



Introduction

1. Policy Statement The school's values are concerned with meeting the needs of pupils, parents and all others who have a stake in the school. The governing body believes that constant feedback is an important ingredient in self-improvement and raising standards. Pupils, parents, carers, or other adults who have concerns or complaints should feel that they can be voiced and will be considered seriously.

2. Aims and Principles of the policy

This policy aims to:

- Encourage the resolution of concerns and complaints by informal means wherever possible
- Ensure that concerns are dealt with quickly, fully and fairly and within defined time limits where possible
- Provide effective and appropriate responses to concerns and complaints
- Maintain good working relationships between the school and all those involved

Key principles of the policy are:

- The legal context of the Complaints Policy
- Awareness
- Speedy and fair to all involved.
- Support
- Confidentiality
- Training

3. Legal Context

Section 29 of the Education Act 2002 requires governing bodies of all maintained schools and nursery schools in England to have procedures in place to deal with complaints. The governing body is required to establish and publish procedures for dealing with complaints relating to the school, other than those covered by legislation and formal procedures.

4. Awareness

All staff, governors, parents and carers at the school are made aware of this complaints policy and any other policies that may be inter-related. Complaints procedures are accessible and publicised (**see Appendix A for the school's complaints procedure**):

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- A summary of how the school deals with complaints is included in the information that is given to new parents when their children join the school and through the school's Newsletter.
- Parents can access the Complaints Policy via the school website.

5. Procedures are as speedy as possible, consistent and fair to all concerned

Each stage of the procedure should have set time limits. Where it is not possible to meet these, the complainant will be kept informed of progress.

6. Support for complainant

Parents are made aware that at any stage of the procedure they can be accompanied by a friend, relative or representative and know where they can go for information, advice and advocacy, if required.

7. Support for a person complained against

This policy recognises that staff who may be questioned as part of the investigation of a complaint must feel that:

- they are being treated fairly.
- they will have the opportunity to put their case forward.
- a friend or representative may accompany them at any stage.

A balance will be maintained between supporting the individual so that his/her rights are maintained and reputation protected, and investigating a complaint thoroughly and impartially.

The complaints procedure is distinct from formal disciplinary proceedings for staff and this will be made clear to all concerned. However there may be occasions where a complaint leads to a disciplinary procedure which puts the complaints process on hold. If so, the complainant will be informed of this, without going into details, and updated regularly on likely further delay. After the disciplinary process is completed it will be necessary to decide what further response to the complainant is required.

8. Confidentiality

It is very important to treat all concerns and complaints with discretion. It is vital that parents feel confident that their complaint will not penalise their child. However, a complainant will need to be aware that some information will have to be shared with those involved in order that the complaint can be investigated.

It is usual to disregard anonymous complaints, but the danger is that they may relate to something serious and the complainant may subsequently surface and say that he/she alerted the school. It should be at the Headteacher or governing body's discretion to decide whether the gravity of an anonymous complaint warrants an investigation.



9. Upholding or Not Upholding Complaints

At each stage of the complaints procedure the conclusion will be either:

- That the complaint is upheld (in part or full) and where appropriate some form of action is taken **OR**
- That the complaint is not upheld and reason(s) for this, where appropriate, are clearly given

If the outcome of the complaints procedure shows the school is at fault, it is often sufficient to provide redress in the form of an acknowledgement that the complaint is valid. Alternatively, it may be appropriate to offer one or more of:

- an apology,
- an explanation,
- a promise that the event complained of will not recur,
- an undertaking to review school policies or practices in the light of the complaint,
- in appropriate circumstances, financial compensation.

Fear of litigation will not prevent the school from admitting to parents when mistakes have been made, but advice may be sought from the LEA if it is possible that the parent might take legal action.

10. Staff Awareness and Training

All staff understand the procedures and have the reassurance that senior staff are committed to following these procedures. Staff have also undertaken some basic training in dealing with people who are upset or angry and guidance is given in the school staff handbook. All staff have clear information about which staff have which responsibilities so that parents do not get continually passed from one to another.

