

Information for Parents

How to comment or complain

Grove Road Primary School
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www.groveroad.herts.sch.uk/
admin@groveroad.herts.sch.uk



HOW TO COMMENT OR COMPLAIN

We care about what you think

Each day this school makes many decisions and tries hard to do the best for all the children. Your comments - either positive or negative - are helpful for future planning.

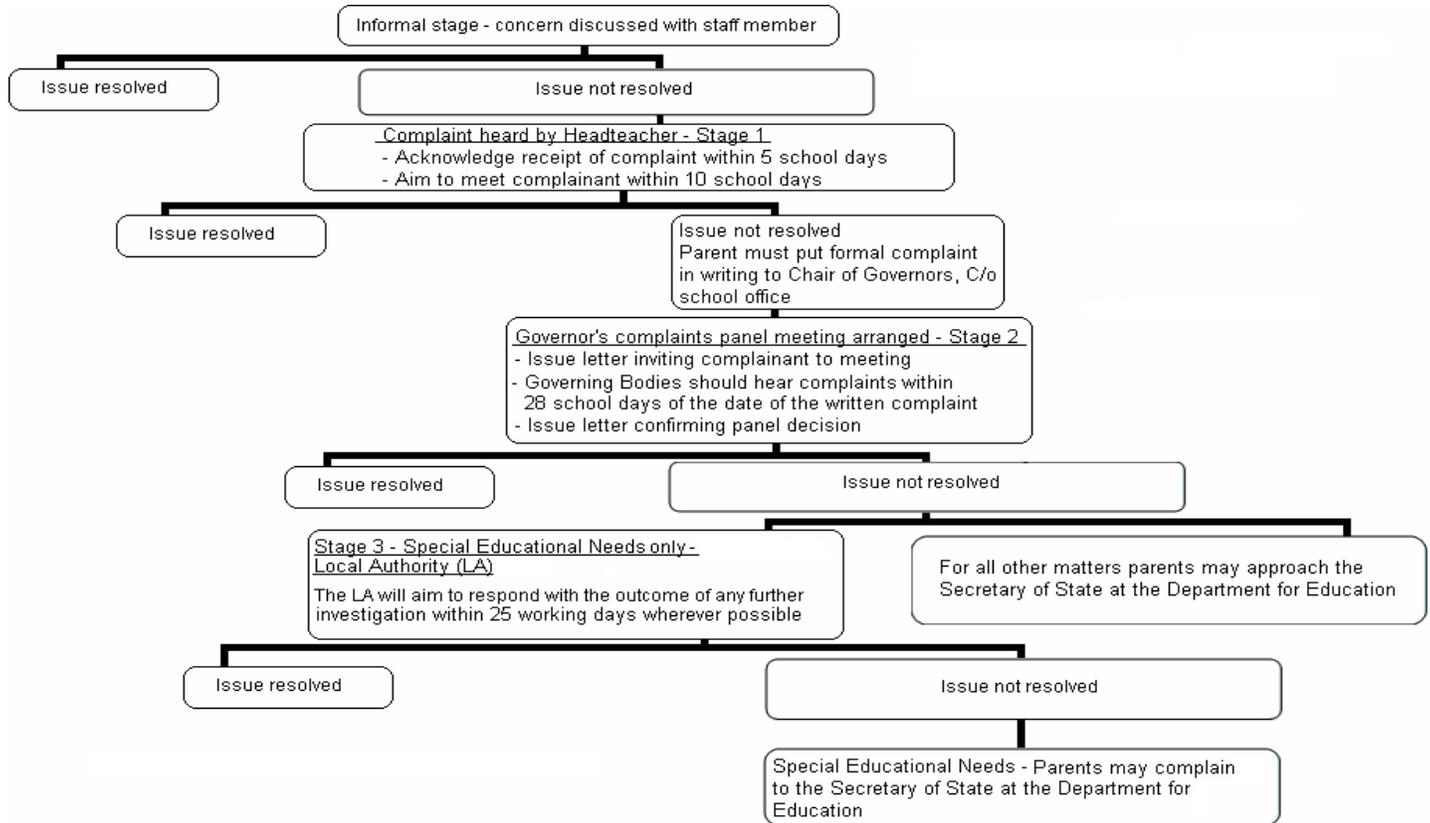
You may want to talk to us about a particular aspect of this school, though not actually make a complaint - you just want to get something off your chest

If you are dissatisfied about the way your child is being treated, or any actions or lack of action by us, please feel able to contact us using the details listed above.

