



Ashford School

# COMPLAINTS POLICY

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# COMPLAINTS

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## Policy Statement

Ashford School prides itself on the quality of teaching and pastoral care provided to its students. It recognises that parents may, from time to time, have concerns about the progress, achievement, behaviour or welfare of their son or daughter. Parents are encouraged to make those concerns known to staff so that they can be addressed in partnership with the school.

The School will take all concerns and complaints seriously and will make every effort to deal with complaints informally, at an early stage, in the spirit of continued respect and partnership.

This is a three-stage process. In most cases, any concern or complaint, regardless of whose attention to whom it is initially brought, should be discussed informally at stage 1, before being submitted to a formal process. Complaints concerning the Head may proceed directly to formal process at stage 2 and will be managed by the chair of the Local Governing Body (LGB).

## **Definitions**

This policy deals with concerns or complaints from parents of current pupils and parents of former pupils provided the complaint was initially raised when the pupil was still registered at the School.

For the purposes of this procedure, **concerns** are defined as having a worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought. A **complaint** can be any matter about which a parent/carer is unhappy and seeks action by the School.

## **Matters falling outside of this policy**

- This procedure does not apply to safeguarding concerns regarding children or allegations of abuse made against teachers, and other staff, including supply teachers and volunteers, which are managed under the School's Safeguarding Policy (<https://www.ashfordschool.co.uk/about-us/school-policies/>) and is distinct from formal staff disciplinary, grievance or capability proceedings.
- Appeals regarding a permanent exclusion, required removal and suspension are managed in accordance with Stage 3 of this procedure. Appeals against admissions are managed under the admissions policy (<https://www.ashfordschool.co.uk/about-us/school-policies/>)
- Where the complaint concerns a third party or service used by the school please complain directly
- For 'Subject Access Request's please see the Data Protection Policy (<https://www.ashfordschool.co.uk/about-us/school-policies/>)
- For whistleblowing complaints, please refer to the UL whistleblowing policy ([https://hub.unitedlearning.org.uk/sites/policies/HR\\_Policies/United Learning Whistleblowing \(Raising Concerns\) Policy.docx](https://hub.unitedlearning.org.uk/sites/policies/HR_Policies/United_Learning_Whistleblowing_(Raising_Concerns)_Policy.docx))

## Policy Aims and Guidance

We aim to:

### 1: Encourage the **informal and early** resolution of complaints at stage 1, so far as it is possible.

We aim to deal with all matters of concern raised by parents or carers promptly, fairly, openly, and without Prejudice. Concerns and complaints are more likely to be resolved informally when all parties commit to working together towards a resolution in the spirit of co-operation. Informal resolutions will usually involve a meeting between the complainant and the school. Any concern or complaint should be listened to by an appropriate member of the staff team -usually the class teacher, year group or pastoral leader or a member of the leadership team (as appropriate to the nature of the complaint). Where further information is needed, we will aim to respond in a timely and sensitive manner. It also helps to understand what a satisfactory outcome would look like to the complainant. We aim to resolve matters at stage 1 within 15 working days.

When managing a concern or complaint informally at stage 1, parents may, if they are not satisfied with the response, to escalate their complaint to the formal stage of this procedure.

Mediation meetings may be helpful in resolving issues of concern or in mending relationships and moving forward in partnership with parents/carers however these sit outside of the formal complaints process.

### 2: Ensure that complaints process is easy to understand and access and be readily available.

United Learning has endeavoured to make its procedures as accessible as possible. Parents should not be put off from making a complaint because they are not sure how to do so. This complaints procedure is available on the School website and can be made available in hard copy on request from reception.

### 3: Keep the **formal procedure** to two distinct stages.

**Stage 2** is a formal investigation and response. Stage 2 complaints should be made to the Headteacher, (or the Chair of Governors if the complaint concerns the Headteacher) who will investigate and provide a formal response.

**Stage 3** is a review of the complaint by a Complaints Panel. If the complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome at stage 2, trustees have delegated the LGB with authority to review the complaint on its behalf at **Stage 3**. The stage 3 panel **must** include independent representation\*.