The complainant may choose to take no further action or take their complaint to the next stage.

11. Monitoring and Record Keeping

Recording begins at the point when an initial concern or complaint cannot be resolved immediately but needs some investigation and/or consultation with others in school and a subsequent report back to the parent.

All Health & Safety complaints and the action taken should be documented and a summary included in the Headteacher's termly report to the governors, with advice on any implications for policies. All written complaint will be acknowledged within five working days of the receipt of the complaint.



Recording at the earliest stage may only be a very basic record of the complaint, giving the date, name of parent and general nature of the complaint.

Handling Complaints - A Staged Approach

A staged approach has been adopted as follows (see diagram in Appendix B):

Stage 1: The First Contact

There is a difference between a concern and a complaint.

- A **concern** is likely to require discussion between teacher, pupil and parent. If the concern is not resolved by that means then it could become a complaint.
- A **complaint** is an expression of dissatisfaction which needs a response from the school.
- A **complaint** is likely to arise when there are issues of physical or emotional well-being and security or when the school's stated values or aims are being ignored.

Taking informal concerns seriously at an early stage will reduce the number that develop into formal complaints. Where possible, concerns will be resolved straight away by the class teacher, Headteacher or administrative staff, depending on who is approached first. Parents must feel able to raise concerns with members of staff without any formality, either in person, over the telephone or in writing.

Stage 2: Referral to the Headteacher

At this stage it will have become clear that the concern is a definite complaint and should be investigated according to school guidelines to ensure consistency and to make sure that nothing happens which could make it difficult for later stages to proceed smoothly.

In some cases the Headteacher may already have been involved in looking at the matter; in other cases it may be his/her first involvement. Complainants will be reassured that their grievance will be heard by more than one person, and that the Headteacher will ensure that their involvement will not predominate at every stage of a particular complaint.

In some cases Headteachers will have been involved at Stage 1, or the complaint may be against them, in which cases Stage 2 will be carried out by the Chair of Governors. In other cases, where the Headteacher has delegated the investigation at Stage 2 to another member of staff, s/he will become involved if the parent is not satisfied, before the Stage 2 process is completed and the matter referred to the governing body.



Stage 3: Review by the Governing Body

At this stage the school may seek advice from the Local Authority. This will provide a useful 'outside view' on the issues.

The review by the Governing Body will be independent and impartial. Complaints will be considered by a panel, not by the full governing body. It is important that governors who have previous knowledge of the problem which led to the complaint are not appointed to the panel to avoid any unfair or biased consideration to the issue. If a complaint resulted in disciplinary action against a member of staff it would be necessary for there to be sufficient governors with no prior involvement to form a staff dismissal committee and possibly a staff dismissal appeal committee.

The panel would appoint a clerk to minute the meeting. The clerk would be the contact point for the complainant and be required to:

- Set the date, time and venue of the hearing and ensure that the dates are convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible.
- Collate any written material and send it to the parties in advance of the hearing
- Meet and welcome the parties as they arrive at the hearing
- Record the proceedings
- Notify all parties of the panel's decision

The aim of the meeting would be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and complainant. However, it has to be recognised that sometimes it may only be possible to establish facts and make recommendations that will satisfy the complainant that their complaint has at least been taken seriously.

What if my complaint is about a governor?

You should still contact the Chair of Governors who will investigate your concerns. If the complaint is about the Chair of Governors you should contact the vice-chair. The school should be able to tell you who that would be. If you have a complaint about the governing body as a whole, you should contact the Director of Children's Services and Education at Portsmouth City Council on 02392 841202.

What if my complaint is about a Headteacher?

You should contact the Chair of Governors at stage one, who will investigate your concerns. The school should be able to tell you who that would be. If you still have a complaint following the Chair's investigation, you will bypass to stage 3, where a panel of governors will be set up to investigate further.