Our aims

- Your complaint will be dealt with honestly, politely and in confidence
- Your complaint will be looked into thoroughly and fairly
- If your complaint is urgent we will deal with it more quickly
- We will keep you up to date with progress at each stage
- You will get an apology if we have made a mistake
- You will be told what we are going to do to put things right
- You will get a full and clear written reply to formal complaints within 28 school days

Stages of complaint



How to complain to your child's school - information for parents

Introduction

School Governors are responsible in law for having a published complaints procedure and for responding to complaints. These complaints arrangements are well-established and were made following consultation with Headteachers, Governors, the Diocesan Authorities, Teacher Associations and Representatives of Parent Groups. For Church of England schools the Diocese of St Albans commends the adoption of this procedure. For Roman Catholic schools, the Diocese of Westminster provides its own guidelines to schools for dealing with complaints.

What happens at the first stage?

Most concerns, complaints or potential complaints can be resolved by talking to the member of school Staff concerned. The school can tell you who you should speak to first. You may wish to request a copy of the school's complaints procedure, available from the school office or website. If the concern isn't resolved by speaking to a member of Staff, you should then request a meeting with the Headteacher who will investigate your complaint and aim to inform you of the outcome within 10 school days.

If your first contact is with individual Governors, you may be asked to take up your concerns with the Headteacher or the appropriate member of Staff. A Governor should not be made aware of a potential complaint as they may be required to sit on a panel in the event of a formal hearing (2nd stage) and should be impartial.

If your complaint is about the Headteacher, you should write to the Chair of Governors at the school. If your child has Special Educational Needs (SEN) you might find it helpful to talk to the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCo) at your child's school or your named Special Needs Officer if your child has a Statement of SEN. A Parent Partnership Supporter may also be able to help you.

If parents who have not yet complained to their child's school contact the Local Authority, Council Officers will ask the complainant for their written consent to share information regarding their complaint with the school in question. If the complainant declines to provide their consent, the matter will not be taken any further. If consent is provided, the Council will pass the complainant's concerns onto the school.

What happens at the second stage?

The school may ask you to complete a form or write a letter addressed to the Chair of Governors. In the letter you should:

- make it clear why you are complaining
- say who you have spoken to already
- explain what you want to happen as a result of your complaint.

The Chair of Governors will arrange for your complaint to be considered and investigated under the arrangements approved by the Governing Body. This is likely to involve a Panel of Governors. If the Chair of Governors or another Governor has been involved in discussions to help settle the disagreement at Stage 1, s/he should arrange for another Governor to take charge of the investigation. The Governor in charge of investigating the complaint may ask to meet you to discuss your concerns. The Governing Body should give you full details of how they will carry out any further investigation or formal hearing and keep you up-to-date with progress.

You and the school must make sure the Governors' Complaint Panel is provided with any written information or evidence you intend to use in a formal hearing. You may bring a friend, representative or interpreter to any meeting if you wish. The Chair of the Panel may invite any person who may help establish the facts of the complaint. The Chair should tell you who this person is before the meeting.

If any member of Staff is required by the Governing Body to attend a meeting they will have the opportunity to be accompanied or represented as they wish. A member of Staff named by parents in the complaint may also choose to attend a meeting, even if not required to do so by the Governors. They may be represented. If this happens, the school will inform you before the meeting.

When the panel has fully investigated your complaint, the Chair of the Panel or the Governor in charge of the investigation will write to you to tell you the findings. These findings will be reported to the Governing Body. The Chair of Governors will then write to you confirming the outcome of your complaint and any agreed actions to be taken. The Governing Body should aim to deal with complaints within 28 school days.