Resolution should be sought at all stages.

\*It is a requirement of the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 that, where there is a panel hearing of a complaint, one panel member is independent of the management and running of the school. United Learning determine this to mean external to the individual school and therefore a governor from another LGB within UL may be asked to join a review at stage 3.

### 4: Ensure that as few governors as possible are involved in the management of a complaint.

The School aims to ensure that members of the LGB do not become directly involved in the detail of a complaint, so they are not prevented from sitting on a Complaints Panel if called upon to review complaints under Stage 3.

Where a complaint has been made about a member of the local governing board or the entire governing board, the LGB clerk should seek advice from the Head of Local Governance at United

Learning about how the procedure should apply and proceed given the nature of the complaint. This may involve sourcing an independent investigator and/or panel to hear the complaint.

#### 5: Records should be kept at both stages of the formal process

It is important that those responsible for reviewing a complaint at each formal stage keep records of what the complaint was, whether it was resolved following a formal procedure or proceeded to a panel hearing, any action taken by the School as a result of the complaint (regardless of whether they are upheld), any evidence that was considered, and the outcome. The School will ensure that, in accordance with the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, a copy of the findings and recommendations made at the panel review stage are provided in writing to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about, as well being made available for inspection on the school premises by United Learning and the head teacher.

Any personal information recorded in regard to the complaint will be kept in accordance with the principles of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and Data Protection Act 2018 (see the [ICO website](#)) and in accordance with the School's Privacy Notice.

The School processes data in accordance with its privacy notice (<https://www.ashfordschool.co.uk/about-us/school-policies/>) When dealing with complaints the School (including any panel member appointed under the Stage [2/3] process) may process a range of information, which is likely to include the following:

- The name of the complainant;
- The date and time at which the complaint was made;
- The details of the complaint;
- The desired outcome of the complainant;
- How the complaint is investigated (including written records of interviews held);
- Findings and recommendations of investigations;
- Any action taken;
- The complainant's response (satisfaction or further pursuit of complaint).

This may include 'special category personal data' (including sensitive data such as information relating to physical or mental health) where this is necessary owing to the nature of the complaint.

#### 6: Review the Complaint Procedure regularly

United Learning is confident that the complaints procedure it recommends to schools is thorough, clear and robust. As a matter of good practice UL will therefore review this procedure every two or three years to ensure it remains fit for purpose. The procedure may need to be amended before the review date if, for example, there are any changes to the law, or if it becomes apparent, as a result of a complaint, that the procedure is not working effectively. Any proposed amendment of the procedure will therefore be carried out centrally and submitted to Local governing boards for approval.

In line with our Provision of Information policy, this document is available to all interested parties on our website and on request from the main school office and should be read in conjunction with the following documents; Academic Performance Policy, Anti-Bullying Policy, Child Protection Policy, Curriculum Policy, Special Educational Needs Policy, Admissions Policy, Behaviour and Discipline Policy, Exclusions, Privacy Notice, Expulsion and Removal Policy. (<https://www.ashfordschool.co.uk/about-us/school-policies/>).

Parents of pupils who board may contact ISI in relation to any concern about the pupil's welfare.

**ISI:** CAP House, 9-12 Long Lane, London EC1A 9HA

Phone: 0207 7768849 or e-mail [concerns@isi.net](mailto:concerns@isi.net) or via the ISI website: [www.isi.net](http://www.isi.net)]

**OFSTED:** Piccadilly Gate, Store St, Manchester, M1 2WD

Phone: 0300 123 4666 or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)]

### **School and UL Contact Details**

Headteacher: Mr Michael Hall

Chair of the LGB: Mrs Deborah Geering

Clerk to the LGB: Mrs Sarah Greig

Head of Local Governance: Lesley Dolben [Lesley.dolben@unitedlearning.org](mailto:Lesley.dolben@unitedlearning.org)

Company Secretary: Alison Hussain [Alison.hussain@unitedlearning.org.uk](mailto:Alison.hussain@unitedlearning.org.uk)

## **Procedures**

### **Stage 1: Informal Resolution**

The LGB of Ashford School encourages those that have concerns to raise them with the appropriate person at the school (e.g. your child's class teacher) and to work constructively with that person towards resolving them. The majority of concerns can be dealt with without resorting to the formal stages of the formal complaint procedure. We recognise that, almost invariably, the sooner concerns are raised the easier it is for an appropriate resolution to be found.

