



TRUE LEARNING

PARTNERSHIP

COMPLAINTS POLICY	
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INTRODUCTION

This complaints policy and procedure is not limited to parents or carers of children that are registered at the school. Any person, including members of the public, may make a complaint to True Learning (TLP) about any provision of facilities or services that we provide. Unless complaints are dealt with under separate statutory procedures (such as appeals relating to exclusions or admissions), we will follow this complaints procedure.

The aim of this policy is to ensure that the Trust meets its statutory obligations when responding to complaints and that this underpins our aim that any complaint is handled sympathetically, at the appropriate level and is resolved quickly and efficiently.

This procedure covers all complaints about True Learning, other than complaints that are dealt with under other statutory procedures. Complaints about third party providers offering community facilities or services through their school premises should be made directly to the third-party provider.

Employees of the Trust (and ex-employees who wish to raise an issue relating to their former employment) cannot use this procedure but, where necessary, should raise concerns via the appropriate staffing procedure.

LEGISLATION AND GUIDANCE

This document meets the requirements set out in part 7 of the schedule to the [Education \(Independent School Standards\) Regulations 2014](#), which states that we must have and make available a written procedure to deal with complaints from parents of pupils at our schools.

It is also based on guidance published by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) on [creating a complaints procedure that complies with the above regulations](#), and refers to [good](#)

[practice guidance on setting up complaints procedures](#) from the Department for Education (DfE).

This policy complies with our funding agreement and articles of association.

EQUALITY, CONSISTENCY OF TREATMENT AND FAIRNESS

The Governing and Trust Boards are committed to ensuring consistency of treatment and fairness. They will abide by all relevant equality legislation, including the duty to make reasonable adjustments where these are deemed either necessary or appropriate.

The procedures should be applied irrespective of the age, marital status (including civil partnership), sex, race, disability, religion or belief, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, pregnancy or maternity, socio-economic status or caring responsibility of the person concerned. This means that the policy may need to be adjusted to cater for the specific needs of an individual including the provision of information in alternative formats where necessary.

ANONYMOUS COMPLAINTS

We will not normally investigate anonymous complaints. However, the head teacher, Chair of Governors or Trust Board or the CEO, if appropriate, will determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation.

PERSISTENT COMPLAINANTS

We are committed to handling complaints fairly and providing high-quality service. However, we expect complainants to interact respectfully with staff and will not tolerate unacceptable behaviour such as abuse, aggression, or threats. Unreasonable demands, excessive communications, or disruptive behaviour that impact the school's operations will be considered unacceptable.

Unreasonable Demands:

- Excessive requests for information, frequent approaches, unreasonable response time expectations, or changes to the complaint can be deemed unreasonable.
- Unreasonable complaints may include repeated communication, false or malicious claims, or abusive language.
- We will inform the complainant if their behaviour is considered unreasonable and may limit communication to prevent disruption.

Unacceptable Behaviour:

- Any complaints made maliciously, aggressively, or with abusive, offensive, or discriminatory language will not be tolerated.
- Serious incidents may result in barring the individual from school premises and notifying the police if necessary.

Handling Vexatious or Persistent Complaints:

- If behaviour is deemed vexatious or unreasonably persistent, we may stop responding and inform the complainant that further correspondence on the issue will not be entertained.
- Records of unreasonable behaviour may be shared with the Department for Education (DfE) if requested.

Barring from School Premises:

- The head teacher may bar individuals from school premises if their behaviour is disruptive or concerning. The decision will be reviewed within 5 school days, with the opportunity for the complainant to express their views.
- The decision will then either be confirmed or overturned. If the decision is confirmed the parent should be notified in writing without delay, explaining how long the bar will be in place. This decision will be reviewed every half term.

Duplicate Complaints:

- If a complaint has already been resolved and a duplicate complaint is received, we will assess whether there are new aspects to consider. If not, we will inform the complainant that the issue has been resolved and advise them to contact the DfE if they are unsatisfied.

Complaint Campaigns:

- For large volumes of complaints on the same issue, the school may publish a single response or send template replies. Further complaints will follow normal procedures if needed.

This policy ensures that complaints are managed effectively, fairly, and without disruption to the Trust's operations.

TIMESCALES

You must raise the complaint within three months of the incident or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within three months of the last of these incidents. We will consider exceptions to this timeframe 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.

COMPLAINTS RECEIVED OUTSIDE OF TERM TIME

We will consider complaints made outside of term time to have been received on the first school day after the holiday period.

SCOPE OF THIS COMPLAINTS POLICY

This procedure covers all complaints about True Learning, other than complaints that are dealt with under other statutory procedures, including those listed below.

Exceptions	Who to contact
Admissions to schools	Concerns about admissions should be handled through a separate process – either through the appeals process or via the local authority.
Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation	Complaints about child protection matters are handled under our child protection and safeguarding policy and in accordance with relevant statutory guidance. If you have serious concerns, you may wish to contact the local authority designated officer (LADO) who has local responsibility for safeguarding or the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH).
Exclusion of children from school	Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at: www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions .
Whistleblowing	We have an internal whistleblowing procedure for all our employees, including temporary staff and contractors. The Secretary of State for Education is the prescribed person for matters relating to education for whistle-blowers in education who do not want to raise matters direct with their employer. Referrals can be made at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus . Volunteer staff who have concerns about our school should complain through the school's complaints procedure. You may also be able to complain direct to the LA or the Department for Education, depending on the substance of your complaint.
Staff grievances	Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the school's internal grievance procedures.
Staff conduct	Complaints about staff will be dealt with under the school's internal disciplinary procedures, if appropriate. Complainants will not be informed of any disciplinary action taken against a staff member as a result of a complaint. The complainant is not entitled to participate in the proceedings or receive any details about them. However, the complainant will be notified that the matter is being addressed.

If other bodies are investigating aspects of the complaint, for example the police, local authority (LA) safeguarding teams or Tribunals, this may impact on our ability to adhere to the timescales within this procedure or result in the procedure being suspended until those public bodies have completed their investigations. If this happens, we will inform you of a proposed new timescale.

If a complainant commences legal action against True Learning in relation to their complaint, we will consider whether to suspend the complaints procedure until those legal proceedings have concluded.

RESOLVING COMPLAINTS

At each stage in the procedure, True Learning wants to resolve the complaint. If appropriate, we will acknowledge that the complaint is upheld in whole or in part. In addition, we may offer one or more of the following:

- an explanation
- an admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better
- an apology
- an assurance that we will try to ensure the event complained of will not recur
- an explanation of the steps that have been or will be taken to help ensure that it will not happen again and an indication of the timescales within which any changes will be made
- an undertaking to review school policies in light of the complaint

WITHDRAWAL OF A COMPLAINT

If a complainant wants to withdraw their complaint, we will ask them to confirm this in writing.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE COMPLAINTS PROCESS

- A copy of the Complaints Form to be completed is in Appendix 1.
- Information regarding the roles and responsibilities of all parties included in this document can be found in Appendix 2.
- The Trust complaint delegation model is included in Appendix 3
- A flowchart showing the stages of the complaints process is included in Appendix 4

DEFINITIONS - THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A CONCERN AND A COMPLAINT

A concern may be defined as *'an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought'*.

A complaint may be defined as *'an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action'*.

It is in everyone's interest that concerns and complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. Many issues can be resolved informally, without the need to use the formal stages of the complaint's procedure. True Learning takes concerns seriously and will make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.

If you have difficulty discussing a concern with a particular member of staff, we will respect your views. In these cases, the head teacher, will refer you to another staff member. Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels unable to deal with a concern, the head teacher will refer you to another staff member. The member of staff may be more senior but does not have to be. The ability to consider the concern objectively and impartially is more important.

We understand however, that there are occasions when people would like to raise their concerns formally. In this case, True Learning will attempt to resolve the issue internally, through the stages outlined within this Complaints procedure.

HOW TO RAISE A CONCERN OR MAKE A COMPLAINT

A concern can be made in person, in writing or by telephone. They may also be made by a third party acting on behalf of another person, as long as they have appropriate consent to do so. A complaint needs to be made on the form in Appendix 1.

- Complaints against the school and school staff (except the head teacher) should be made in the first instance, to the head teacher via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.
- Complaints that involve or are about the head teacher should be addressed to the Chair of Governors), via the school office. Please mark them 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 Governors via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.
- Complaints about the Central Trust Team, should be addressed to the CEO, via the central trust office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential. In these situations the CEO will take the role of the headteacher and follow the processes documented in this policy.
- Complaints about the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), or a trustee of the Trust, should be addressed to Clerk to the Trust Board, via the central trust office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.
- Complaints about the Chair of Trustees or the whole Trust Board should be addressed to the Clerk to the Trust Board via the central trust office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

For ease of use, a template complaint form is included in Appendix 1 at the end of this procedure. If you require help in completing the form, please contact the relevant school/trust office. You can also ask a third-party organisation for example like the Citizens Advice to help you.

In accordance with equality law, we will consider making reasonable adjustments if required, to enable complainants to access and complete this complaints procedure. For instance, providing information in alternative formats, assisting complainants in raising a formal complaint or holding meetings in accessible locations.

STAGE 1- INFORMAL COMPLAINTS RESOLVED AT SCHOOL LEVEL

It is to be hoped that most concerns can be expressed and resolved on an informal basis. Stage 1 gives all parties the opportunity to explore the issues causing concern and to seek to resolve them without recourse to formal stages

Concerns should be raised with either the class teacher, year head / subject head or head teacher. Parents/Carers should not approach individual governors to raise concerns or

complaints. They have no power to act on an individual basis and it may also prevent them from considering complaints at Stage 3 of the procedure.

The head teacher is responsible for overseeing Stage One of the process, but this may be initially or fully delegated to an appropriate member of school staff. The member of staff dealing with the concern should ensure they have a clear understanding of the issue(s), what it is that the parent/carers considers should have been done, or where they feel the school has not met reasonable expectations, as well as the resolution being sought.

At the conclusion of their investigation, the appropriate person investigating the concern will provide a written response within 10 school days of the date of receipt of the concern. A written response will be provided even if the situation has been resolved verbally.

In normal circumstances this stage will last no longer than 10 school working days from the date the concern was first raised, either verbally or in writing, with the School. During this period every effort should be made to resolve the situation on an informal basis and all parties will be expected to fully engage with efforts to achieve this resolution.

If the issue remains unresolved, the next step is to make a formal complaint.

STAGE 2 – FORMAL COMPLAINTS

Complaints against the school or specific school staff

Formal complaints must be made to the head teacher (unless they are about the head teacher), via the school office. This may be done in writing, preferably using the Complaint Form in Appendix 1. You must raise the complaint within three months of the incident or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within three months of the last of these incidents.

The head teacher will record the date the complaint is received and will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 10 school days.

Within this response, the head teacher will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, ask what remains unresolved and what outcome the complainant would like to see. The head teacher can consider whether a face to face meeting is the most appropriate way of doing this. Where face to face meetings are held with a complainant, these will be attended by and minuted by another member of the school team. The head teacher may delegate the investigation to another member of the school's senior leadership team but not the decision to be taken.

During the investigation, the head teacher (or investigator) will:

- if necessary, interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish
- keep a written record of any meetings/interviews in relation to their investigation.

At the conclusion of their investigation, the head teacher will provide a formal written response within 10 school days of the date of receipt of the Stage 2 formal complaint. If the

head teacher is unable to meet this deadline, they will provide the complainant with an update and revised response date.

The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions the school or Trust will take to resolve the complaint.

The head teacher will advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 2.

Complaints against the head teacher or a member of the Governing Body

If the complaint is about the head teacher, or a member of the governing body (including the Chair or Vice-Chair), a suitably skilled governor will be appointed to complete all the actions at Stage 2. Complaints about the head teacher or member of the governing body must be made to the Clerk to Governors, via the school office.

Complaints against the Chair/Vice Chair of majority of Governing Body

If the complaint is:

- jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair or
- the entire governing body or
- the majority of the governing body

The Stage 2 process will be referred to the Clerk to Governors and the process will be escalated to and managed by a member of the Trust Board.

Where the matter is not resolved at this stage, the complainant may elevate it to Stage 3, as set out below.

STAGE 3 - PANEL HEARING

Complaints against the school (including the head teacher)

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome at Stage 2 and wishes to take the matter further, they can escalate the complaint to Stage 3 – a panel hearing consisting of at least three people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint with one panel member who is independent of the management and running of the school. This is the final stage of the complaints procedure.

A request to escalate to Stage 3 must be made to the Clerk to Governors, via the school office, within 10 school days of receipt of the Stage 2 response. Any such request must be set out using the Complaint Form, stating where the complainant remains dissatisfied and what remedies are being sought. This request will generate a meeting in front of a complaints panel.

On receipt of the request to have a complaint heard by a panel, the Clerk will confirm that we have received the correspondence and will make arrangements for a panel to be convened. Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.

As soon as possible the Clerk will inform the complainant of a date for the panel meeting. This date will take into account their availability to attend. The meeting will be held as quickly as practicable given the need to find a date that is reasonably convenient for the complainant, the school and panel members.

They will aim to convene a meeting within 15 school days of receipt of the Stage 3 request. If this is not possible, the Clerk will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed.

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

Complaints against the Chair/Vice Chair or majority of Governing Body

If the complaint is:

- jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair of Governors or
- the entire governing body or
- the majority of the governing body

The Stage 3 panel hearing will be heard by the trustees and an independent panel member.

The complainant will be notified by letter and this letter will inform them of the date, time and location of the meeting, and provide an explanation of what will happen before and during the hearing (see Appendix 5). Any written materials/evidence provided will be circulated to all parties at least 5 school days before the date of the meeting. The panel will not accept as evidence electronic recordings of meetings or conversations. The decision of the panel is final.

COMPLAINTS ESCALATED TO / ABOUT THE TRUST, CEO OR TRUSTEES

If a complaint is escalated to True Learning "the trust" or if a complainant wishes to complain directly about the trust, then the following process should be followed.

STAGE 1 – Resolution at Board Level

Complaints made against the CEO or any member of the Trust board should be directed to the Clerk of the Trust board in the first instance. If the complaint is about the CEO or one member of the Trust board (including the chair or vice-chair), a suitably skilled and impartial Trustee will carry out the steps at stage 1 (as detailed above)

STAGE 2 – Independent Investigation

If the complaint is:

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

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

matter is not resolved at this stage, the complainant may elevate it to Stage 3, as set out below.

STAGE 3 – Review by a panel

If the complaint is:

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

A committee of independent governors/trustees will hear the complaint. They will be sourced from local schools and/or the local authority and will carry out the steps at stage 3 (as detailed above)

NEXT STEPS

If the complainant believes the school / trust did not handle their complaint in accordance with the published complaints procedure or they acted unlawfully or unreasonably in the exercise of their duties under education law, they can contact the ESFA after they have completed Stage 3.

The ESFA will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by True Learning. They will consider whether True Learning has adhered to education legislation and any statutory policies connected with the complaint and whether they have followed Part 7 of the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

The complainant can refer their complaint to the ESFA online at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus, by telephone on: 0370 000 2288 or by writing to:

Academy Complaints and Customer Insight Unit
Education and Skills Funding Agency
Cheylesmore House
5 Quinton Road
Coventry. CV1 2WT.

RECORD KEEPING

The school/trust will maintain a record of all complaints, including actions taken, stages of resolution, and the final outcome. These records, which include letters, emails, and notes from meetings or phone calls, will be stored securely and kept confidential. Only those directly involved in investigating the complaint or on the review panel will have access to this information except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the 2008 Act requests access to them

APPENDIX 1: COMPLAINT FORM

Your name:
Pupil's name (if relevant):
Your relationship to the pupil (if relevant):
Address: Postcode: Day time telephone number: Evening telephone number: Email address:
Please give details of your complaint, including whether you have spoken to anybody at the school about it.

What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?

Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details.

Signature:

Date:

Official use

Date acknowledgement sent:

By who:

Complaint referred to:

Action taken:

Date:

APPENDIX 2: ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The complainant

The complainant will get a more effective and timely response to their complaint if they:

- Follow these procedures
- Co-operate with the school throughout the process, and respond to deadlines and communication promptly
- Ask for assistance as needed
- Treat all those involved with respect
- Do not publish details about the complaint on social media

The investigator

An individual will be appointed to look into the complaint and establish the facts. They will:

- Interview all relevant parties, keeping notes
- Consider records and any written evidence and keep these securely
- Prepare a comprehensive report to the head teacher or complaints committee, which includes the facts and potential solutions

The complaints co-ordinator for stages 1 and 2

The complaints co-ordinator can be:

- The head teacher or CEO as appropriate
- The designated complaints governor
- Any other staff member providing administrative support

The complaints co-ordinator will:

- Keep the complainant up to date at each stage in the procedure
- Make sure the process runs smoothly by liaising with staff members, the head teacher, chair of governors, Clerk and CEO and chair of trustees
- Be aware of issues relating to:
 - Sharing third-party information
 - Additional support needed by complainants; for example, interpretation support or where the complainant is a child or young person
- Keep records

