The Orchard Primary School

Nurture Learn Grow

Complaints Policy

Spring 2026

Date	Review Date	Completed by	GB Committee
Spring 2026	Summer2028	HT / GB	Curriculum and Community

Introduction:

The majority of issues raised by parents, the community or pupils, are concerns rather than complaints. Orchard Primary School is committed to taking concerns seriously, at the earliest stage, in the hope of keeping the number of formal complaints to a minimum and without needing formal procedures. However, depending on the nature of the complaint, you may wish or be asked to follow the school's formal complaints procedure. For the school to be able to investigate a complaint, it needs to be made within one year of the incident occurring. If a complaint is older than a year it will not be investigated.

The prime aim of Orchard Primary School's policy is to resolve the complaint as fairly and speedily as possible. Formal complaints will be dealt with in a sensitive, impartial and confidential manner. Malicious complaints may incur appropriate action by the school.

When responding to complaints we aim to:

- Be impartial and non-adversarial
- Facilitate a full and fair investigation
- Address all the points at issue and provide an effective and prompt response
- Respect complainants desire for confidentiality
- Treat complainants with respect and curtesy
- Make sure any decisions we make are lawful, rational, reasonable, fair and proportionate
- Consider how the complaint can feed into school improvement evaluation processes

We try to resolve concerns or complaints by informal means wherever possible. Where this is not possible, formal procedures will be followed. Throughout the process, we will be sensitive to the needs of all parties involved, an make any reasonable adjustments needed to accommodate individuals.

Legislation and guidance:

This document meets the requirements of section 29 of the Education Act 2002 which states that schools must have and make available a procedure to deal with all complaints relating to their school and to any community facilities or services that the school provides.

It is also base on guidance for schools on complaints procedures from the Department for Education, including the model procedure, and model procedure for dealing with serial and unreasonable complaints.

Definitions and scope

Definitions – the DfE guidance explains the difference between a concern and a complaint:

- A **concern** is defined as "an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought"
- A **complaint** is defined as "an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action"

Scope - The school intends to resolve complaints informally where possible, at the earliest possible stage.
There may be occasions when complainants would like to raise their concerns formally. This policy outlines the procedure relating to handling such complaints.

This policy does **not** cover complaints procedures relating to:

- Admissions
- Statutory assessments of special educational needs (SEN)
- Safeguarding matters
- Exclusion
- Whistle-blowing
- Staff grievances
- Staff discipline
- School re-organisation proposals
- Curriculum
- Collective worship

Please see our separate policies for procedures relating to these types of complaint.
Complaints about services provided by other providers who use school premises or facilities should be directed to the provider concerned.

Principles for investigation

When investigating a complaint, we will try to clarify:

- What has happened
- Who was involved
- What the complainant feels would put things right.

Time scales

The complainant must raise the complaint within 3 months of the incident. If the complaint is about a series of related incidents, they must raise the complaint within 3 months of the last incident.

We will consider exceptions to this time frame in circumstances where there were valid reasons for not making a complaint at that time and the complaint can still be investigated in a fair manner for all involved.
When complaints are made out of term time, we will consider them to have been received on the first school day after the holiday period.

If at any point we cannot meet the time scales we have set out in this policy, we will:

- Set new time limits with the complainant
- Send the complainant details of the new deadline and explain the delay

The following details outline the stages that can be used to resolve complaints.

Informal Stage

Our school will take informal complaints seriously and make every effort to resolve the matter quickly. The majority of complaints/concerns can be resolved informally by discussion with the member of staff concerned or a senior leader. It may be the case that the provision or clarification of information will resolve the issue. Parents / carers should make an appointment to discuss their concerns with the member of staff who knows about the issue or incident. The complainant should raise the complaint as soon as possible.

If the complaint is not resolved informally, it should be escalated to a formal complaint.

Formal Stage

There are three school-based formal stages.

Stage 1 Formal

The formal stage involves the complainant putting the complaint to the headteacher in a letter or email. The complainant should provide details such as relevant dates, times and the names of witnesses of events, alongside copies of any relevant documents. If complainants need assistance raising a formal complaint, they can contact the school office: office@tops.hounslow.sch.uk or 020 8570 6247.