Please see the following contacts in school for support:

- Concerns of a pastoral nature should normally be made to your child's Form Teacher or Tutor, Head of Prep School Mr Nick Tiley-Nunn or Senior Deputy Head ( and Deputy Head Pastoral, Senior School) Mrs Timms.
- Concerns of an academic nature would be through the Head of Department or Deputy Head (Academic) Mrs Jo Russell (Senior School) and Mrs Rosie Clifford (Prep School).
- If the nature of your concern is broader and may cover both academic and pastoral issues then concerns should be directed to either Deputy Head Pastoral or Deputy Head Academic.

The member of staff will acknowledge the complaint normally within 3 working days of receipt. They will try to identify areas of agreement and clarify any misunderstandings that might have occurred. They may make a written record of your concern or complaint, the date on which it was received, and then try to resolve the matter themselves or refer you to the appropriate person.

The extent to which complainants have attempted informal ways of addressing an issue may be taken into consideration when assessing the reasonableness of a complaint during the formal stages of the procedure.

If a complaint cannot be resolved informally within 15 working days, or if the relevant member of staff and the parent fail to reach a satisfactory resolution, then the parents should proceed with their complaint in accordance with **Stage 2** of this Complaints Procedure.

### **Complaints about a member of staff or the headteacher**

Where a complaint is about a member of staff, the headteacher will investigate or will delegate responsibility to investigate to a senior member of staff (Deputy or Assistant Head for example).

Where the subject of the complaint is the headteacher, the complainant should notify the clerk to the governors (see contact details at the end of the document). The formal, **Stage 2** process will then commence, but with the chair of governors as the individual responsible for the investigation, rather than the headteacher.

For reasons of confidentiality, complainants will not be informed of the outcome of any disciplinary action against any member of staff, arising from a complaint.

### **The timescale for making a complaint**

All complaints will be handled within clear and reasonable timescales. Please note that, for the purposes of this procedure, working days refers to weekdays (Monday to Friday) during term time, excluding bank holidays. This means that during school holidays it may take longer to resolve a complaint although the School will do what is reasonably practicable to avoid undue delay.

Timescales for investigating and/or responding to a complaint may also need to be extended in the event of a force majeure, a pandemic or as the result of enforced government restrictions. The School will inform parents if there is to be a delay to the anticipated timescales, for instance because of disruption to the School, staff absence or site closure.

Parents are expected to proceed with their complaint in a timely and reasonable manner. To enable effective review, the School therefore expects complaints to be raised within 3 months of an issue arising. Complaints outside this timeline will only be considered in exceptional circumstances. These may include (but are not limited to) subsequent information about the complaint coming to light and a valid explanation of why it was not possible to give notification of the complaint sooner. In such cases the headteacher/chair of the governing board/clerk to the governing board (as appropriate) will review the circumstances, may seek advice, and determine whether the complaint is to be considered under this policy. It is also expected that if parents wish to escalate their complaint to the next stage of the procedure, they will generally do so within 15 working days of the conclusion of the current stage. Depending upon the circumstances, the School may, acting reasonably, treat a complaint as closed if a parent has not proceeded within this timeframe.

### **Maintaining records**

Notes may be made to support the informal management of complaints and the school may also keep an informal record of any meeting held or any agreed action to be taken. These will be processed by the school in line with the relevant privacy notice (insert). Records taken and used throughout the complaints process, including correspondence, notes of meetings, telephone calls etc., will be kept securely and in accordance with the principles of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and Data Protection Act 2018.

The record of complaints is kept for at least 7 years and may be kept for longer if there is a safeguarding aspect to the complaint.

The number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year is available on request from Melissa Clark, Executive Assistant to the Headmaster.

### Maintaining confidentiality

Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints are kept strictly confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 108 or 109 of the 2008 Act requests access to them.

Concerns and complaints will therefore be dealt with confidentially at all stages and at the conclusion of the procedure. Confidentiality should be maintained all times by everyone involved. Complaints are not to be discussed externally by parents, including via social media.

Actions taken in relation to school staff that arise from complaints will remain confidential to the school and the member of staff concerned.

### Safeguarding

Wherever a concern indicates that a child's wellbeing or safety is at risk, the school is duty bound to act on this which may include reporting this immediately to the local authority. Any action taken will be in accordance with the school's safeguarding policy (<https://www.ashfordschool.co.uk/about-us/school-policies/>)

## Formal Resolution

### Stage 2 - Investigation and Response

1. A request for a formal investigation of a complaint by the Headteacher (or chair of the LGB if the complaint concerns the Head) should be made in writing, or by completing the formal complaints form that is included as Appendix 1 of this procedure. The Headteacher will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action to take.
2. The headteacher (or chair of the governing board as appropriate) will acknowledge the request in writing, **no later than 10 working days** (excluding those that fall in the school holidays) of receiving it. The written acknowledgment will, as far as possible, explain how the complaint will be investigated, the timescale for completing any necessary investigation and delivering a response.
3. A log of all correspondence in relation to the complaint will be kept in accordance with the Data Protection Principles.
4. It may be necessary for the Headteacher (or Chair as appropriate) to carry out further investigation. In Investigating, the headteacher (or Chair) will consider all evidence they consider relevant. This **may** include, but is not limited to:
  - obtaining statements from the complainant and those involved with the complaint
  - meeting/speaking with the complainant and those involved in the complaint
  - reviewing relevant correspondence and other documents relating to the complaint
5. After considering all matters the headteacher/chair considers relevant, the headteacher/chair of LGB can decide to:
  - uphold the complaint and direct that certain action be taken to resolve it
  - uphold the complaint in part (in other words find an aspect or aspects of the complaint to be valid, but not the whole complaint) direct for certain action to be taken, or
  - dismiss the complaint entirely



6. The headteacher will inform the complainant of their decision in writing, the grounds on which it was made, and any actions taken as a result of the complaint. Wherever reasonably practicable, this will be **within 20 working days** (excluding those that fall in the school holidays) of having issued written acknowledgement of receipt of the complaint (see 2 above) or within 10 working days after any meeting or speaking with the parents to discuss the **Stage 2** complaint. The written notification shall also advise the complainant of their right to escalate the complaint to **stage 3** of the formal complaints procedure if they are not satisfied with the outcome at **stage 2**, including the contact details of the clerk to the governing board (see page 6).
7. Parents may request a review at **Stage 3** of the procedure within 15 working days of receipt of the stage 2 outcome letter.
8. If the parent does not invoke a **stage 3** review within this timeframe the school may, acting reasonably, deem the complaint closed.

### Stage 3: Review by the Local Governing Body (LGB) Complaints Panel

The complainant is entitled to request a review of the decision and the actions taken at **Stage 2**. The review is carried out by a complaints panel, at a meeting convened by the LGB clerk and provides an opportunity for the complaint to be heard afresh.

Requests for a review of the decision taken at stage 3 should be made in writing to the LGB clerk (see contact details Page 6) **no later than 15 working days after receipt of written notification of the decision at Stage 2**. The request should include a summary of the complaint, why the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of stage 2 and the outcome they are seeking.

The LGB clerk will convene a meeting of the complaints panel and will organise the time and date of the Stage 3 review meeting, inviting all the attendees, collating all the relevant documentation and distributing this to all parties, no less than 5 working days in advance of the meeting. Minutes of the review meeting will be taken by the clerk and provided with the written notification of the decision taken at stage 3 (see 9 below).