Is there a third stage of complaint?

For most complaints, the procedure ends with the Governing Body and there is no third stage of complaint to the Local Authority.

If the school's complaints procedure has been exhausted and you remain dissatisfied, you can approach the Secretary of State. Further advice is available from the Children's Legal Centre, the Advisory Centre for Education (ACE) or Family Lives (formerly Parentline Plus).

If your complaint is about the way that a school is providing for your child's Statement of Special Educational Needs you do have a third stage of complaint to the Local Authority.

In this case, you can write to the Complaints Manager who will acknowledge your complaint within five working days and then inform the Chair of Governors and Headteacher. The Complaints Team will aim to investigate your complaint within 25 working days, however the investigation may take longer in complex situations. When your complaint has been fully investigated the Complaints Manager will write to let you know the decision. S/he will give the reasons for the decision, any action or proposed action to be taken and any further avenues open to you. S/he will send a copy to the Headteacher, the Chair of Governors and anyone else concerned in the investigation.

Parents who remain dissatisfied following further investigation by the Local Authority have the right to complain to the Secretary of State who may decide to conduct an additional investigation.

If your complaint is about Denominational Religious Education or Collective Worship in a Voluntary-Aided school you do not have a third stage of complaint to the Local Authority.

This is because the Local Authority has no power in Voluntary-Aided schools to inspect the provision or to influence content. You may complain beyond the second stage to the relevant Diocesan Authority where this applies:

For Roman Catholic schools:

The Director of the Education Service, Diocese of Westminster, 46 Francis Street, London, SW1P 1QN. Tel: 020 7798 9005. Email: education@rcdow.org.uk

For Church of England schools:

The Diocesan Director of Education, Diocese of St Albans Education Centre, Hall Grove, Welwyn Garden City, AL7 4PJ. Tel: 01707 332321. Website: www.stalbans.anglican.org

Can I complain to anyone other than the County Council?

For all other types of complaint, including those regarding Bullying, the National Curriculum or Collective Worship in a Community, Voluntary-Controlled, Foundation or Trust school, there is no third stage of complaint to the Local Authority.

However, you can complain to the Secretary of State at the Department for Education. The contact details for the Secretary of State are as follows:

The Secretary of State
Department for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BT
Telephone: 0870 000 2288
Website: www.education.gov.uk

Please note that the Department for Education will only follow up your complaint with the school or the Local Authority if they believe either might have acted unreasonably or failed to carry out a statutory duty.

Complaints about academies

Whilst they are required to have a complaints procedure in place, Academies operate independently of the Local Authority. Accordingly, the Local Authority is unable to investigate complaints regarding Academies even if your complaint relates to Special Educational Needs provision. If you have a complaint about an Academy which has not been satisfactorily resolved through the Academy's complaints procedure, you should contact the Secretary of State using the contact details listed above and request that your complaint be passed to the Education Funding Agency.

Useful contact details

Chair of Governors	The school secretary can tell you who this is and pass on any written correspondence	
Complaints Team Children's Services	www.hertsdirect.org/your-council/hcc/childserv/comments/ Email: cs.complaints@hertscc.gov.uk	01992 588542
Parent Partnership Service (SEN)	www.hertsdirect.org/parentpartnership Email: parent.partnership@hertscc.gov.uk	01992 555847
Black Minority Ethnic (BME) Achievement Team - If your complaint is about racial harassment or discrimination	www.thegrid.org.uk	01438 844752
ACE (Advisory Centre for Education)	www.ace-ed.org.uk	0808 800 5793
HertsHelp	www.hertsdirect.org/hertshelp	0300 123 4044
Family Lives	www.familylives.org.uk	0808 800 2222
Carers in Herts	www.carersinherts.org.uk	01992 586969
Children's Legal Centre	www.childrenslegalcentre.com	01206 873820
Citizen's Advice Bureau	www.citizensadvice.org.uk	08444 111 444

How to make a complaint

First

If you have a concern about anything we do, or if you wish to make a complaint, you can do this by telephone, in person or in writing (by letter or email). We hope that most complaints can be settled quickly and informally, either by putting matters right or by giving you an explanation. If there is something you are not happy about, or you don't understand why we are doing something in a particular way, please come in and discuss it with the class teacher or another appropriate member of Staff, such as the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCo) if it is about Special Needs.

We know that it can feel uncomfortable to question or challenge, but if you don't tell us what is worrying you we cannot explain what we are doing or try to put it right. If the first person you talk to cannot help you then speak to the Headteacher. Make an appointment with the school secretary to make sure the Headteacher is available. You should be able to sort out your worries but sometimes this is not possible. In this case there is a next step.

Second

If you are not satisfied you can complain formally by filling in a form, which is available from the school office and online. Address the form to the Chair of Governors. The school secretary will tell you who this is and pass on any written correspondence. The Chair will then arrange for your complaint to be investigated and considered and will reply within 10 working days to give you a progress report and tell you what will happen next. This is likely to involve a Panel of Governors. When your complaint has been fully investigated you will be told of the outcome in writing.

Third

Most complaints are the responsibility of the Governing Body of the school and will be resolved by them. A small number of complaints may not be resolved by this process.

In the case of complaints about **Special Educational Needs**, you can complain further to the Local Authority. This should be done by writing to the Complaints Manager in the Customer Service Team at the address on the back page.

It should be noted however that if you wish to pursue this route, you must do so within 28 days of receiving the written outcome of the hearing into your complaint. After 28 days, neither the school nor the Local Authority is under any obligation to investigate or progress your complaint any further.

Useful contacts

Advisory Centre for Education (ACE)

1C Aberdeen Studios, 22 Highbury Grove, London, N5 2EA

Free Advice Line 2-5pm, Monday to Friday

Web: www.ace-ed.org.uk

Email: enquiries@ace-ed.org.uk

Phone: **0808 800 5793**

Children's Legal Centre

University of Essex, Wivenhoe Park, Colchester, Essex, CO4 3SQ

Free Advice Service, 2-5pm

Web: www.childrenslegalcentre.com

Email: clc@essex.ac.uk

Phone: **01206 873820**

Complaints Team

Customer Service Team, Room 164, County Hall, Hertford, SG13 8DF

Web: www.hertsdirect.org/your-council/hcc/childserv/comments/

Email: cs.complaints@hertscc.gov.uk

Phone: **01992 588542**

Parent Partnership Team (Special Educational Needs)

Room 152, County Hall, Hertford SG13 8DF

Web: www.hertsdirect.org/parentpartnership

Email: parent.partnership@hertscc.gov.uk

Phone: **01992 555847**

The Parent Partnership service provides impartial information and offers guidance on Special Educational Needs to Parents, Carers and Professionals. There are four Parent Partnership Supporters in the county and you can contact your local Supporter directly and confidentially. Their contact details are as follows:

- **Irene Holland - 01462 634488**
(Stevenage/Hitchin/Letchworth/Baldock/villages)
- **Dawn Owen - 01920 411152**
(Hertford/Ware/Bishops Stortford/Waltham Cross/Hatfield/WGC/villages)
- **Kären Edwards - 01442 453316**
(Watford/Rickmansworth/Potters Bar/Borehamwood/villages)
- **Helena Marks - 01442 217143**
(St Albans/Hemel Hempstead/Tring/Harpenden/Berkhamsted/villages)

ParentlinePlus

520 Highgate Studios

53-79 Highgate Road

Kentish Town

London, NW5 1TL

Web: www.parentlineplus.org.uk

Phone: **0808 800 2222**

Summary - Schools Complaints Procedure

Full procedure available on: www.thegrid.org.uk

Model procedures for dealing with school based complaints

What is the issue?

Whether a grievance or a complaint, it is important to decide which policy to use.

Is it a Safeguarding issue? Read your Safeguarding policy to consider which procedure to follow.