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.

The headteacher (or other person appointed by the headteacher for this purpose) will then conduct their own investigation. The Headteacher will offer a meeting with the parent/carer or other complainant at a mutually convenient time to discuss and clarify what the issues are and what the parent/carer wants to achieve.

If the issue is complex the Headteacher may need to speak to other staff and pupils to investigate the concerns. This should happen within 10 school days. If this timescale cannot be met the Headteacher will inform the parent/carer that this will take longer, explaining the reasons for this and giving a timescale for when the investigation will be completed.

Together all parties will agree on an acceptable outcome that is to the satisfaction of all parties involved.

Stage 2 (Optional at the Chair of Governor's discretion)

After meeting with the Headteacher, if the complaint is still not resolved to the parent/carer's satisfaction, the complaint can be referred to the Chair of Governors. This should be in writing to the Chair at the school address. The Headteacher can also refer the complaint to the Chair of Governors. If the Headteacher is the subject of the complaint, the complaint should go straight to the Chair of Governors and miss out Stage 1.

The Chair of Governors will offer to meet with the parent/carer or other complainant, at a mutually convenient time. The Chair of Governors has 15 school days to investigate the complaint. If it cannot be resolved within this time, the Chair will inform the complainant explaining the reasons for the delay and when it is expected that the investigation will be completed. Reasons for the delay may be that the complaint is complex and needs more time or someone involved is absent through sickness or holidays.

Stage 3 Complaints Committee

Complaints will be escalated to the panel hearing stage if the complainant is not satisfied with the response to the complaint at the first and second optional formal stages. As far as possible it is recommended that Complaints Committees are a last resort.

The Complaints Committee is made up of three members of the Governing Body. The Complaints Committee will meet at a time convenient to all parties. The complainant, the Headteacher, the Chair of Governors and any member of staff the complaint is about will be invited to the meeting. The parent / carer can bring a friend or supporter if they wish. The Complaints Committee will consider any written material and also give the person making the complaint and the Headteacher,

Chair of Governors and staff an opportunity to state their case and to question others present. The Committee will ensure that all present are treated fairly. The meeting will be recorded by the Clerk to Governors and everyone present will be given a copy of the minutes.

The aim of the Appeal panel hearing is to impartially resolve the complaint and to achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant. All parties will be notified of the Panel's decision in writing within three school working days after the date of the hearing. The letter will also contain what you need to do if you wish to take the matter further.

Complainants have the right to request an independent panel if they believe there is likely to be bias in the proceedings. The decision to approve this request is made by the governing board, who will not unreasonably withhold consent.

N.B. In cases where the matter concerns the conduct of the head teacher, the head teacher and Chair of Governors will be informed of the complaint. The Chair will arrange for the matter to be investigated. In cases where the matter concerns the conduct of a member of the Governing Body the member will be informed of the complaint.

At the meeting

The meeting will be held in private. Electronic recordings of meetings or conversations are not normally permitted unless a complainant's own disability of special needs require it. Prior knowledge and consent of all parties attending will be sought before meetings or conversations take place and consent will be recorded in any minutes taken.

At the review panel meeting, the complainant and representatives from the school, as appropriate, will be present. Each will have an opportunity to set out written or oral submissions prior to the meeting.

The complainant must be allowed to attend the panel hearing and can be accompanied by a suitable companion if they wish. If a school employee is called as a witness, they may wish to be supported by their union but we do not encourage either part to bring legal representation.

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

At the meeting, each individual will have the opportunity to give statements and present their evidence, and witnesses will be called as appropriate to present their evidence.

The panel will then put together its findings and recommendations from the case. The panel will also provide copies of the minutes of the hearing and the findings and recommendations to the complainant and, where relevant, the subject of the complaint, and make a copy of the findings and recommendations available for inspection by the headteacher.

The Outcome

The committee can:

- Uphold the complaint, in whole or in part
- Dismiss the complaint, in whole or in part

If the complaint is upheld, the committee will:

- Decide the appropriate action to resolve the complaint
- Where appropriate, recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future

The school will inform those involved of the decision in writing within 10 school days.