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Stage 4: Review by the Secretary of State for Education

Following the abolition of the Local Government Ombudsman, Section 45 of the Education Act 2011 has repealed the power to complain to a Local Commissioner and this is effective from 31st July 2012. Consequently, with effect from 1st August 2012, any unresolved school complaints will have a final route of appeal direct to the Secretary of State for Education.

If the complainant is unsatisfied at the end of Stage 4 they can contact the Secretary of State at the address below:

Secretary of State for Education
The School Complaints Unit
Department for Education 2nd Floor, Piccadilly Gate
Manchester
M1 2WD

Date approved by governing body: November 2018
Next Review Date Nov 2021



Appendix A

Wimborne Junior School Complaints Procedure 2016

In order to investigate a parent's complaint as fully as possible the governing body of Wimborne Junior School have implemented a staged approach.

Stage 1: The first contact (informal)

- 1.1. Parents are always welcome to discuss any concerns with the appropriate member of staff or Headteacher, who will clarify with the parent the nature of the concern and reassure them that the school wants to hear about it. The member of staff may explain to the parent how the situation happened. It can be helpful at this point to identify what sort of outcome the parent is looking for. If at this point the concern is resolved then no further action is taken.
- 1.2. If the member of staff first contacted cannot immediately deal with the concern, s/he will make a clear note of the date, name and contact address or phone number.
- 1.3. All members of staff will know how to refer, if necessary, to the person with responsibility for the particular concern raised by the parent. The teacher refers the concern to the appropriate member of staff. The teacher and appropriate member of staff will agree who is to respond to the parent. If the appropriate member of staff is to respond to the parent the teacher should monitor that this has taken place within ten working days, if not the teacher will remind the appropriate member of staff of the concern. The appropriate member of staff will let the teacher know when it has been resolved or what actions has been taken.
- 1.4. The member of staff dealing with the concern will make sure the parent is clear what action (if any) or monitoring of the situation has been agreed, putting it in writing if appropriate.
- 1.5. If the concern is brought to the attention of the Headteacher s/he might decide to deal with it directly at this stage. If the Headteacher can resolve the concern then no further action is required.
- 1.5. Where no satisfactory solution has been found within ten working days of the initial contact, parents will be advised that if they wish their concern to be considered further they should write to the Headteacher in the form of a letter or using the complaints form (appendix F). It should be made clear that help can be provided with the completion of the form if required.. If the complaint is against the Headteacher the parent will be advised to contact the Chair of the Governing Body, again in writing.



Stage 2: Referral to the Headteacher for investigation (formal)

- 2.1 The Headteacher (or designated person) will acknowledge the complaint in writing (letter) within three working days of receiving the written complaint. The acknowledgement will give a brief explanation of the school's complaints procedure and a target date for providing a response to the complaint. This should normally be within ten working days. If this proves impossible, a letter will be sent explaining the reason for the delay and giving a revised target date.
- 2.2 The Headteacher will provide an opportunity for the complainant to meet them to supplement any information provided previously. It will be made clear to the complainant that if s/he wishes s/he might be accompanied to any meeting by a friend, relative, representative or advocate who can speak on his/her behalf.
- 2.3 If necessary the Headteacher will interview witnesses and take statements from those involved. If the complaint centres on a pupil, the pupil should also be interviewed. Pupils should normally be interviewed with parents present, but if this would seriously delay the investigation of a serious/urgent complaint or if the pupil has specifically said that s/he would prefer that parents were not involved, another member of staff with whom the pupil feels comfortable should be present. If a member of staff is complained against, they must have the opportunity to present their case.
- 2.4 The Headteacher will keep written records of meetings, telephone conversations and other documentation.
- 2.5 Once all the relevant facts have been established as far as possible, the Headteacher will then produce a written response to the complainant, including a full explanation of the decision and the reasons for it. Where appropriate, this will include what action the school will take to resolve the complaint. The complainant will be advised that should s/he wish to take the complaint further s/he should notify the Chair of Governors within five weeks of receiving the letter. If no contact is made with the Chair within this time the complaint will be closed with no further action.
- 2.6 If the complaint is against the Headteacher, or if the Headteacher has been closely involved at Stage 1, the Chair of the Governing Body will carry out all the Stage 2 procedures.