A grievance is an issue raised by a member of Staff. *Staff* are employees of the LA/school and work solely at the school, except for Shire County Catering. It does not apply to outside contractors, who are managed by their own organisation. Full details can be found in the Guide to the Law - Chapter 4 (Grievance and Disciplinary procedures) and Chapter 5 (Disciplinary procedures)

A complaint is often an issue raised by a Parent, or a member of the community.

1. The complaint may initially start as a concern, and by dealing with it promptly and professionally, thus reducing the number that develop into formal complaints. In most cases the class teacher or the individual delivering the service, in the case of extended school provision, will receive the first approach. It would be helpful if Staff were able to resolve issues immediately, including apologising where necessary.
2. If an informal discussion has not resolved the issue, the person raising the concern can take the matter further. *Appendix A* is a flowchart summarising the three stages of the complaints procedure. Follow this in conjunction with the explanatory notes below.

Resolving the complaint is what the school will want to achieve as swiftly and efficiently as possible by being fair and impartial both at informal or formal stages. Whether the complaint is not valid, valid in whole, or in part, needs to be acknowledged. An effective procedure will identify areas of agreement between the parties. It is appropriate to offer one or more of the following depending on the outcome:

- An apology;
- An explanation;
- An admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better. This is not the same as an admission of liability.
- An assuring discussion of the matter with the complainant, and explanation of steps taken that this issue will not recur, can be a positive move in resolving the matter.
- An undertaking to review school policies in light of the complaint.

A complainant may remain dissatisfied even if the school has followed all the above guidance and its own procedures. If the complainant tries to reopen the same issue, the Chair of the GB is able to inform them in writing that the procedure has been exhausted and that the matter is now closed. If it is written in the schools procedure, the complainant should be told of the next stage available to them (where applicable) - i.e. writing to the LA, Diocese or other external agency such as the Secretary of State.

Appendix 1: Flowchart - The three stages of a school-based complaints procedure

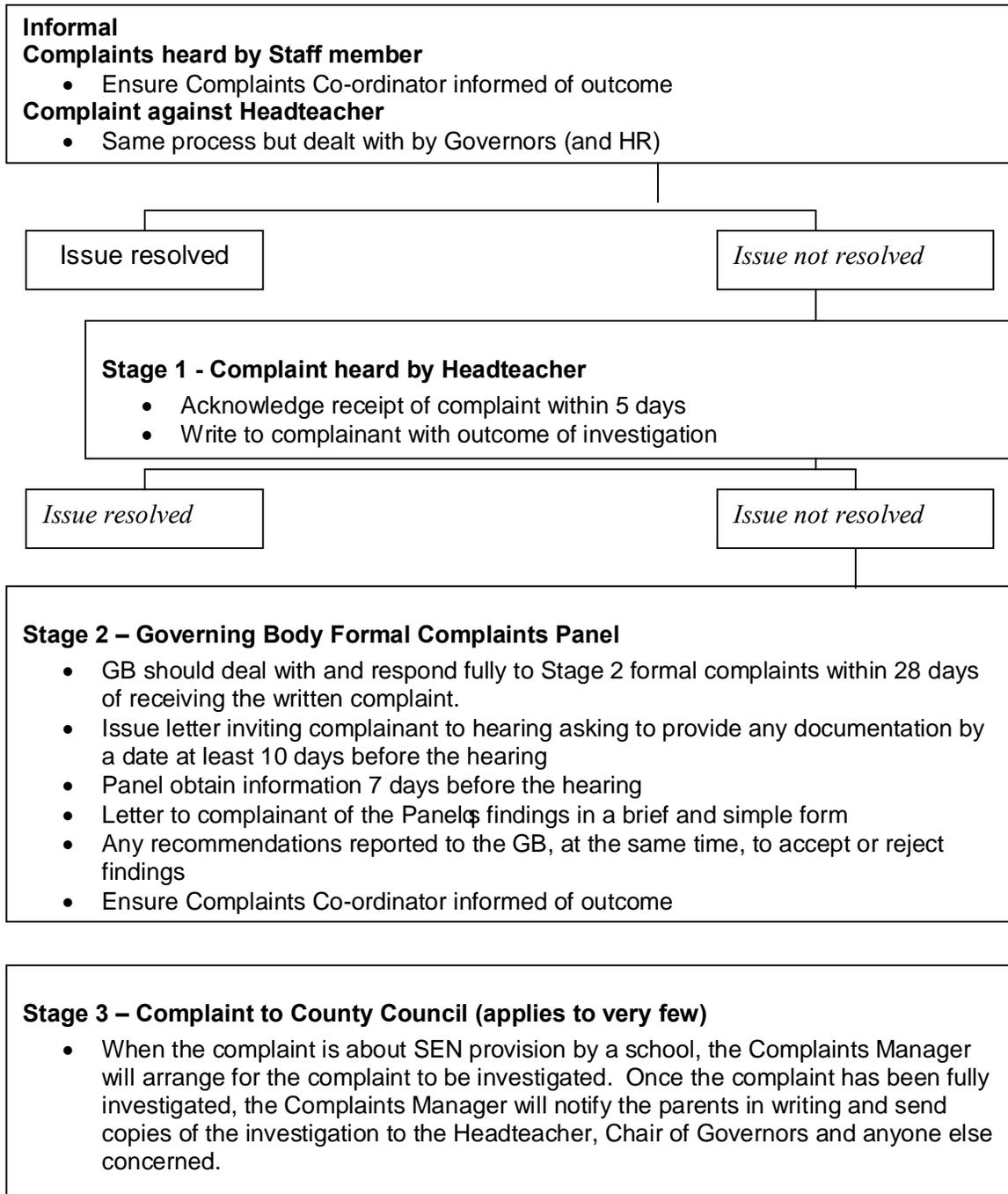
Appendix 2: Roles and Responsibilities

Appendix 3: Vexatious Complaints

Appendix 4: Panel Checklist

Appendix 5: Example of a Complaint Form

Appendix 1: The three stages of the school-based complaints procedure.



Appendix 2: School Complaints Procedure – Roles and Responsibilities

A complaint needs to be dealt with at the earliest stage by the appropriate person.

A Complaints Co-ordinator is the member of Staff with responsibility for the operation and management of the school complaints procedure. This may often be the Headteacher. Responsibilities include:

- Establishing what has happened so far, and who is involved;
- Considering timescales so the complaint is resolved as quickly and efficiently as possible. Allow for realistic time limits for each action. Be flexible if time is needed to prepare or for the meeting time to suit all involved, remember to keep all parties informed.
- Clarify the nature of the complaint and what remains unresolved;
- Meet or contact the complainant to discuss any information needed or clarify issues;
- Clarify what the complainant feels might resolve the problem at any stage;
- Interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish;
- Conduct the interview with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning;
- Keep notes of all the interviews and final outcome. Some discussions may be on the phone but to ensure all parties have the same understanding of the issue a brief note of the meeting/telephone calls can be kept and a copy of any written response added to the record.

The Role of the Chair of Governors

If the Governing Body are requested to hear the complaint, at Stage 2, the Chair will check the correct procedure has been followed before notifying the Clerk to arrange a Panel.

The Role of the Clerk

The Department strongly recommends that any Panel assign a Clerk for the complaints hearing. The Clerk would be the contact point for the complainant and be required to:

- set the date, time and venue of the hearing, ensuring that the dates are convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible;
- collate any written material and send it to the parties in advance of the hearing;
- meet and welcome the parties as they arrive at the hearing;
- record the proceedings;
- notify all parties of the Panel's decision.