The following steps are taken at **stage 3**

1. The clerk will acknowledge the written request for the complaint to be reviewed no later than ten working days (not including the school holidays) after receiving it.
2. The LGB clerk will convene a panel of **three** people who were not directly involved in the detail of the complaint, one of which must include **one** independent of the running and management of the school to review the complaint. A governor from a local governing body of a different school within United Learning, provided they have no conflict of interest, may sit as an independent panel member.
3. If the panel deems it necessary, it may require that further particulars of the complaint or any related matter be supplied in advance of the meeting or further investigation be carried out. Copies of such particulars shall be supplied to all parties usually not later than 5 working days prior to the meeting or 3 working days if requested after receipt of the full pack of documents.
4. The review meeting will take place within 20 working days (excluding those which fall in the school holidays) of receipt of the written acknowledgement from the clerk (see 1 above).

5. The review meeting is not a court case and will be as informal as circumstances allow and conducted in such a manner as at the discretion of the Panel. The meeting may be convened remotely or face to face within school. The Panel members are not legally trained and therefore cannot making findings as to points of law.
6. The panel **may** speak with the following, either as part of the review meeting, or as part of any further investigation:
  - the complainant
  - the headteacher (or chair of the LGB as appropriate) who investigated the complaint and made the decision at stage 2
  - relevant persons involved the complaint
  - persons whom, in the view of the panel, can provide relevant advice and information relating to the subject of the complaint and the review process at stage 3
7. Where the complainant, headteacher and/or relevant person involved in the complaint have been invited to attend the review meeting, they are entitled to be accompanied by a family member/friend/representative as appropriate. However, legal representatives are not permitted to attend the review meeting.
8. The parents may attend and be accompanied at the panel meeting by one other person if they wish. This may be a relative, teacher or friend. Legal representation will not be appropriate. The parents should notify the LGB Clerk at least 3 working days in advance of the hearing of the name and occupation of an accompanying person (if relevant).
9. The Panel meeting will go ahead unless the complainant indicates that they are satisfied and do not wish to proceed further. A Panel meeting may proceed notwithstanding the complainant may subsequently decide not to attend, in which case, the Panel will consider the complaint in absentia and issue findings on the substance of the complaint, thereby bringing the matter to a conclusion.
10. Where the complaint is about a governor or the LGB itself, the complainant may request that the review meeting is held by an independent panel. This is at the discretion of the LGB/ United Learning who will notify the clerk of their decision. Where an entirely independent panel is required, timescales may be affected while the school source appropriate individuals for the review.
11. If possible, the panel will resolve the parents' complaint without the need for further investigation. Where further investigation is required, the panel will decide how it should be carried out, and may undertake any such further investigation, and ask for any such further information as it considers necessary, in order to be able to reach a finding in respect of the complaint. After due consideration of all facts they consider relevant, the panel will make findings as to whether the Stage 2 decision was a reasonable one and accordingly can decide to:
  - uphold the complaint and recommend that certain action be taken to resolve it;
  - uphold the complaint in part (in other words find an aspect or aspects of the complaint to be valid, but not the whole complaint) and recommend certain action to be taken, or
  - dismiss the complaint entirely.
12. The Panel may make recommendations to the school as a result of its deliberations but has no power to compel the school to take action.
13. The complainant, the headteacher, (or chair of the LGB as appropriate) who investigated the complaint and made the decision at stage 1, and, where relevant, the person complained about will be informed in writing of the panel's findings and any recommendations, normally no later than 10

working days (excluding those which fall in the school holidays) after the review meeting has taken place.

14. A confidential written record of all complaints that are made in accordance with the formal stage of this procedure will be kept by the school. The written record will include whether the complaint has been resolved following a formal procedure and whether it proceeded to a panel review meeting. It will also refer to any action taken by the school, regardless of whether it has been upheld.
15. The School will ensure that, in accordance with the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, a copy of the findings and recommendations made at the panel review stage are provided in writing to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about, as well being made available for inspection on the school premises by United Learning and the head teacher.
16. Any complaint of a decision taken by the Headteacher to exclude or require the removal of the pupil will be governed by this Stage [2/3] of the School's Complaints Procedure. In such circumstances, the Panel may only uphold the complaint and ask the Headteacher to reconsider their decision if they consider, having regard to the process followed by the Headteacher, that the Headteacher's decision to exclude / require the removal of the pupil was not a reasonable decision for the Headteacher to have taken.