Stage 3: Review by the Governing Body (formal)

- 3.1 The Chair of the Governing Body will write to the complainant to acknowledge receipt of the written request for the governing body to review the complaint. The acknowledgement will inform the complainant that three members of the school's governing body will hear the complaint within twenty working days of receiving the complaint. The letter will also explain that the complainant has the right to submit any further documents relevant to the complaint. These must be received in time for the documents to be sent to the three members.
- 3.2 A meeting of the Governors' Complaints Panel will be convened. No governors with prior involvement must be included on the panel and it may be necessary to use reserves (previously agreed by the governing body) to ensure the Panel can meet within the set time. If s/he has not previously been involved the Chair should chair the Panel; otherwise the Vice-Chair should do so. Governors should bear in mind the advantages of having a parent governor on the panel, and will also want to be sensitive to issues of race and gender. It is not appropriate for the Headteacher to sit on the Panel.
- 3.3 The Chair/Vice-Chair will ensure the Panel hears the complaint within twenty working days of receiving the letter. All relevant correspondence relating to the complaint will be given to each Panel member as soon as the composition of the panel is confirmed. If the correspondence is extensive, the Chair may prepare a thorough summary for sending to Panel members.
- 3.4 The Chair or clerk will write and inform the complainant, Headteacher, any relevant witnesses and members of the Panel at least five working days in advance of the date, time and place of the meeting. The notification will also inform the complainant of his/her right to be accompanied to the meeting by a friend/advocate/interpreter and explain how the meeting will be conducted and the complainant's right to submit further written evidence to the Panel.
- 3.5 The Headteacher will be invited to attend the Panel meeting and will be asked to prepare a written report for the Panel in response to the complaint. All concerned should receive any relevant documents including the Headteacher's report, including the complainant, at least five working days prior to the meeting.

The Headteacher may also invite members of staff directly involved in matters raised by the complainant to respond in writing or person, subject to the discretion of the Chair.

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3.6 The meeting should allow for:

- The complainant to explain their complaint and the Headteacher to explain the school's response
- The Headteacher to question the complainant about the complaint and the complainant to question the Headteacher and/or other members of staff about the school's response
- Panel members to have an opportunity to question both the complainant and the Headteacher
- Any party to have the right to call witnesses (subject to approval of the Chair) and all parties having the right to question all the witnesses
- Final statements by both the complainant and the Headteacher.

It is the responsibility of the Chair of the Panel to ensure that it is properly minuted.

3.7 The Chair of the Panel will explain to the complainant and Headteacher that the Panel will consider its decision and that a written decision will be sent to both parties within 15 working days. The complainant, Headteacher, other members of staff and witnesses will then leave.

3.8 The Panel will then consider the complaint and all the evidence presented and

- Reach a unanimous, or at least a majority decision on the complaint;
- Decide upon the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint; and
- Where appropriate, suggest recommended changes to the school's systems or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not happen again.

3.9 A written statement outlining the decision of the Panel must be sent to the complainant and Headteacher. The letter to the complainant should also explain whether a further appeal can be made, and if so, to whom.

3.10 The school should ensure that a copy of all correspondence and notes are kept on file in the school's records. These records should be kept separately from the pupil's personal records.