Clerk to the Governing/Trust board

The Clerk will:

- Act as the complaints coordinator for Stage 3
- Be the contact point for the complainant and the complaints committee, including circulating the relevant papers and evidence before complaints committee meetings
- Arrange the complaints hearing
- Record and circulate the minutes and outcome of the hearing

Committee Chair

The committee chair should ensure that

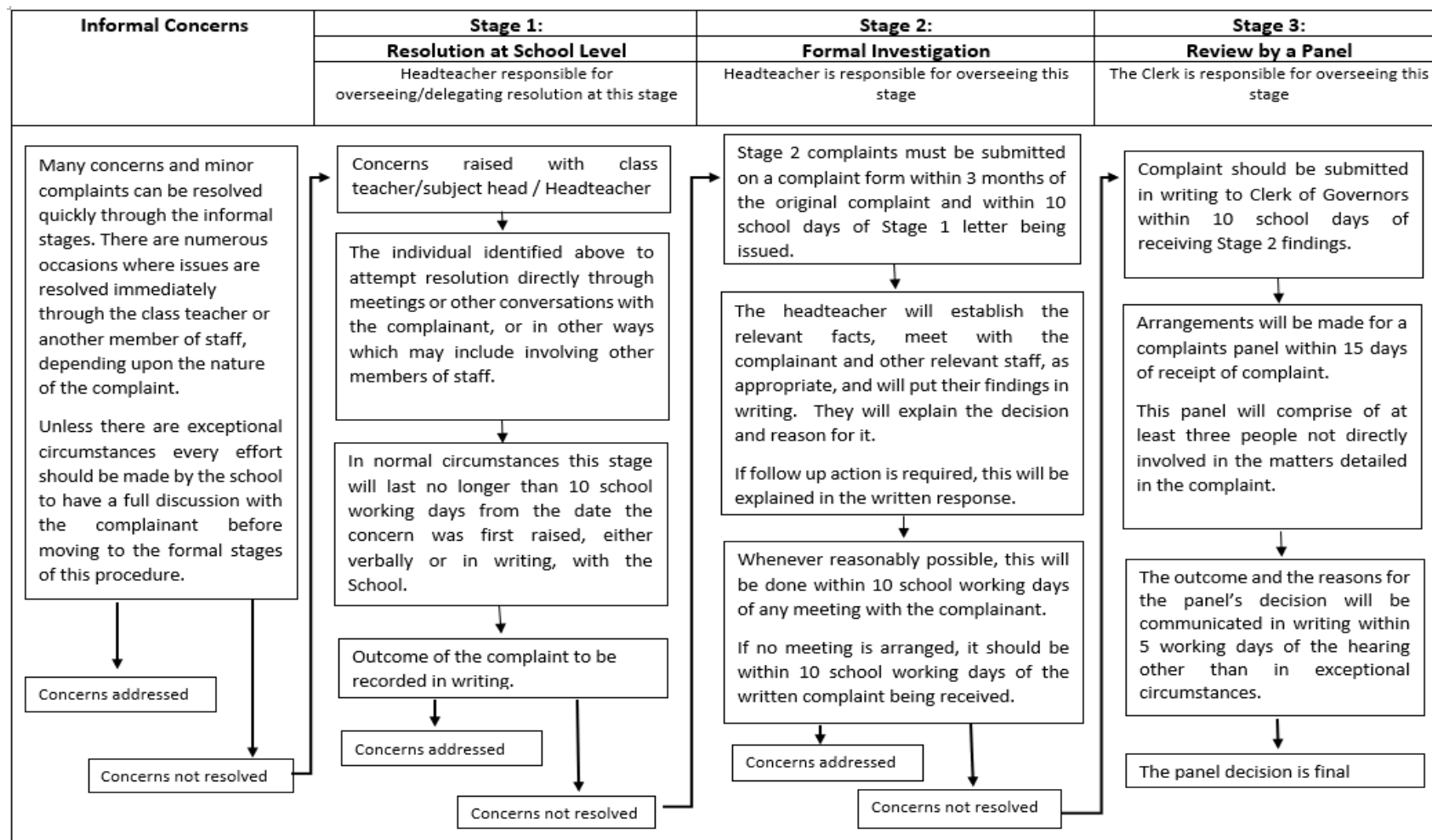
- the meeting is appropriately chaired, ensuring that everyone is treated with respect throughout
- All parties see the relevant information, understand the purpose of the committee, and are allowed to present their case

APPENDIX 3: TRUST BOARD COMPLAINT DELEGATION

	Complaint against the school	Complaint against the head teacher or member of the Local Governing Board, including the Chair or Vice-Chair	Complaint against the entire Local Governing Board, some of the Local Governing Board, its Chair and Vice-Chair	Complaint against the Trust, the Chair and Vice-Chair, the entire Trust Board or the majority of the Trust Board
Stage 1: Informal	Sent to: Class teacher/Subject Lead/Year Head Investigated by: Class teacher/Subject Lead/Year Head Managed by: Head teacher			
Stage 2: Formal	Sent to: Head teacher Managed and investigated by: Head teacher who can delegate the investigation to a member of the SLT but the head teacher must make the final decision	Sent to: The Clerk to Governors via the School Office Managed and investigated by: A member of the Governing Body	Sent to: The Clerk to Governors via the School Office Managed and investigated by: The Trust CEO	Sent to: Clerk to the Trust Board Managed and investigated by: The Trust CEO. Complaint v Trust CEO – the Chair of the Trust Board Complaint v the Chair of the Trust Board – the Vice-Chair of the Trust Board
Stage 3: Panel	Sent to: The Clerk to Governors via the School Office Managed by: The Clerk to Governors to convene a Panel of three governors	Sent to: The Clerk to Governors via the School Office Managed by: The Clerk to Governors to convene a Panel of three Governors	Sent to: The Clerk to Governors via the School Office Managed by: The Clerk to Governors to convene a Panel of Trustees and an independent Panel member	Sent to: The Clerk to the Trust Board Managed by: The Clerk to Trust Board to convene a totally independent committee Panel

APPENDIX 4: FLOWCHART SHOWING THE STAGES OF THE COMPLAINT PROCESS FOR A SCHOOL BASED COMPLAINT

Within True Learning, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) has overall responsibility for the operation and management of the school's complaints procedure. In practical terms, the CEO will nominate the head teacher as complaints co-ordinator to deal with matters on a day-by day basis and hold records relating to any complaints received. If the complaint is about the specific action / inaction / conduct of the head teacher, this will be dealt with by the CEO and Chair of the Local Governing Body. In the event that the complaint is about the CEO or the wider Trust Board, this will be dealt with by the Chair of the Board of Trustees.



APPENDIX 5: PANEL HEARING INFORMATION

The meeting is not a court case; it will be held in private, and will be as informal as circumstances allow. Electronic recordings of meetings or conversations are not permitted as the meeting will be minuted. The Chair of the Panel will bear in mind that the formal nature of the meeting can be intimidating, and will do their best to put all parties at ease.

The complainant will be entitled to bring a companion along to provide support. They are there to provide support, rather than to speak on the complainant's behalf, and will not usually be permitted to speak during the meeting except with the permission of the Chair. Legal representation representing the complainant will only be permitted in exceptional circumstances and with prior agreement from the Trust.

Any written material will be circulated to all parties 5 school days before the date of the meeting. The committee will not review any new complaints at this stage or consider evidence unrelated to the initial complaint to be included. New complaints must be dealt with from Stage 1 of the procedure.

The Panel meeting will take the following format:

- Chair will introduce all attendees.
- The Complainant(s) will be asked to explain why they are not satisfied with the outcome of the Stage 2 investigation and will explain their desired outcomes. Witnesses can be called by mutual agreement to present evidence at this stage.
- The school representatives and the Panel can question the complainant(s).
- The school representatives will present their case. Witnesses can be called by mutual agreement to present evidence at this stage.
- The Complainant(s) and the Panel can question the school representatives.
- The Complainant and the school representatives will be given the opportunity to summarise their evidence.
- The Complainant(s) and the school representatives will be escorted from the premises.
- The Panel will remain to discuss the outcome.

N.B. At no point during the meeting can any new evidence be presented. This could cause an adjournment of the meeting – either whilst all parties read the evidence or until another date.

The Panel will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented. The committee can:

- uphold the complaint in whole or in part
- dismiss the complaint in whole or in part.

If the complaint is upheld in whole or in part, the Panel will:

- decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint
- where appropriate, recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future.

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