The Governors appeal hearing is the last school-based stage of the complaints process. The Governing Board will review any underlying issues raised by complaints with the Headteacher, where appropriate, to determine whether there are any improvements the school can make to procedures or practice to help prevent similar events in the future.

Referring complaints on completion of the school's procedure

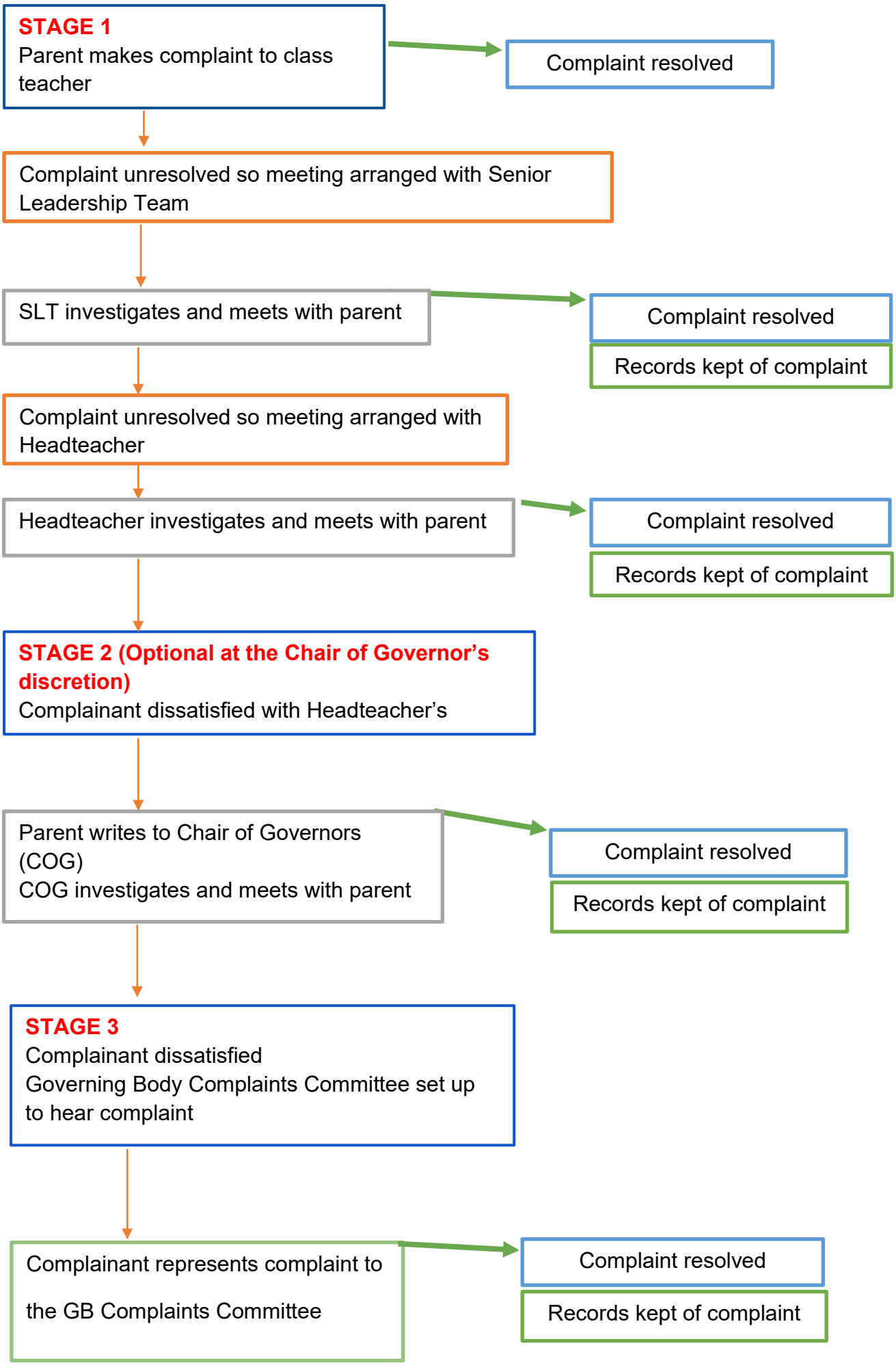
If the complainant is unsatisfied with the outcome of the school's complaints procedure, they can refer their complaint to the DfE.

The DfE will not re-investigate the matter of the complaint. It will look at whether the school's complaints policy and any other relevant statutory policies that the school holds were adhered to. The DfE also looks at whether the school's statutory policies adhere to education legislation. The DfE may direct the school to reinvestigate the complaint where it is clear the school has:

- Failed to act in line with its duties under education law
- Acted (or is proposing to act) unreasonably when exercising its functions

If the complaints procedure is found to not meet regulations, the school will be asked to correct its procedure accordingly.

The Orchard Primary School Complaints flow chart



Complaints against the Headteacher, a Governor or the Governing Board

Stage 1: Informal
Complaints made against the Headteacher or any individual member of the governing board (including the chair or vice-chair) should be directed to the Clerk of the Governing Board in the first instance. A suitably skilled and impartial governor will then carry out the steps at the informal stage set out above. If the complaint is not resolved informally, it will be escalated to a formal complaint.
Complaints about the whole governing board will be resolved at stage 2 below.

Stage 2: Formal
Complaints that involve or are about the Headteacher should be addressed to the Chair of Governors, via the school office, marked as private and confidential.
Complaints about the Chair of Governors, any individual governor or the whole governing body should be addressed to the clerk to the governing board via the school office, marked as private and confidential.

If the complaint is about the Headteacher or an individual governor, a suitably skilled and impartial governor will then carry out the steps at stage 2.
If the complaint is:

- Jointly about the chair and vice-chair or
- The entire governing board or
- The majority of the governing board

An independent investigator will carry out the steps in stage 2 set out above. They will be appointed by the governing board, and will write a formal response at the end of their investigation.

The written conclusion of this investigation will be sent to the complainant within 10 school days.

If the complainant wishes to proceed to the next stage of the procedure, they should inform the clerk to the governing board in writing within 10 school days. Requests received outside of this timeframe will be considered in exceptional circumstances.

The clerk will acknowledge receipt of the request within 5 school days.

Persistent complaints

Where a complainant tries to re-open the issue with the school after the complaints procedure has been fully exhausted and the school has done everything it reasonably can in response to the complaint, the Chair of Governors (or other appropriate person in the case of a complaint about the Chair) will inform the complainant that the matter is closed.

If the complainant subsequently contacts the school again about the same issue, the school can choose not to respond. The normal circumstance in which school will not respond is if:

1. *the school has taken every reasonable step to address the complainant's needs, and*
2. *the complainant has been given a clear statement of the school's position and their options (if any), and*
3. the complainant is contacting the school repeatedly but making substantially the same points each time.

However, this list is not intended to be exhaustive.
The school will be most likely to choose not to respond if:

4. we have reason to believe the individual is contacting the school with the intention of causing disruption or inconvenience; and/or
5. complaints are without merit, obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific, repetitious;
6. the individual's letters/emails/telephone calls are often or always abusive or aggressive; and/or
7. the individual makes insulting personal comments about, or threats towards, school staff.

Steps we will take

We will take every reasonable step to address the complainant's concerns, and give them a clear statement of our position and their options. We will maintain our role as an objective arbiter throughout the process, including when we meet with individuals. We will follow our complaints procedure as normal (as outlined above) wherever possible.
If the complainant continues to contact the school in a disruptive way, we may put communications strategies in place. We may:

- Give the complainant a single point of contact via an email address
- Limit the number of times the complainant can make contact, such as a fixed number per term
- Ask the complainant to engage a third party to act on their behalf, such as Citizens Advice
- Put any other strategy in place as necessary

Unreasonably persistent complaints

We are committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, and to providing a high quality service to all including those who complain. We will not normally limit the contact complainants have with the school. However, we do not expect our staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour and will take action to protect staff from that behaviour, including that which is abusive, offensive or threatening.

We consider unreasonable complainants as 'those who, because of the frequency or nature of their contacts with the school, hinder our consideration of their or other people's complaints'.

A complaint may be regarded as unreasonable when the person making the complaint:

- refuses to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcomes sought by raising the complaint, despite offers of assistance
- refuses to co-operate with the complaints investigation process
- refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of the complaints procedure
- insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the complaints procedure or with good practice
- introduces trivial or irrelevant information which they expect to be taken into account and commented on
- raises large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions, and insists they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales
- makes unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues, and seeks to have them replaced
- changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds
- repeatedly makes the same complaint (despite previous investigations or responses concluding that the complaint is groundless or has been addressed)

- refuses to accept the findings of the investigation into that complaint where the school's complaint procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed including referral to the Department for Education
- seeks an unrealistic outcome
- makes excessive demands on school time by frequent, lengthy and complicated contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with
- uses threats to intimidate
- uses abusive, offensive or discriminatory language or violence
- knowingly provides falsified information
- publishes unacceptable information on social media or other public forums.

Whenever possible the Headteacher or Chair of Governors will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before considering a complaint to be unreasonable.

In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, we will immediately inform the police and communicate our actions in writing. This may include barring an individual from our school site.

As a school, we fulfil a public function but schools are private places and the public has no automatic right of entry. We will therefore act to ensure they remain a safe place for pupils, staff, parents and other members of our school community.

If a parent's behaviour gives cause for concern, they will be asked to leave the school premises. I serious cases, the Headteacher or the local authority can notify them that they are no longer allowed on the school site – usually on a temporary basis and subject to any representation the parent may wish to make. We will always give the parent the opportunity to express their views on the decision to bar in writing.

The decision to bar will be reviewed, taking into account any representations made by the parent and either confirmed or lifted. If the decision is confirmed the parent will be notified in writing, explaining how long the bar will be in place.

Anyone wishing to complain about being barred can do so, via letter or email, to the Headteacher or Chair of Governors.

Stopping responding

We may stop responding to the complainant when all these factors are met:

- We believe we have taken all reasonable steps to help address their concerns
- We have provided a clear statement of our position and their options
- The complainant contacts us repeatedly, and we believe their intention is to cause disruption or inconvenience

Once the school has decided that it is appropriate to stop responding, the complainant will be informed in writing, either by letter or email.

The school will ensure when making this decision that complainants making any new complaint are heard, and that the school acts reasonably.

Duplicate complaints

If we have resolved a complaint under this procedure and receive a duplicate complaint on the same subject from a partner, family member or other individual, we will assess whether there are aspects that we hadn't previously considered, or any new information we need to take into account.

If we are satisfied that there are no new aspects, we will:

- Tell the new complainant that we have already investigated and responded to this issue, and that the local process is complete
- Direct them to the DfE if they are dissatisfied with our original handling of the complaint

If there are new aspects, we will follow this procedure again.

Complaint campaigns

Where the school receives a large volume of complaints about the same topic or subject, especially if these come from complainants unconnected with the school, the school may respond to these complaints by:

- Publishing a single response on the school website
- Sending a template response to all of the complainants

If complainants are not satisfied with the school's response, or wish to pursue the complaint further, the normal procedures will apply.

Record Keeping

The school will record the progress of complaints including actions taken at all stages, how the complaint was resolved and the final outcome. The records will include copies of letters and emails as well as notes relating to meetings and phone calls.

The information will be treated as confidential and held centrally. It will be viewed only by those involved in investigating the complaint or on the review panel.

Records of complaints will be kept securely, only for as long as necessary and in line with data protection law, our privacy notices and professional guidance.

- For major complaints, records will be kept for 6 years after the complaint is resolved.
- for complaints related to negligence, records will be kept for 15years after the complaint is resolved.
- For complaints related to child protection of safeguarding issues, records will be kept for 40 years after the complaint is resolved

Records Management Society's information management toolkit for schools (2019).

The details of the complaint, including the names of individuals involved, will not be shared with the whole governing board in case a review panel needs to be organised at a later point.
Where the governing board is aware of the substance of the complaint before the review panel stage, the school will (where reasonably practicable) arrange for an independent panel to hear the complaint.

Monitoring

The Headteacher with the curriculum and community committee will monitor and review the effectiveness of the complaints procedure in making sure that complaints are handled properly.

This policy will be reviewed every 2 years It will be ratified by the full Governing board and the Headteacher.