Stage 4: Review by the Secretary of State for Education (formal)

School complaints guidance

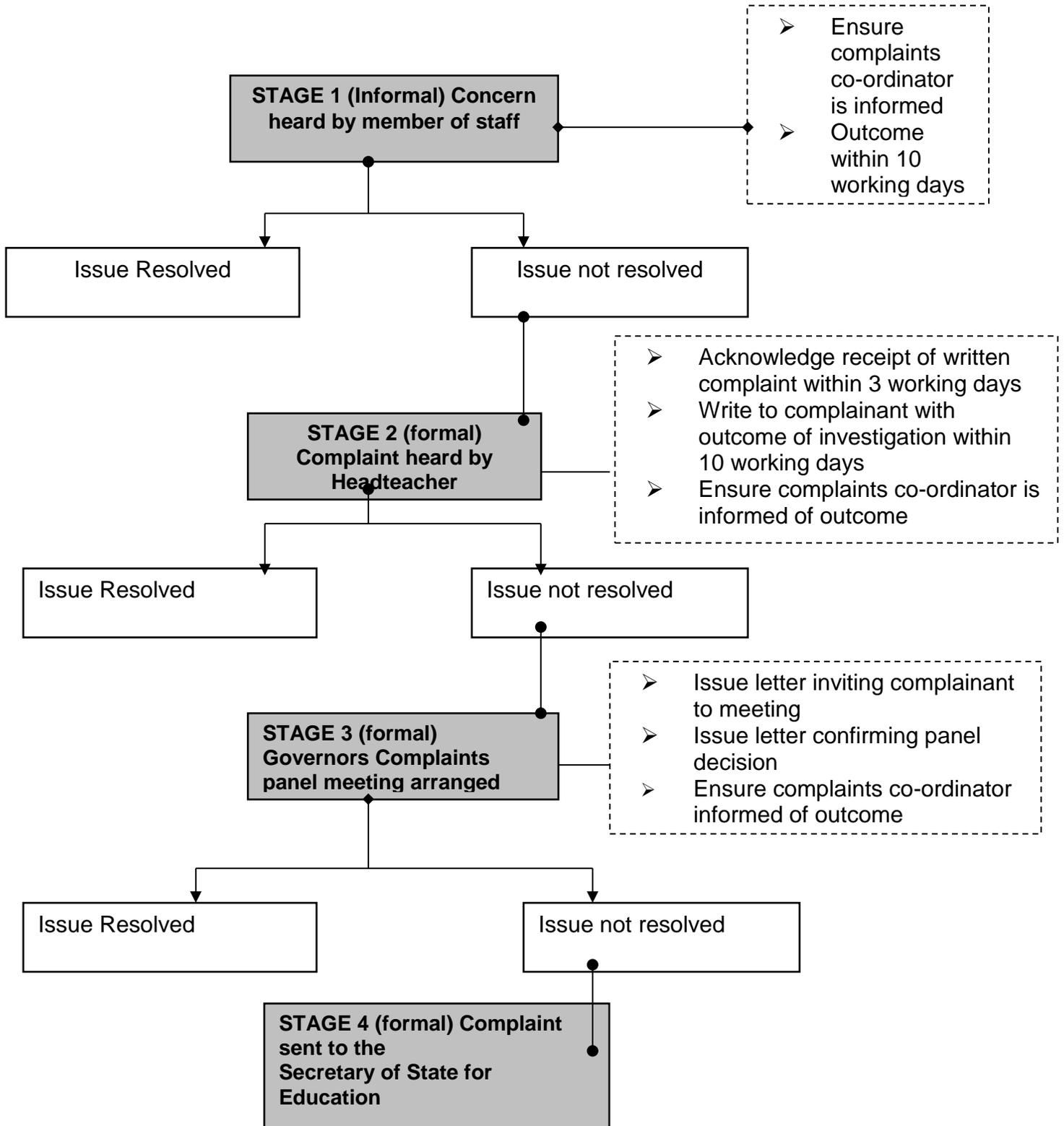