The Role of the Chair of the Panel

The Chair of the Panel has a key role, ensuring that:

- the remit of the Panel is explained to the parties and each party has the opportunity of putting their case without undue interruption;
- the issues are addressed;
- key findings of fact are made;
- Parents and others who may not be used to speaking at such a hearing are put at ease;

- the hearing is conducted in an informal manner with each party treating the other with respect and courtesy;
- the Panel is open minded and acting independently;
- no member of the Panel has a vested interest in the outcome of the proceedings or any involvement in an earlier stage of the procedure;
- each side is given the opportunity to state their case;
- written material is seen by all parties. **If a new issue arises it would be useful to give all parties the opportunity to consider and comment on it.**

Notification of the Panel's Decision

The Chair of the Panel needs to ensure that the complainant is notified of the Panel's decision, in writing, with the Panel's response; this is usually within a set deadline which is publicised in the procedure. The letter needs to explain if there are any further rights of appeal and, if so, to whom they need to be addressed.

It should be noted that if Parents remain dissatisfied following the outcome of their Stage 2 hearing and wish to take their complaint further, they must do so within 28 days of receiving the written outcome of the hearing. After 28 days, neither the school nor the Local Authority (where appropriate) are under any obligation to investigate or progress the complaint any further.

Appendix 3: Vexatious Complaints

If properly followed, a good complaints procedure will limit the number of complaints that become protracted. However, there will be occasions when, despite all stages of the procedure having been followed, the complainant remains dissatisfied.

A vexatious complaint is likely to involve some or all of the following:

- The complaint arises from a historic and irreversible decision or incident;
- Contact with the school is frequent, lengthy, complicated and stressful for Staff;
- The complainant behaves in an aggressive manner to Staff when he/she presents his/her complaint or is verbally abusive or threatening;
- The complainant changes aspects of the complaint partway through the complaint process;
- The complainant makes and breaks contact with the school on an ongoing basis; or
- The complainant persistently approaches the school (and in some cases the Local Authority) through different routes about the same issue in the hope of getting different responses.

If the situation is challenging but it is possible to proceed, Staff should avoid giving unrealistic expectations on the outcome of the complaint. In instances where there is a complete breakdown of relations between the complainant and the school, a decision may be made to restrict contact. Any restrictions imposed should be appropriate and proportionate. The options that schools are most likely to consider are:

- Requesting contact in a particular form (e.g. . letters only);
- Requiring contact to take place with a named member of Staff (e.g. . Headteacher);
- Restricting telephone calls to specified days and times;

- Asking the complainant to enter into an agreement about his/her future contact with the school; and
- Informing the complainant that if s/he still does not follow this advice (as stated above) any further correspondence that does not present significant new matters or new information will not necessarily be acknowledged, but should be kept on file.
- If the complainant tries to reopen an issue that has already been examined through the complaints procedure, the Chair of the Governing Body is able to inform them in writing that the procedure has been exhausted and that the matter is now closed.

The Complaints Team can be contacted directly by schools to discuss such cases further on 01992 588542 (www.hertsdirect.org/your-council/hcc/childserv/comments/)

Appendix 4: Panel Checklist

- The hearing is as informal as possible and proceedings explained to all parties;
- Witnesses are only required to attend for the part of the hearing in which they give evidence;
- After introduction, the complainant is invited to explain their complaint, and be followed by their witnesses;
- The Headteacher is then invited to explain the school's actions and be followed by the school's witnesses;
- The Panel may ask questions at any point, or adjourn if necessary;
- The complainant is then invited to sum up their complaint;
- The Headteacher is then invited to sum up the school's actions and response to the complaint;
- The Panel needs to ensure that all parties have been heard;
- Both parties leave together while the Panel decides on the issues;
- The Chair explains that both parties will hear from the Panel within a **set timescale**.

Appendix 5: Example of a Complaint Form

Please complete and return to õ õ õ õ õ õ õ õ õ õ ..(Complaints Co-ordinator)
who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

Your name:

Pupil's name:

Your relationship to the pupil:

Address:

Postcode:

Day time telephone number:

Evening telephone number:

Please give details of your complaint.

What action, if any, have you already taken to try and resolve your complaint.
(Who did you speak to and what was the response)?

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

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

Signature:

Date:

Official use

Date acknowledgement sent:

By whom:

Complaint referred to:

Date: