will be appointed by the Chair of the LGB to complete all the actions at Stage 2.

If the complaint is:

- about the Chair of the Local Governing Board;
- the entire Local Governing Board; or
- the majority of the Local Governing Board

the matter will be escalated to the CEO and Chair of Trustees who will decide how to proceed Stage 2 of the procedure.

The investigation of your complaint may include a meeting with you. You may be accompanied at any meeting by a friend or relative but you must tell the investigator in advance that you will be accompanied.

### **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 involved in the complaint.

This is the final stage of the complaints procedure.

A request to escalate to Stage 3 must be made to the Clerk to the LGB within **five school days** of receipt of the Stage 2 response.

The Clerk will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within **five school days**.

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

The Clerk will write to the complainant to inform them of the proposed date of the panel hearing. They will aim to convene a meeting within **20 school days** of receipt of the Stage 3 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 hearing will then proceed in the complainant's absence, on the basis of written submissions from both parties.

If the complaint is:

- about the Chair of the Local Governing Board;
- the entire Local Governing Board; or
- the majority of the Local Governing Board

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, we do not encourage either party to bring legal representatives to the panel meeting. However, there may be occasions when legal representation is appropriate.

For instance, if a school employee is called as a witness in a complaint meeting, they may wish to be supported by union and/or legal representation.

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

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

At least **ten school days** before the meeting, the Clerk will:

- confirm and notify the complainant of the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring 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 panel at least **six school days** before the meeting.

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

The panel 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 panel will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented. The panel 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 panel 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 Panel will provide the complainant and the school with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within **five school days**.

The letter to the complainant will include details of how to contact the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled by the STAR MAT.

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 or trust 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, Headteacher and CEO.

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.

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.

### **Complaints escalated to / about the Trust, CEO or Trustee**

If a complaint is escalated to the STAR MAT "the trust" or 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 under Stage 2 of this Complaints Procedure 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 **20 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 **ten 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 of Trustees, 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 Clerk to the Trust Board asking for the complaint to be heard before a Complaint Panel, within **five school days**.

The Clerk will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within **five school days**.

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

The Clerk will write to the complainant to inform them of the proposed date of the panel hearing. They will aim to convene a meeting within **20 school days** of receipt of the Stage 3 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 hearing will then proceed in the complainant's absence, on the basis of written submissions from both parties.

If the complaint is:

- about the Chair of the Trust Board;
- the entire Trust Board; or
- the majority of the Trust Board

Stage 3 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.

A complainant may bring someone along to the panel meeting to provide support. This can be a relative or friend. Generally, we do not encourage either party to bring legal representatives to the committee meeting. However, there may be occasions when legal representation is appropriate.

For instance, if a trust employee is called as a witness in a complaint meeting, they may wish to be supported by union and/or legal representation.

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

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

At least **ten school days** before the meeting, the Clerk will:

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

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

The panel 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 panel 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 panel will:

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

The Chair of the Panel will provide the complainant and the STAR MAT with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within **five school days**.

The letter to the complainant will include details of how to contact the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled by the STAR Multi-Academy Trust.

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 STAR MAT 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 CEO.

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.

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.

### **Next Steps**

If the 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 ESFA after they have completed Stage 3.

The ESFA will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by the STAR MAT. They will consider whether the STAR MAT 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](#).

The complainant can refer their complaint to the ESFA at: [www.education.gov.uk/contactus](http://www.education.gov.uk/contactus), by telephone on: 0370 000 2288 or by writing to: Academy Complaints and Customer Insight Unit, Education and Skills Funding Agency, Cheylesmore House, 5 Quinton Road, Coventry CV1 2WT



## Complaint Form

Please complete and return to the Headteacher/CEO/Clerk as appropriate, who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

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



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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 as appropriate to clarify what the complainant feels would put things right.

The investigator should:

- conduct interviews with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning
- keep notes of interviews or arrange for an independent note taker to record minutes of the meeting
- ensure that any papers produced during the investigation are kept securely pending any appeal
- be mindful of the timescales to respond
- prepare a comprehensive report for the Headteacher (or complaints panel) that sets out the facts, identifies solutions and recommends courses of action to resolve problems.

The Headteacher (or complaints panel) will then determine whether to uphold or dismiss the complaint and communicate that decision to the complainant, providing the appropriate escalation details.

### Headteacher or CEO (complaints co-ordinator)

The complaints co-ordinator should:

- ensure that the complainant is fully updated at each stage of the procedure
- liaise with staff members, Chair of the LGB (if appropriate) and Clerk 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.

### **Clerk to the Local Governing Board or Trust Board**

The Clerk is the contact point for the complainant and the committee and should:

ensure that all people involved in the complaint procedure are aware of their legal rights and duties, including any under legislation relating to school complaints, education law, the Equality Act 2010, the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act (DPA) 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)

- set the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that the dates are convenient to all parties (if they are invited to attend) and that the venue and proceedings are accessible
- collate any written material relevant to the complaint (for example school and complainant submissions) and send it to the parties in advance of the meeting according to agreed timescales
- 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 hearing, should ensure that:

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

### **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
- the welfare of the child/young person is paramount.

Careful consideration of the atmosphere and proceedings should ensure that the child/young person does not feel intimidated. The panel 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 panel 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 panel 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 panel considers is not in the child/young person's best interests.