

**COMPLAINTS POLICY
FOR
St. Thomas More School
in the Pope Francis
Catholic Multi Academy
Company**

October 2023

DIOCESAN EDUCATION SERVICE

Making Christ Known Today

1 General Principles

Catholic schools aim to be places where love of one's neighbour is evident at all times. Christ said to His disciples at the Last Supper "This is my commandment, that you love one another, as I have loved you." It is in wishing to uphold this principle that Catholic schools, and those who work there, commit themselves to care for their school community and uphold the Catholic doctrine and the ethos of the school. Nevertheless, as in any organisation, there can be times when a complaint may arise and the aim of this Complaints Policy is to set out how those complaints will be dealt with and how the school will work with all parties involved towards achieving a satisfactory resolution.

The main purposes of this Complaints Policy is to:

- resolve problems as swiftly as possible, ideally through an early informal stage.
- give complainants a means to raise complaints and to have them addressed.
- explain who a complaint should be directed to at the different stages and how they will be dealt with at each stage, including expected timescales.
- encourage all parties to raise and/or respond to complaints as quickly as possible so that they may be dealt with swiftly and whilst the matter is still fresh in people's minds.
- stress that at all stages of this policy any discussions, consideration and hearings will be held with the intention to resolve the complaint rather than apportion blame.

It should be noted that this Complaints Policy does not replace the arrangements for dealing with certain types of complaint that fall outside of its remit and are covered by other policies, for example, admissions to schools, statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs, school re-organisation proposals, any matter that may require a Child Protection Investigation, exclusions, whistleblowing, staff grievances and disciplinary procedures and complaints about services provided by third parties using the school premises or facilities. Schools may seek the assistance or advice from the Diocese or other agencies as appropriate. Any adviser supporting the school through this process may also support the Governors Complaints panel in their deliberations.

This policy is for use by all Catholic academy schools and some school's governance terminology differs within Archdiocesan Multi Academy Companies. This policy uses the term Governor throughout, but in some schools Governors are known as Representatives. The term Local Governing Body is used throughout but in some schools this is known as an Academy Committee. The term Governor should be taken as being either a Governor or Representative as applicable and the term Local Governing Body should be taken as being either the Local Governing Body or the Academy Committee for the school as applicable.

Schools recognise that complainants can be submitted by anyone, not just by parents of pupils in the school. Complaints will be dealt with consistently regardless of who the complainant is.

2 The Role of the Individual Governor

It is important that everyone understands that no individual Governor may deal with a complaint. Anyone considering raising a complaint with the school should refer to the Complaints Management Procedure (Appendix B) to check who the complaint should be directed to.

Governors should not get into discussion with a complainant if they are approached but should advise them only of the procedure to follow. If the situation is such that the Governor has to listen in order to help to direct the complainant, then this would prejudice their impartiality if the complaint is raised and they would be unable to take part in the process any

further. Should this situation arise, the Governor concerned must inform the Chair of Governors accordingly.

3 Stage 1 – Informal Resolution

In the majority of cases the concern should be handled, if at all possible, without the need to undertake any formal procedures and this should be the objective of all parties involved. The complaint should be initially discussed with the relevant member of staff, for example the class teacher or form tutor. There is no need at this stage for the complaint to be put in writing, however, the staff member should complete the Initial Record Form (Appendix C) outlining the nature of the complaint and the agreed actions to be taken including any timescales to complete them.

At this stage the complaint should be raised with the relevant staff members as soon as possible in order to ensure that it is still fresh in everyone's mind and can be dealt with and resolved as quickly as possible. Complaints should be raised within three months of the complainant becoming aware of the complaint/incident and be resolved within ten school days, but it should be noted that the sooner the school is notified of a complaint then the swifter it can begin to be investigated and therefore complainants are encouraged to submit their complaint as soon as possible after becoming aware of the complaint/incident. The school will, however, consider exceptions to complaints being raised outside of the three month timescale and will not refuse to deal with a complaint simply because it has been lodged outside of this preferred timeframe.

Should the person raising the concern be unable to resolve the matter at this stage then it may be felt appropriate to move on to Stage 2 of the process. However, it is expected that the majority of complaints would be resolved by the end of stage 1 without the need to escalate the complaint further.

4 Stage 2 – Formal Resolution

If the complaint cannot be resolved at Stage 1, then the complainant may, if they wish, proceed to Stage 2 by completing and submitting a Stage 2 Complaint Form (Appendix D) to the relevant person as detailed in the Complaints Management Procedure (Appendix B). The Stage 2 Complaint Form should be submitted within 10 school days of the conclusion of Stage 1.

Should the complainant have any difficulties or barriers to completing the Stage 2 Complaint Form, they should contact the relevant person outlined in the Complaints Management Procedure (Appendix B) by telephone or, if they do not have the means to contact them by telephone, contact the school office and explain that they wish to submit a Stage 2 Complaint. They will then be assisted to submit the Stage 2 Complaint verbally and the relevant person will record the nature of the complaint using the Stage 2 Complaint Form.

On receipt or completion by them of the Stage 2 Complaint Form, the relevant person will:

- acknowledge receipt of the Stage 2 Complaint Form within 5 school days.
- ensure the complaint is investigated in line with the agreed protocols of the Multi Academy Company and decide how best to resolve it. This may involve meeting with and interviewing the complainant and any other persons.
- within 5 school days of completing the investigation, write to the complainant outlining how the investigation was conducted and the outcome of the complaint. This letter will also include details of what the complainant can do next if the complaint has still not been resolved to their satisfaction. Information advising the complainant that they

can escalate the complaint to Stage 3 must also advise them that if they wish to do so then it must be within 10 school days of the notification of the outcome of Stage 2.

5 Stage 3 – Governors Complaints Panel

If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of the Stage 2 process, they may, if they wish, request that the complaint be considered by a Governors Complaints Panel. To request this, the complainant will need to complete and return the Stage 3 Complaint Form (Appendix E) within 10 school days of the notification of the outcome of Stage 2.

This form should be sent to the Chair of Governors via the school address unless the complaint is regarding an individual governor or the entire governing body in which case the form should be sent to the Clerk to the Local Governing Body via the school address.

Should the complainant have any difficulties or barriers to completing the Stage 3 Complaint Form, they should contact the school office and explain that they wish to submit a Stage 3 Complaint. The school will then contact the Chair or Vice-Chair of Governors as appropriate to broker contact between them and the complainant. The complainant will then be assisted to submit the Stage 3 Complaint verbally and the Chair of Governors (or Vice-Chair of Governors as appropriate) will record the nature of the complaint using the Stage 3 Complaint Form.

The Governors Complaints Panel is the last school-based stage in the complaints process and is not convened to merely rubber-stamp any previous decisions.

The Panel will consist of two Governors and one other person, typically appointed by the Multi Academy Company in line with approved protocols, who is independent of the management and running of the school. The independent member of the Panel typically will act as its Chair unless otherwise agreed by the Panel. No Governor may sit on the panel if they have had any prior involvement in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it. Neither the Head Teacher or the Chair of Governors should be a member of this Panel. Where it is not possible for the Governors to convene a Panel due to there being insufficient Governors who have no prior involvement in the complaint, then another Catholic school may be approached via the Multi Academy Company's Catholic Senior Executive Leader (CSEL)/Accounting Officer (AO) to request that Governors from that school make up the Panel.

The Stage 3 Complaint Form will be acknowledged within 5 school days and the Governors Complaints Panel will normally be convened within 20 school days of the receipt of the form. The complainant will be invited to attend the panel hearing and may be accompanied if they wish.

Both parties should normally be present whilst the complaint is being described and responded to. Complainants will be invited to attend the panel hearing and can be accompanied if they wish. However, DfE guidance recommends that neither the complainant nor the school bring legal representation as the panel hearing is not a form of legal proceeding.

However, there may be situations where the Chair of Governors considers that the relationship between the complainant and the school has broken down to such an extent that any further meeting that they jointly attend would not be beneficial. If this situation arises then the Chair of Governors may decide that the Stage 3 hearing should be held in two parts with each party, and their witnesses, meeting with the Governors Complaints Panel on their own. Should this decision be taken then the Chair of Governors will advise both parties, the Clerk to the Complaints Panel and the Chair of the Complaints Panel accordingly.

The panel will consider the following:

- any appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint.
- whether to dismiss the complaint in whole or in part.
- whether to uphold the complaint in whole or in part.
- whether changes to the school procedures or systems in the future may be necessary to ensure that situations of a similar nature do not recur.

The panel will take into account whether the complaint has been handled properly and reasonably in accordance with this policy and whether the outcome at Stage 2 was reasonable and appropriate.

As part of the Governors Complaints Panel hearing the following will be undertaken:

- a Clerk to the panel will be appointed. This would usually be the Clerk to the Governors or another clerk assigned by the Multi Academy Company.
- the Clerk will ensure that all parties have received a copy of this Complaints Policy.
- the Clerk will set a date, time and venue for the hearing within 20 school days of the receipt of the Stage 3 Complaint Form. The venue will be accessible for all parties.
- at least 10 school days prior to the hearing all parties will submit to the Clerk to the Complaints Panel any written evidence or other documentation to be presented at the hearing, together with the names of any witnesses either party wishes to call.
- all written evidence or other documentation submitted will be sent to all parties and the panel members to arrive at least 5 school days prior to the hearing.
- the Clerk to the Complaints Panel will record the proceedings and notify, in writing, all parties of the panel's decision within 5 school days of the hearing.
- the issues raised in the complaint are addressed.
- the panel will be open minded and act independently.
- no member of the panel will have a vested interest in the outcome of the proceedings or any involvement in any earlier stage of the procedure.
- only the issues raised in the complaint will be discussed and considered. Any new issues raised will need to be raised as a separate complaint and given due consideration by progressing through the Complaints Policy.
- if any party fails to attend the Governors Complaints Panel hearing, then the hearing will continue in their absence and considered on any written evidence that the absent party has submitted at least 10 school days prior to the hearing.

The following points should also be noted:

- all parties shall be put at ease and the hearing will be conducted as informally as possible with each party treating the other with respect and dignity.
- the Chair of the Complaints Panel will explain the panel's remit to all parties and ensure that each party has the opportunity to put their case without undue interruption and to ask questions.
- witnesses are only required to attend for the part of the hearing in which they give their own evidence.
- after an introduction by the Chair of the panel, the complainant is invited to explain their complaint and be followed by their witnesses.
- the Headteacher may question both the complainant and the witnesses after each has spoken but only to clarify what they are saying.
- the Headteacher is then invited to explain the school's actions and be followed by the school's witnesses.
- the complainant may question both the headteacher and the school's witnesses after each has spoken but only to clarify what they are saying.

- the panel may ask questions at any time.
- the complainant is invited to sum up their complaint.
- the Head Teacher is invited to sum up the school's actions and response to the complaint.
- the Chair explains that both parties will receive the written decision of the panel from the Clerk within 5 school days.
- both parties leave together whilst the panel considers the issues. The Clerk, and any other advisers, may be present with the panel during their discussion but the conclusions and recommendations are the responsibility of the panel members only.

The Chair of the Complaints Panel, through its clerk, will ensure that all parties are notified in writing of the panel's decision within 5 school days. The reasons for the decision will be clearly defined, in plain English and will include information regarding any further rights of appeal. If the panel makes findings and recommendations as a result of the panel hearing then these findings and recommendations will be shared with the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about. A copy of any findings and recommendations will also be made available for inspection by the Board of directors and the Headteacher of the school. A copy of the minutes of the panel hearing will be issued to the complainant.

If either party requires clarification concerning any points in the letter, this will be provided by the Chair of the Complaints Panel.

6 Register of Complaints

The school will maintain a register of all formal complaints received and note whether each one was resolved at the end of Stage 2 or whether the proceed to a Stage 3 panel hearing. This register will record any action taken by the school or Multi Academy Company as a result of the complaint, regardless of whether the complaint is upheld or not.

7 Confidentiality

Correspondence, statements and records relating to an individual complaint 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.

8 Anonymous Complaints

Anonymous complaints will not be investigated under this policy unless there are exceptional circumstances. These would include serious concerns such as Child Protection issues, where the School would either involve external agencies or else conduct its own internal review to test whether there is any corroborative evidence which might trigger a formal investigation.

9 Serial and Persistent Complaints

There will be occasions when, despite all stages of the procedure having been followed, the complainant remains dissatisfied. Where a complainant tries to reopen the same issue, the Chair of Governors will inform them in writing that the procedure has been exhausted and that the matter is now closed.

10 Complaint Campaigns

If the school becomes the focus of a campaign and receives a large volume of complaints that are all based on the same subject and/or are from complainants unconnected with the school, then they will be dealt with separately. The school will establish the most appropriate

way to deal with these which could include sending a template response to all complainants or publishing a single response on the school's website.

11 Third Parties

If a complaint relates to a third party who is using the school premises or facilities then that complaint must be submitted directly to the third party concerned following their own complaints procedures. For example, this could be where the school site is being used for community facilities or services.

12 Deviation from following this published procedure

There may be occasions when it is necessary or reasonable to deviate from the published complaints procedure. This could be not doing something that the procedure says that the school will, should or may do. In the event that this is deemed to be necessary the school will document any deviation and reasons for it.

13 Time Scales

Clear timescales are set out in this procedure defining the time frame that a complaint will be dealt with at each stage. However, in the event of a complaint being complex and further investigations are necessary it may become clear that the published timescale cannot be met. In this event then the school will set new timescales. The complainant will be sent the details of the next timescales and be provided with an explanation of the delay.

Where a complainant submits a complaint outside of the time frame outlined in these procedures the school will take exceptional circumstances into account when deciding whether to accept or progress a complaint and will not refuse to deal with a complaint simply because it has been lodged outside of this preferred timescale.

14 Taking a complaint further

If a complainant has completed the stages in this Complaints Policy and is still dissatisfied, they have the right to refer their complaint to the Secretary of State. The Secretary of State has a duty to consider all complaints raised but will only intervene where the Governors have acted unlawfully or unreasonably and where it is expedient or practical to do so.

The Regional Director considers complaints relating to academy schools in England on behalf of the Secretary of State. The Regional Director will consider complaints about academies that fall into any of the following three areas:

1. where there is undue delay or the academy did not comply with its own complaints procedure when considering a complaint.
2. where the academy is in breach of its funding agreement with the Secretary of State.
3. where an academy has failed to comply with any other legal obligation.

The Regional Director will not overturn a school's decision about a complaint. However, if it finds that the school did not deal with a complaint properly it will request the complaint is looked at again and procedures meet the requirements set out in the Regulations.

If the school's complaints procedure does not meet the Regulations, it will ask the school to put this right. It may seek to enforce the decision under the terms of the funding agreement on behalf of the Secretary of State if appropriate.

The Regional Director can be contacted through The Regions Group as follows:

Re.se@education.gov.uk

15 Expectations under this procedure

When raising a complaint under this policy a complainant can expect the school and Multi Academy Company to:

- take the complaint seriously.
- treat them with courtesy and respect.
- deal with the complaint with discretion and confidentiality (although if the matter relates to the safety and wellbeing of a child then the school may have to share the details with other agencies).
- offer them the opportunity to be accompanied by a friend, adviser or colleague.
- meet the timescales set unless there are good reasons to extend these, in which case they will be informed of this.
- seek and offer resolution at all stages.
- inform them of the action taken to resolve the complaint and of any measures put in place by the school and/or the Multi Academy Company to ensure that a similar complaint does not arise in the future.

In turn, the school expects that complainants will:

- treat school and Multi Academy Company staff with respect.
- be mindful of the need to keep information relating to children confidential in the interest of all students.
- enter into the process in the spirit of seeking resolution.
- appreciate that if the Multi Academy Company considers that disciplinary action may be necessary against a member of staff then this will be dealt with under the school's disciplinary procedure and in confidence.

If there are any queries regarding the implementation of this policy or the complaints process, please contact in the first instance the Governance Manager of the Pope Francis Catholic Multi Academy Company, Addison Road, Banbury, Oxon, OX16 9DG.

Should there be questions or feedback in relation to the model Complaints Policy, please contact the Birmingham Diocesan Education Service:

Email: governance@bdes.org.uk

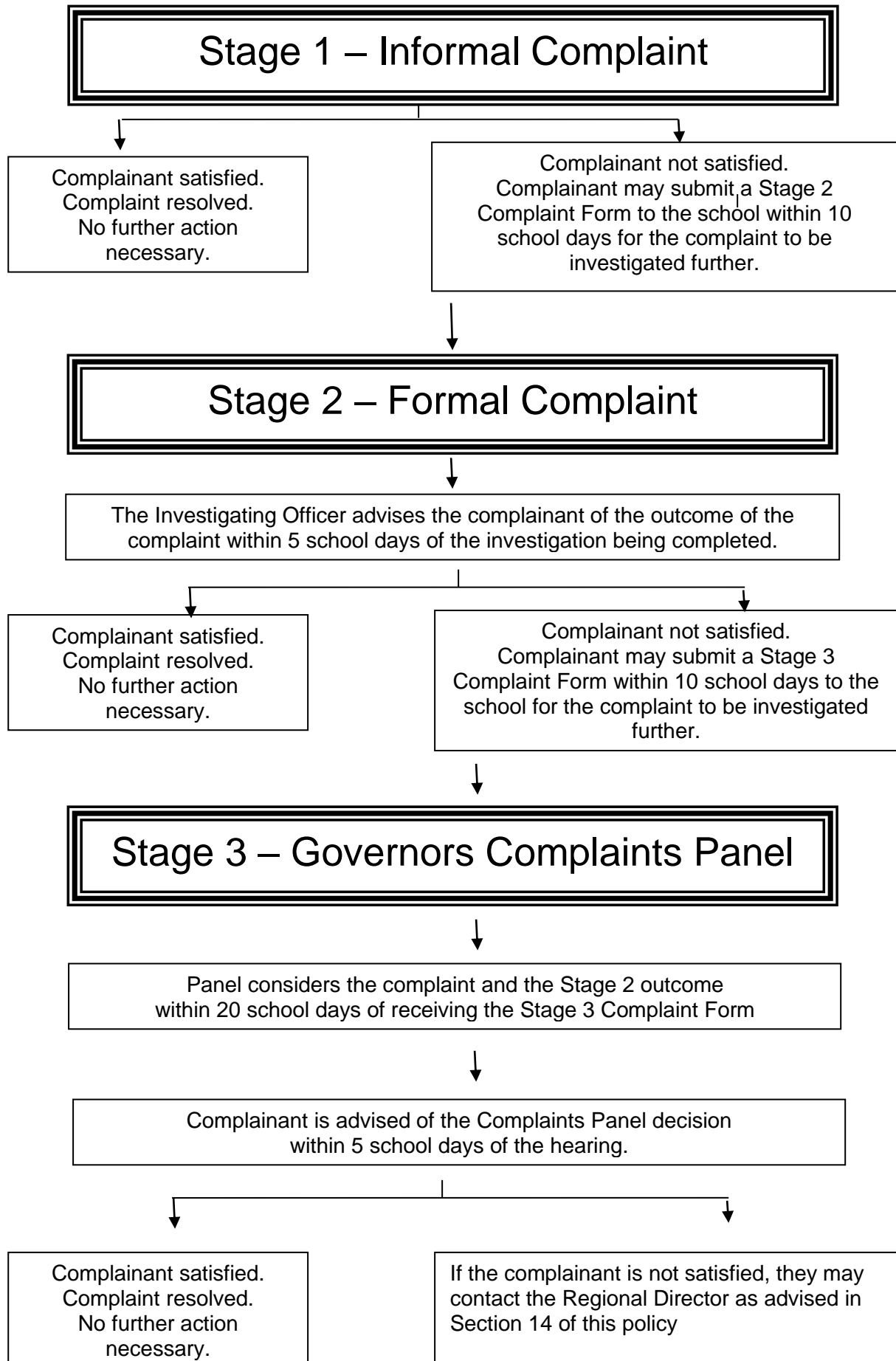
Telephone: 01675 464755

Address – Birmingham Diocesan Education Service
Don Bosco House
Coventry Road
Coleshill
Birmingham
B46 3EA

Website: www.bdes.org.uk

Appendix A

FLOWCHART TO SHOW GENERAL COMPLAINTS PROCESS



Appendix B

Complaints Management Procedure

Who the Complaint relates to:	Stage 1: Informal Resolution	Stage 2: Formal Resolution	Stage 3: Governors Complaints Panel
Pupil, parents or staff (other than the Head Teacher)	The relevant member of staff, eg the class teacher or form tutor	The Head Teacher or his/her nominee	Panel appointed by the Multi Academy Company in line with its agreed protocols
The Head Teacher	The Head Teacher	The Chair of Governors or another nominated non-staff Governor	Panel appointed by the Multi Academy Company in line with its agreed protocols
A Governor or Governors (other than the Chair of Governors)	The Chair of Governors	A Member of the Board of Directors for the Multi Academy Company appointed by the Board in line with its agreed protocols	Panel appointed by the Multi Academy Company in line with its agreed protocols