**Stage 3 is the final stage at which the school will consider the complaint.**

**Alternative Dispute Resolution**

Where the school is unable to resolve a complaint with you and the internal procedure has been exhausted, the school will let you know that if they cannot settle the complaint you may, if you wish, contact the Ombudsman Service as a means of alternative dispute resolution ("ADR"). In providing you with this information, the school will also indicate whether they are prepared to consider entering into ADR in that instance, as the school is not obliged to do so.

**Complaints about governors**

Where a complaint concerns a governor, the complainant should contact the LGB clerk. The LGB clerk will then determine the most appropriate course of action, seeking advice from the Head of Local Governance, as appropriate. This will depend upon the nature of the complaint.

**Complaints about the CEO, UL officers or members of United Learning central team**

Where a complaint concerns a member of United Learning staff, this should be referred to the Company Secretary, Alison Hussain, who will determine the most appropriate person to review the complaint.

**Written complaints relating to the requirements of the EYFS Statutory Framework**

Written complaints about the fulfilment of the EYFS requirements will be investigated in accordance with **Stage Two** of the complaints procedure and you will be notified of the outcome of the investigation within 28 calendar days of the complaint being received. Stage Three above will be available to you if you remain dissatisfied with the outcome at Stage Two.

The School will provide Ofsted and ISI (as appropriate), on request, with a written record of all complaints made during any specified period, their outcome and the action that was taken as a result of each complaint, which will include details of whether the complaint was upheld.

You may also complain directly to ISI or OFSTED if you believe that the School is not meeting the EYFS requirements:

ISI may be contacted on 020 7600 0100 or by email: [concerns@isi.net](mailto:concerns@isi.net).

Ofsted may be contacted on 0300 123 4666 or by email: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)

**Responding to complaint campaigns**

Occasionally schools can become the focus of a campaign and receive large volumes of complaints;

- All based on the same subject
- From complainants unconnected with the school

In these rare instances, the school will seek advice from United Learning central office and may respond using a template response to all complainants. Alternatively, the school may choose to publish a single response on its website. In these circumstances we would expect to respond to a complaint campaign within 30 working days.

**Vexatious Complaints**

There will be occasions when, despite all stages of the procedures having been followed, and where central office has agreed to investigate, the complainant remains dissatisfied. If the complainant tries to reopen the same issue or a closely related issue that has already been dealt with under this complaints procedure, the relevant United Learning Director and the Chair of the LGB will inform parents in writing that the procedure has been exhausted and that the matter is now closed.

If the complainant writes again on the same issue, then the correspondence may be recognised as vexatious and there will be no obligation on the part of the school or Central Office to respond to any further correspondence on the same issues or a closely related issue.

Whilst we understand that some matters may be potentially upsetting, if the conduct of the complainant is inappropriate, threatening or abusive (either in person or in written form), the school reserves the right to regard the matter as a vexatious complaint and there will be no obligation on the part of the school to respond.

This document is annually reviewed by the Local Governing Body or as events or legislation change requires. The next scheduled date for review is March 2022.

V22/02/i

Date Document Updated	Document Updated by
October 2021	NTN
February 2022	MC

Date Document Reviewed	Reviewed by	Date of next review
December 2021	LGB	March 2022
March 2022	LGB	March 2023