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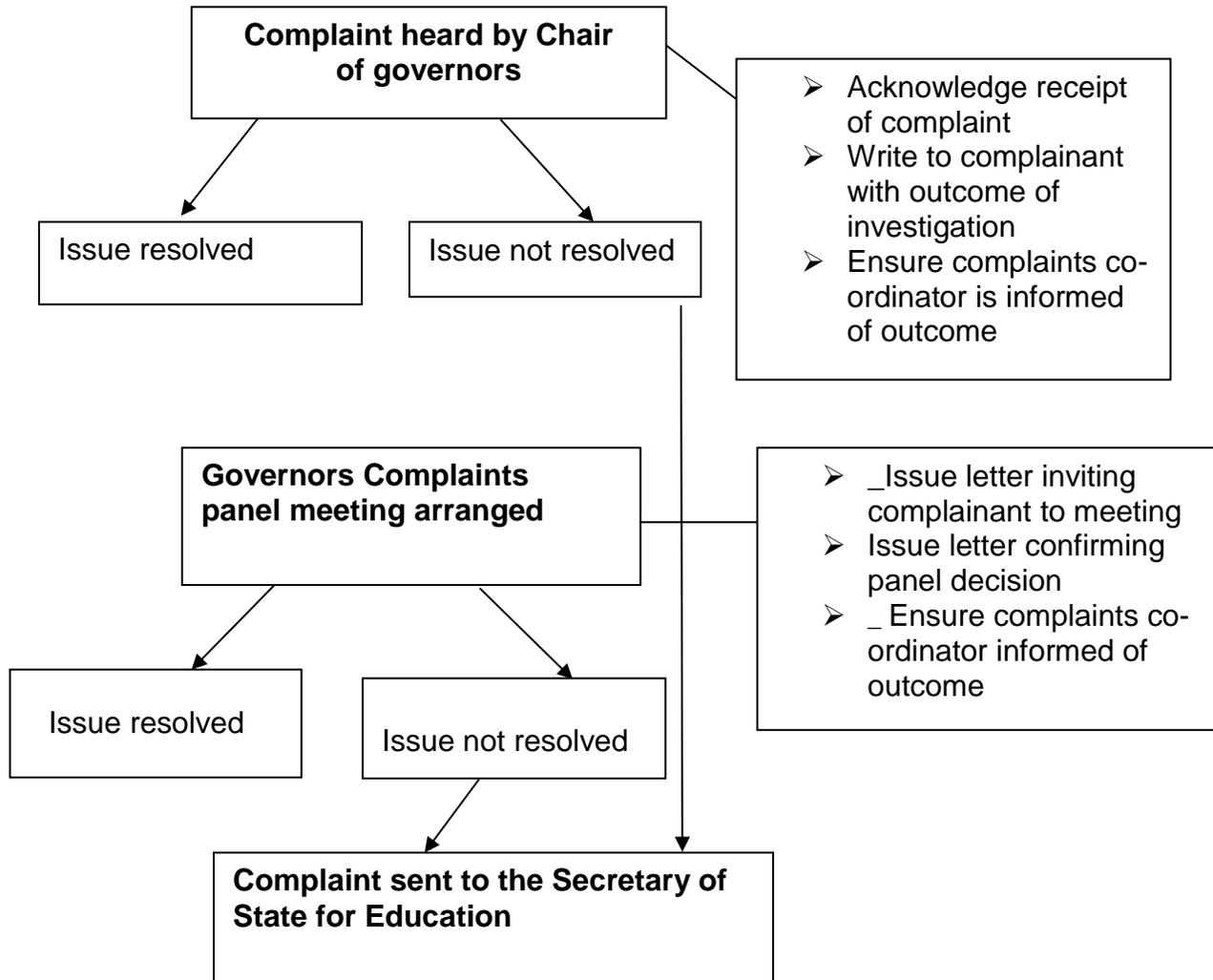
Appendix B Flowchart for complaints