If a complaint relates to any individual governor, both the Chair and Vice Chair of Governors or the entire governing body then it should be submitted to the Clerk to the Governing Body who will then determine the most appropriate course of action in liaison with the Multi Academy Company's (MAC's) Catholic Senior Executive Leaders / Accounting Officer and the MAC's approval protocols. This will depend on the nature of the complaint. It may involve escalating the complaint to the Board of Directors, who may in exceptional circumstances determine it is necessary to deviate from this published procedure as set out in section 12 above.

Note: No Governor will be involved at Stage 3 if they have been involved in the complaint in any way prior to the Stage 3 panel hearing.

Appendix C

Initial Record Form for a School Complaint

School:		
Name of Complainant:		
Name of Child:		
Date of Contact with School:		
Nature of Concern		
Actions Taken		
Name:	Signature:	Date:

Appendix D

Stage 2 Complaint Form

Your Name:	
Child's Name:	
Your relationship to the child:	
Address:	
Postcode:	
Telephone Number(s):	
Email Address:	
Details of your complaint:	
<p>What action, if any, have you already take to resolve your complaint? Please include details of who you spoke to and what was the response/outcome (including dates where possible):</p>	

What actions do you feel may resolve the complaint at this stage?

Are you attaching any paperwork to this Form? If yes, please give details.

Signature:

Date:

For Office Use Only

Date acknowledgement sent:

By who:

Complaint referred to:

Date complaint referred:

Are you attaching any paperwork to this Form? If yes, please give details.

Signature:

Date:

For Office Use Only

Date acknowledgement sent:

By who:

Complaint referred to:

Date complaint referred:

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