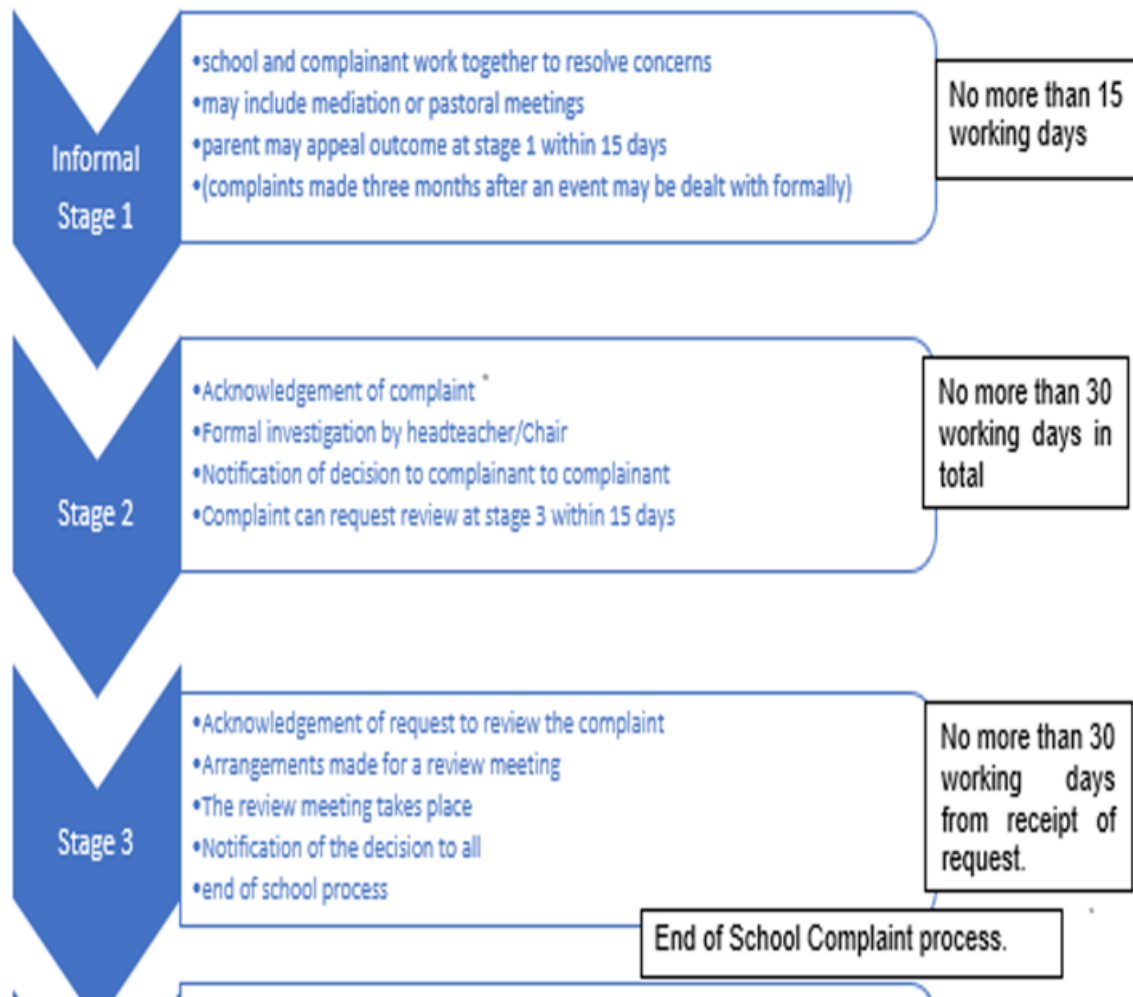
## Appendix 1: Complaint Form

Please complete in BLOCK CAPITALS and return to the Headmaster who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

<b>Your name</b>	
<b>Student's name</b>	
<b>Your relationship to the student</b>	
<b>Address</b>	
<b>Postcode</b>	
<b>Contact telephone number (1)</b>	
<b>Contact telephone number (2)</b>	
<b>Please give details of your complaint below</b>	
<b>What action, if any, have you already taken to try and resolve your complaint? (To whom did you speak to and what was the response?)</b>	
<b>What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?</b>	
<b>Are you attaching any paperwork?</b>	<b>YES / NO</b>
<b>If so, please give details.</b>	
<b>Signature:</b>	<b>Date:</b>

<b>For Official use only</b>			
Date acknowledgement sent		Complaint resolved at which stage	
Acknowledgement sent by		Complaint recorded in school records	
Complaint referred to			
Complaint referred on (date)			

## Appendix 2: Complaint Process- Timelines (Independent Schools)



**Stage 3 is the end of the complaints process for Independent schools.**