Complaints Policy

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1. Aims

This is the complaints policy of Veritas Multi Academy Trust (MAT).

The aims of this policy and related procedures are to provide a framework for the resolution of complaints which:

- allows for their resolution informally and sets out the school's formal procedures where this is not achievable.
- is easily accessible and publicised, simple to understand and use and impartial and non-adversarial.
- enables a full and fair investigation by an independent person where necessary.
- respects people's desire for confidentiality.
- addresses all the points at issue and provides an effective response and appropriate redress, where necessary; and
- provides information to the school's senior leadership / management team so that services can be improved.

2. Scope and application

This policy applies to the whole school.

This policy applies to any expression of dissatisfaction however made about actions taken, or a lack of action, by the school where the complainant seeks action by the school.

This policy applies only to complaints from each of the following:

- parents of current pupils.
- parents of former pupils if the complaint was initially raised when the pupil was registered at the school.
- members of the public. However, in respect of complaints made by those who are not parents of pupils at the school, there is no obligation to follow the complaints policy in its entirety. Such complaints will be dealt with at Stage 2 of this procedure.

Requests for financial awards, such as claims for compensation, damages or fee refunds, are beyond the scope of the school's complaints procedures.

All complainants should be aware that, regardless of the nature of a complaint and whether or not it is upheld, complainants are not entitled to details of any related sanctions imposed on staff, pupils or parents.

The School has separate grievance and whistleblowing policies and procedures for staff concerns.

3. 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*'.

4. Attempting informal resolution prior to a formal complaint

It is in everyone's best interest to resolve concerns and complaints at the earliest possible stage. Often, they can be resolved informally, without the need for the formal stages of the complaint's procedure. For formal complaints, please provide evidence of how the issue was addressed informally first.

Veritas MAT takes concerns seriously and will make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.

Please address any concerns with the involved staff member first. If this is not possible, please contact the Trust Governance Professional at governance.professional@veritasmat.co.uk or via the main office. Should the staff member feel unable to handle your concern, the Governance Professional will refer you to another suitable staff member. This member of staff may be more senior but does not have to be. What is important is the ability to address the concern objectively and impartially.

If you are not satisfied with the outcome of the informal discussion, you may raise a formal complaint. In such cases, Veritas MAT will attempt to resolve the matter internally, through the stages outlined within this complaint's procedure.

5. How to make a complaint

An **informal concern or complaint** can be made in person, by telephone, in writing or by email.

A **formal complaint** must be submitted in writing or by email using the provided complaint's template (see Annex A) Third parties can submit complaints on behalf of a complainant with appropriate consent. No formal complaints will be accepted unless an informal resolution has been attempted first Only in exceptional circumstances will a complaint be immediately progressed to the formal stage.

I. **Formal complaints against school staff** (except the Headteacher) should be made in the first instance, to the Headteacher, via the school office**.** Please mark them as Private and Confidential.
II. **Formal complaints that involve or are about the Headteacher** should be addressed to the Trust Governance Professional (governance.professional@vertiasmat.co.uk), for the attention of the Chair of Local Academy Committee, via email or the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.
III. **Formal complaints about the Chair of the Trust Board**, **any individual governor or trustee the whole Local Academy Committee** should be addressed to the Governance Professional via the Trust office address: Veritas Multi Academy Trust, c/o Warden House Primary School, Birdwood Avenue, Deal, Kent, CT14 9SF, or, via governance.professional@veritasmat.co.uk. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.
IV. **Formal complaints about the Chief Executive Officer (CEO),** should be addressed to the Governance Professional at governance.professional@vertiasmat.co.uk. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Formal Complaints will be acknowledged in writing and an investigating officer appointed to manage the complaint.

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 school office. You can also ask a third-party organisation for example 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 Headteacher, Chair of Local Academy, CEO, or Chair or Trust Board, if appropriate, will determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation.

Where the school is the focus of a campaign and receives a large volume of complaints, all based on the same subject or from complainants unconnected with the School, the School may choose to respond by sending a template response to all complainants or publish a single response on the school's website.

If either anonymous or campaign complaints are investigated as above, the school can request a representative be identified and appointed to act on behalf of the group/complainant.]

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 if exceptional circumstances apply. A complaint raised outside this timescale should therefore include details of the issues which led to a delay.

It is expected that the management of every complaint will progress in a timely manner. Where there are exceptional circumstances resulting in a delay to the timescales for a stage of the complaints procedure, the school will notify the complainants and inform them of the reasons for the delay and the new timescales as soon as possible.

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 complaint's procedure

This procedure covers all complaints about any provision of community facilities or services by Veritas MAT, 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) County LADO Service https://www.kscmp.org.uk/procedures/localauthority-designated-officer-lado (Contact Number: 03000 41 08 88) who has local responsibility for safeguarding, or the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) https://www.kent.gov.uk/education-and-children/specialeducational-needs/social-care-support-for-SEND/mashs
• Exclusion of children from school*	Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at: www.gov.uk/school-disciplineexclusions/exclusions. **complaints about the application of the Behaviour Policy can be made through the school's complaints procedure, found under each school link via* https://www.veritasmat.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 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. Volunteer staff who have concerns about our school should submit their complaint through the school's complaints procedure. You may also be able to submit your complaint 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 Veritas MAT or associated 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, Veritas MAT and its associated schools wishes to resolve any 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 at any point, we will ask them to confirm this in writing.

Stage 1 – Informal complaints

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

Concerns should initially be raised with the member of staff member involved (class teacher, year head / subject head or Headteacher). If, however you do not consider this appropriate you could raise your informal complaint to the Family Liaison Officer, class teacher, or member of the academy school leadership team such as the Headteacher or Deputy Headteacher to allow for this concern to be reviewed and addressed informally. An informal complaint will be acknowledged by telephone, email or letter within 3 school days of receipt, indicating the action that is being taken and the likely timescales. Such action may include an investigation and / or a meeting with the complainant.

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.

At the conclusion of their investigation, the appropriate person investigating the complaint will provide an informal written response within 15 school working days from the date of receipt of the complaint.

If the complaint remains unresolved, or you are dissatisfied with the response to the informal complaint, you may make a formal complaint in writing under Stage 2 of this procedure.

No formal complaint will be considered unless an informal complaint has been made first to allow for resolution.

Stage 2 – Formal complaints

Formal complaints must be made to the Headteacher (unless they are about the Headteacher), via the school office using the complaints form within annex A. Complaints not presented on annex A will not be considered. These forms should be submitted via email using the email address on the school website or via the main school office.

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 5 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 the investigation to another member of the school's senior leadership team but not the decision to be taken.

Formal Complaints against Trust school staff (except the Head Teacher)

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 their investigation, the Headteacher will provide a formal written response within 15 school days of the date of acknowledging 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. This may also provide a conclusion to uphold/ partially uphold or not uphold the complaint. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions that the Veritas MAT school will take to resolve the complaint.

In the response 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, or a member of the Local Academy Committee (including the Chair or Vice-Chair), a suitably skilled governor will be appointed to complete all the actions at Stage 2.

Formal Complaints against Trust school Headteacher or a member of the Local Academy Committee

Complaints about the Headteacher or member of the Local Academy Committee must be made to the Governance Professional, via the school office.

If the complaint is:

- jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair or
- the entire Local Academy Committee or
- the majority of the Local Academy Committee

Stage 2 will be escalated to the CEO of the Trust.

Formal Complaints against the Chief Executive Officer, Trust Central Team or Trustee including Chair of Trust Board

The same process detailed above will apply. These complaints will be investigated by a panel of the Board of Trustees or an independent panel, as appropriate.

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 complaint's procedure. A request to escalate to Stage 3 must be made to the Governance Professional at governance.professional@vertiasmat.co.uk or the school office, within 10 working school days of receipt of the Stage 2 response.

The Governance 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 days.

Requests received outside of the 10-day time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.

The Governance 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 days of receipt of the Stage 2 request. If this is not possible, the Governance Professional will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed. This panel could be held virtually or in person.

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

If the complaint is:

- jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair or
- the entire Local Academy Committee or
- the majority of the Local Academy Committee

Stage 3 will be heard by the trustees and/or an independent panel as appropriate.

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, in which case 5 school days' notice must be given if the complainant wishes to be accompanied by a person who is legally qualified. The complainant should note that the Panel will wish to speak to them directly. The legally qualified person will not be permitted to act as an advocate or to address the Panel unless invited to do so by the Chair of the Panel.

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

The Governance Professional will in advance:

- 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 10 school 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 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. No covert recordings will be permissible.

The panel will consider the complaint, and all the evidence presented. Findings will be made on the balance of probabilities. 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 school's systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future.

The Chair of the panel will provide the complainant and the Veritas Trust school/ with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within 5 school days.

The letter to the complainant will include details of how to contact Department for Education if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled by Veritas MAT/school.

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 Veritas MAT/school will take to resolve the complaint.

The panel will ensure that those findings and recommendations are sent in writing, by e-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 Stage 1 or proceed to a formal complaint, 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.

Complaints about the CEO or Director

A formal complaint about the CEO or a Trustee will be managed in the same way as the above, there will be however different stakeholder involvements.

Complaints escalated to / about the Trust, CEO or Trustee

If a complaint is escalated to Veritas MAT or if a complainant wishes to complain directly about the trust, then the complaint should be addressed to the Governance Professional to the Board of Trustees, via the Trust office at Veritas MAT, Warden House, Deal, Kent or via email to governance.professional@veritasmat.co.uk.. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

The Governance Professional to the Board of Trustees will write to the complainant acknowledging the complaint within 5 school days of the date that the written request was received. The acknowledgement will confirm that the complaint will now be investigated under the relevant stage (informal/formal stage) of this Complaints Policy and will confirm the date for providing a response to the complainant.

Stage 1 – Informal Complaint

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

Concerns should initially be raised with the individual (CEO/ Trustee/Chair of Board)

Many of these concerns may be addressed immediately, however, if further exploration is required, at the conclusion of their exploration, the appropriate person reviewing the complaint will provide an informal verbal or written response within 15 school days of the date of the complaint being raised.

If the issue remains unresolved, or the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of the informal process, the next step is to make a formal complaint in writing using the formal complaints form

within 10 days of notification of the decision (Annexe A). No formal complaint will be considered unless an informal complaint has been made first to allow for resolution.

Stage 2 – Formal Complaint

The acknowledgement within 3 school days will confirm that the complaint will now be investigated under Stage 2 of this Complaints Policy and will confirm the date for providing a response to the complainant. The Chair of the Board will detail the appointment of the investigating officer.

Following the investigation, the CEO/Chair of the Board will write to the complainant confirming the outcome within 15 school days of acknowledging of the complaint receipt. If this time limit cannot be met, the Governance Professional will write to the Complainant 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 or an independent panel as appropriate.

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 Stage 2, the complainant should write asking for the complaint to be escalated to Stage 3.

Stage 3 - Appeal

If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of the previous stage/s, the complainant should write to the Governance Professional to the Trust Board, within 10 school working days of notification of outcome, asking for the complaint to be heard before a Complaint Panel.

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

As detailed earlier, Stage 3 will be heard by a completely independent 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, nor have any detailed prior knowledge of the complaint. The aim is to have a panel convened within 20 school days, notwithstanding the complainant and panels availability.

One of the Complaint Panel members will be independent of the management and running of Veritas Multi 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. It is not generally encouraged for either party to bring legal representatives to the committee meeting. However, there may be occasions when legal representation is appropriate, in which case 5 school days' notice must be given if the complainant wishes to be accompanied by a

person who is legally qualified. The complainant should note that the Panel will wish to speak to them directly. The legally qualified person will not be permitted to act as an advocate or to address the Panel unless invited to do so by the Chair of the Panel.

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

The Governance Professional will in advance of the meeting:

- 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 20 school 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 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. Covert recordings of investigation meetings are expressly prohibited.

The committee will consider the complaint, and all the evidence presented. Findings will be made on the balance of probabilities. 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 panel will provide the complainant and Veritas Multi Academy Trust with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within 5 school days.

The letter to the complainant will include details of how to contact Department for Education if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled by Veritas 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 Veritas Multi Academy Trust will take to resolve the complaint.

The panel will ensure that those findings and recommendations are sent by e-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.

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 Department for Education after they have completed Stage 3.

The Department for Education will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by the Trust. They will consider whether the Trust has adhered to education legislation and any statutory policies connected with the complaint.

The complainant can refer their complaint to the Department for Education online at: Home - Customer Help Portal, by telephone on 0370 000 2288 or by writing to:

Department for Education
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester M1 2WD

Annexe A - Complaint Form

Please complete and return to *<…Name>* (*either Headteacher / Governance Professional, as detailed within the Complaint Policy*) 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 to date, including details of who you have spoken to within the school at the informal stage (Stage 1) and resolutions offered/agreed.

Please give details of your complaint, including whether you have spoken to anybody at the school about it.
What resolution are you seeking to address your complaint?

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/Trust 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 for the Headteacher or complaints committee/panel that sets out the facts, identifies solutions and recommends courses of action to resolve problems.

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

Governance Professional to the Local Academy Committee / Trust Board

The Governance 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 committee's decision.

Panel Chair

The panel's chair, who is nominated in advance of the complaint meeting, should ensure that:

- both parties are asked (via the Governance 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/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/Trust 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 Governance Professional (and complaints co-ordinator, if the school has one).

Panel Member

Committee 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 panel 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/Trust 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.