"Reach for the stars"

Sincerity, Teamwork, Achievement, Respect

Appendix C Flowchart of complaints about a Headteacher





Appendix D How to Listen to Complaints

When you realise that you are listening to a complaint, try to remember these points:

- | | |
|--|---|
| Don't pass the buck | Try not to keep transferring an aggrieved person from one place to another. Make sure you know the contact person for anything you cannot deal with yourself. |
| Don't be flippant | First impressions count. You and the school may be judged on your immediate reaction. |
| Treat all complaints seriously | However small or trivial it may seem to you, the complaint will be an important problem for anyone who takes the trouble to complain. |
| Treat every complaint individually | Even if you have already received several similar complaints the same day, it is probably the person's first chance to have their say. |
| Be courteous and Patient | Be sympathetic and helpful, but do not blame other colleagues. |
| Say who you are | If you are unknown to the other person, introduce yourself. |
| Ask for their name and use it | Anonymous complaints are acceptable only where there are special circumstances. |
| Take time to find out exactly what the problem is | It is easy for someone to forget to tell you an important detail, particularly if they are upset or annoyed. |
| Don't take the complaint personally | To an angry or upset person, YOU are the school, and the only one they can put their feelings to right now. |
| Stay cool and calm | Do not argue with the person - be polite and try to find out exactly what the person thinks is going wrong, or has gone wrong. |

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Check you are being understood

Make sure that the person understands what you are saying. Don't use jargon - it can cause confusion and annoyance to someone 'not in the know'.

Don't rush

Take your time. Let people have their say and let off steam if they need to. Listen carefully and sympathetically to their problems before replying and attempting to find a solution or offer a next step.



Appendix E

Concerns and Complaints about Wimborne Junior School

Guidance Notes for Parents

If you have a concern or complaint

We would like you to tell us about it. We welcome suggestions for improving our work in school. Be assured that no matter what you want to tell us, our support and respect for you and your child in school will not be affected in any way. Please tell us of your concern as soon as possible. It is difficult for us to investigate properly an incident or problem that happened some time ago.

What to do first

Most concerns and complaints can be sorted out quickly by speaking with your child's classteacher. In our procedure this is Stage 1 – an informal complaint.

We will endeavor to resolve your complaint or concern within 10 working days.

All staff will make every effort to resolve your problem informally. They will make sure that they understand what you feel went wrong, and they will explain their own actions to you. They will ask what you would like the school to do to put things right. Of course, this does not mean that in every case they will come round to your point of view but it will help both you and the school to understand both sides of the question. It may also help to prevent a similar problem arising again.

What to do next

If you are dissatisfied with the teacher's initial response (or with the Headteacher's initial reaction if s/he has already been involved) you can make a complaint to the Headteacher. This is Stage 2 – a formal complaint. This should be made in writing in the form of a letter or using the complaint form available from the school office. They will also be able to help you complete it if you need them to.

If your complaint is about an action of the Headteacher personally, then you should refer it to the Chair of Governors now. You can contact him/her via the school office.

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You may also find it helpful at this stage to have a copy of the full statement of the General Complaints Procedures as this explains in detail what procedures are followed. This is available by request from the school office.

The Headteacher will ask to meet you to discuss the problem. Again you may take a friend or someone else with you if you wish. The Headteacher will conduct a full investigation of the complaint and may interview any members of staff or pupils involved. You will receive a written response to your complaint, within 10 working days. If extra time is needed to investigate the complaint you will be notified.

If you are still unhappy

The problem will normally be solved by this stage. However, if you are still not satisfied you may wish to contact the Chair of the Governing Body to ask for a referral of your complaint to a Governors' Complaints Panel. It will then be heard by a group of three governors who have no previous knowledge of the problem and so will be given a fresh assessment. The meeting will take place within 20 working days. You will be invited to attend and speak to the panel at a meeting that the Headteacher will also attend. The Panel will issue a letter confirming their decision within 15 working days of the meeting. The Complaints Procedure statement explains how these meetings operate.

Further Action

Complaints about school problems are almost always settled within schools but in exceptional cases it may be possible to refer the problem to an outside body such as the Secretary of State for Education, again there is more on this in the General Complaints Procedure.

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What actions, if any have you taken to try and resolve your complaint (who did you speak to and what was the response)?	
What actions do you feel might resolve the problem?	
Are you attaching any paperwork?	
Signature	
Date	
For Office Use only	
Date acknowledgement sent Complaint referred to:	By Whom Date: