



William Henry Smith Foundation

Complaints Policy

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1. Introduction

1.1 This Foundation strives to provide an excellent education for all our children and young people. The principal, senior leadership team, governors and staff work diligently to build positive relationships with parents, carers and all stakeholders.

1.2 However, if parents, carers or other stakeholders* have a concern this policy sets out the procedure to be followed in such cases.

**Although, technically, any person, including members of the general public, may make a complaint about any aspect of a Foundation's facilities or services (unless, as specified below, separate statutory procedures apply) it is normally the case that concerns and complaints will only be submitted by those who have a personal reason for involvement, and in practice this will include not only parents and carers but may also extend to, for example, those resident in the immediate vicinity of the Foundation or other members of the local community.*

1.3 The Foundation must ensure, throughout the process, that they comply with their obligations under the Equality Act 2010. Although it is common practice to ask for complaints to be made in writing (ideally by completion of an official complaint form) it is possible that the complainant may have different communication preferences due to disability or learning difficulties or unfamiliarity with the English language (etc) and where this is of relevance the Foundation must allow alternative methods of contact (as emphasised later in this policy).

2. Purpose and scope

2.1 It should be noted at the outset that any concerns or complaints submitted by members of staff should be dealt with under the Foundation's Grievance Policy. The remit of this policy is therefore limited to concerns or complaints emanating from an external source in relation to facilities or services provided by the Foundation.

2.2 The primary aim of this policy is to ensure that any concerns or complaints received from parents or other stakeholders are resolved as fairly and speedily, and as near to the point of origin, as possible.

2.3 The Foundation is committed to developing a robust, transparent and reflective approach to remedy any identified concerns or complaints. There is a similar commitment to ensuring that the Foundation is an exemplar of the very highest of standards.

2.4 Most issues raised are concerns rather than complaints. 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', in contrast, may be defined as 'an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about actions taken or about a lack of (appropriate) action'.

2.5 Both concerns and complaints (irrespective of whether these are accorded formal status) will be dealt with by the Foundation in a sensitive, impartial and confidential manner. It is recognised that a concern may turn into a complaint if it is not addressed seriously or sensitively.

2.6 It is in the interest of all parties that both concerns and complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage, and it is likely that many issues will prove capable of informal resolution without the need to resort to formal procedures.

2.7 The Foundation is committed to taking all concerns seriously as soon as they become aware of the problem and will endeavour, whenever possible, to resolve such issues without necessarily instigating formal procedures.

- 2.8 However, depending on the nature of the concern or complaint and the outcome of informal process, the complainant may wish to follow (or may be requested by management to follow) the Foundation's formal complaints procedure (although compliance with any such request will be entirely at the discretion of the complainant).
- 2.9 Complaints may be received by the Foundation in relation to services provided by third parties in the form of external providers who use the Foundation premises or facilities. In such an event the Foundation should direct the complainant to follow the external provider's own complaints procedure (and the Foundation should ensure, at the time of making any arrangement for a third party to use their premises or facilities to offer services to the community, that such providers have their own complaints procedures in place).
- 2.10 For the Foundation to be able to investigate a complaint, it must be brought to the attention of the Foundation within three months of the incident occurring or (should this be later) coming to light. If a complaint is not made within three months of the relevant incident occurring or coming to light it is unlikely to be investigated unless the circumstances are exceptional.
- 2.11 Similarly, escalation (to the next stage) of a concern or complaint is dependent upon the submission within ten working days of receipt of a response from the Foundation (whether verbal or in writing) to the informal (Stage 1) process or (in writing) to the formal (Stage 2) process of written notification* from the complainant of their continuing dissatisfaction.
- *If the complainant has a relevant disability the requirement for such notification to be in writing should normally be waived in accordance with the final clause of section 1.*
- 2.12 We will consider complaints made outside of term time to have been received on the first day after the holiday period. In addition, complaints made on a weekend will be considered on the next working day.
- 2.13 **If no such notification is received within the above timescale the complaint shall be deemed to have lapsed and (other than in extenuating circumstances) will not be investigated further.**

3. Legal and technical considerations

- 3.1 The Foundation is required to have a procedure for dealing with complaints relating either to the Foundation or to any community facilities or services that the Foundation may offer.
- 3.2 This policy is fully compliant with the guidance contained in the National Minimum Standards for Residential Special Schools (2015). It also reflects DfE guidance contained within 'Best Practice Advice for School Complaints Procedures 2020' (for maintained schools, maintained nursery schools and local authorities) whilst taking into consideration the substance of the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 (particularly Part 7 thereof).
- 3.3 For complaints from parents or carers of students (other than those relating to admissions, exclusions, statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs (SEN), allegations of child protection, or breach of trust or misconduct – for all of which specific protocols are in place) the appropriate procedure should comply with recommendations from the Department for Education (DfE) and government legislation (Section 29 of the Education Act 2002) in offering no fewer than three stages, which should include:
- an opportunity to resolve the complaint with the Foundation on an informal basis (for example through discussion with the class teacher in the first instance)
 - a formal complaint stage (should the complainant be dissatisfied with the response at the informal stage)

- a formal appeal hearing (should the complainant be dissatisfied with the response at the formal stage) before (in accordance with The Non-Maintained Special Schools (England) Regulations 2015) an ‘independent person’ who has had no direct involvement in any matter detailed in the complaint **and** who is not, and who never has been, a staff member or governor of the Foundation, or a parent of a child registered at the Foundation.
- 3.4 The Foundation will always be mindful of the obligation to make special provision where the complainant may have specific needs or requirements due to disability or to limited facility in use of the English language. *Further information in relation to this may be available on the Foundation website.*
- 3.5 Occasionally, The Foundation may become the focus of a campaign and receive large volumes of complaints which:
- relate to the same subject; and/or
 - emanate from complainants with no direct connection to the Foundation.
- 3.6 In such circumstances the Foundation reserves the right to respond by providing all complainants with a template response and/or by publishing a single response on the Foundation’s website.
- 3.7 In a similar manner, the Foundation may, having completed the complaints procedure in relation to a complaint submitted, subsequently receive a duplicated complaint (in relation to the same matter) from a different source, not infrequently a family member.
- 3.8 In such circumstances it is acceptable for the Foundation to advise the complainant, in accordance with sections 11 (final clause) and 14 (in its entirety), that the complaints procedure has been completed and that no further action will be taken.
- 3.9 However, in such cases the (new) complainant should also be advised that, if they remain dissatisfied with the Foundation’s handling of the original complaint, they may wish to consult the Department for Education’s website to seek further information on how they might pursue the matter.

4. Parental responsibility

- 4.1 Not infrequently, complaints may be received by the Foundation which relate to a background of conflict between estranged parents. The Foundation is required by law to engage with the parents of students but in certain circumstances it may prove difficult to establish which parties in fact legally hold parental responsibility, as several adults may make such a claim in respect of an individual child.
- 4.2 The Foundation are also expected to navigate complex living arrangements, particularly for children and young people who may be living in social care, where once again the issue of parental responsibility may not be entirely clear.
- 4.3 In such cases, The Foundation may wish to seek guidance from the relevant government website which contains specific advice for The Foundation to understand their obligations and duties, as recognised by education law, in relation to the rights and responsibilities of parents. This guidance can be located at:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/dealing-with-issues-relating-to-parental-responsibility/understanding-and-dealing-with-issues-relating-to-parental-responsibility

5. Unreasonable ('serial or persistent') and anonymous complaints

- 5.1 Serial or persistent complaints are defined as those which are in pursuance of a desire to reopen a matter which has already been explored in accordance with this policy to the point where the final stage of the process has been exhausted (see section 14).
- 5.2 Such complaints need not be responded to by the Foundation (although care must be taken that these labels are not applied to the complainant in person: **they can only be applicable to** (the nature of) **the complaint itself**).
- 5.3 Before making a considered decision to stop responding to a complainant the Foundation should consider whether:
- it has taken every reasonable step to address the complainant's needs
 - the complainant has been given a clear statement of the Foundation's position and their options (if any)
 - the complainant is contacting the Foundation repeatedly but making substantially the same points each time.
- 5.4 In this respect the Foundation is significantly less likely to be open to criticism (for failing to respond) if:
- there is reason to believe the complainant is deliberately causing disruption or inconvenience
 - the complainant has been abusive or aggressive (whether in person or via either telephone or written communication)
 - the complainant has made insulting personal comments or has threatened staff.
- 5.5 Anonymous complaints are incapable of being responded to in accordance with the Foundation's policy (as the complainant clearly cannot engage in the process, or receive an appropriate response, if they have not been identified). However, anonymous complaints about matters which are deemed by the Foundation to warrant investigation will be explored further if sufficient information has been provided to render this feasible.

6. Stages of process

- 6.1 The standard procedure of this policy consists (in accordance with the format specified by the DfE) of the following four stages:
- **Stage 0 (informal)**
The concern is raised with a staff member (ideally the individual against whom the complaint is directed) or a member of management staff. This aims for resolution at the initial level.
 - **Stage 1 (formal)**
The complainant submits an indication (normally in writing) that they remain dissatisfied with the outcome at the conclusion of Stage 0, at which point formal process is commenced.
The complaint is formally reviewed and investigated by a member of the Executive Leadership Team (Executive Member of the Senior Leadership Team) (or delegated to a Vice

Principal member of the Senior Leadership Team). If the complaint is about a member of the Executive Leadership Team, it must be sent to the CEO.

- **Stage 2 (formal review)**

The complainant submits an indication (normally in writing) that they remain dissatisfied with the outcome at the conclusion of Stage 1, at which point formal review process is commenced.

The complaint is escalated to the CEO (or delegated to a member of the Executive Leadership Team) for review if the complainant remains dissatisfied with the Stage 1 outcome. If the complaint is about the CEO, it must be sent to the Chair of Governors.

- **Stage 3 (appeal)**

The complainant submits an indication (which, other than in extenuating circumstances, will be in writing) that they remain dissatisfied with the outcome at the conclusion of Stage 2, after which the complaint is heard by the final internal stage: an independent appeal panel and/or an independent individual.

7. Complaints against Foundation staff

- 7.1 Any complaints which have progressed beyond the informal stage and which relate to the conduct of members of staff will be handled in accordance with the Foundation's internal disciplinary procedures.
- 7.2 This means that complaints against staff members in relation to their conduct may be dealt with, under the relevant policy, by the principal (unless that individual is deemed to be compromised by virtue of previous involvement in the matter, in which case the issue may be delegated to either a senior member of staff or a governor) and then, should the matter progress to the appeal stage, by a panel formed in accordance with the relevant policy.
- 7.3 A modified procedure is applicable in instances where a complaint in relation to conduct is directed specifically against the principal. In the event of such an issue arising (and progressing beyond the informal stage) the complaint is initially dealt with at the formal stage by a suitably skilled (and impartial) nominated member of the governing body and then, should the complaint progress to the appeal stage, by a panel formed in accordance with the relevant policy.
- 7.4 Both this policy and any other policy of relevance (such as the Foundation's Disciplinary Policy) should therefore be interpreted in accordance with this principle by substituting 'nominated member of the governing body' for 'principal' in instances where the latter is the subject of the complaint.

8. Complaints against governors

- 8.1 Very occasionally a complaint may be received in relation to the behaviour or actions of an individual governor or (less often) either a group of governors or the governing body as a whole.
- 8.2 Governing bodies are strongly advised to have in place an appropriate code of conduct which will ensure that all governors know how to work positively towards Foundation improvement whilst providing assurance that governance of the Foundation conforms to best practice. This latter element includes ensuring that any concern which may arise in relation to the conduct of governors (whether jointly or severally) is addressed at the earliest opportunity.

- 8.3 There are no nationally agreed procedures for dealing with complaints against governors (other than regulations on suspension and removal of governors) and the following guidance (intended to complement the content of this policy) is designed to advise governing bodies on what should be done in the event of such an occurrence.
- 8.4 Complaints against a governor should never be investigated by the principal or by any other member of Foundation staff.
- 8.5 In dealing with a complaint against a governor, the process should follow a three-stage process (as outlined in section 6 above) comprising informal stage, formal stage and appeal.
- 8.6 When a complaint is made against a governor (including the chair or vice chair) it should be submitted to the Governance Professional, who should then arrange for the complaint (unless it can be resolved informally at Stage 1 of the process) to be heard by a suitably skilled and impartial member of the governing body (Stage 2) and then (if required) by an appeal panel composed as defined previously (Stage 3).
- 8.7 If the complaint relates to the entire governing body, or to both the chair and vice chair, then the Governance Professional should determine the most appropriate course of action.
- 8.8 This will depend on the precise nature of the complaint but may involve bringing the matter to the attention of the local authority who can advise on the need to appoint an independent investigator to complete Stage 2 and/or co-opting appropriate persons (such as governors from other schools) to hear an appeal at Stage 3 of the process.

9. Stage 0 (informal) – raising a concern

- 9.1 Concerns can be raised with the Foundation at any time. The Foundation requests that parents make their first contact with the student's teacher or, where this is not possible or is deemed inappropriate, a member of the management team (e.g. Head of Education/Head of Residential Care/Head of College).
- 9.2 The recipient of the concern may be able to respond immediately (and often this will serve to resolve the issue). However, on some occasions the concern raised may require investigation, or discussion with others, in which case the Foundation will endeavour to provide an informal response (which may be either verbal or written) within two working days. It is anticipated that most concerns will be satisfactorily dealt with in this manner.
- 9.3 However, if the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome at the completion of Stage 0, they are entitled to progress their concern to the status of an official complaint and to advance to the next stage of the process.
- 9.4 At this juncture (if not before) they should be provided with a copy of the Foundation's complaints policy (or signposted to this via the Foundation's website if this is acceptable to them).
- 9.5 All complainants should be made aware that publicising their complaint through social media or any other means of communication will be likely to prejudice any investigation and may make it impossible to explore their complaint further.
- 9.6 The complainant should also be requested, at this point, to complete an official complaint form (Appendix 1) which should be returned to a member of the Executive Leadership Team (Head of School, Deputy Principal for Further Education, Deputy Principal of Residential Care) within ten working days of the complainant receiving an initial response (whether verbal or written). The

official complaint form should, ideally, present an opportunity to communicate the complainant's expectations as to how their complaint might best be satisfactorily resolved.

- 9.7 On receipt of the official complaint form, the complaint will be logged by the Foundation, including the date of receipt. The Foundation will then progress the complaint to the next (formal) stage.
- 9.8 The Foundation cannot insist on the complainant completing an official complaint form. If the Foundation is in receipt of a notification (this may be interpreted to include not only email but also verbal communication – see following section) which could reasonably be regarded as constituting an official complaint it is still under an obligation to treat this seriously. The Foundation must record the communication and respond appropriately, including escalating the matter to formal process if it becomes clear that the complainant remains dissatisfied by informal attempts to reach a resolution.

10. Stage 1 (formal) – dealing with complaints

- 10.1 If the matter has not been resolved at Stage 0, as evidenced by receipt of further communication from the complainant to this effect, a member of the Executive Leadership Team (Head of School; Deputy Principal – Head of Further Education; Deputy Principal – Head of Residential Services) reviews the complaint by considering all relevant material and discussing the issue with appropriate staff and/or the complainant. If the complaint is against a member of the Executive Leadership Team, the CEO deals with the formal stage.
- 10.2 The aim will be to resolve the matter as quickly as possible, the member of the Executive Leadership Team provides a response, normally in writing, typically within five working days of the written complaint being received.
- 10.3 The Foundation may wish to extend to the complainant an opportunity to meet with the person appointed to deal with the complaint to explore the matter further (unless there are circumstances where it is felt that this might place any party at risk).
- 10.4 Any such meeting should normally take place within five working days of the written complaint having been received, and an appropriate response in writing should then be provided within a further five working days, but this timescale may be extended if, as may be the case, a meeting cannot reasonably be arranged within this period.
- 10.5 If the complainant remains dissatisfied, they are entitled to progress the complaint to the next stage (Stage 2) and should notify the Foundation of their continuing dissatisfaction, ideally in writing, within ten working days of receiving the response.
- *If the complainant has a relevant disability the requirement for notification to be in writing should normally be waived in accordance with the final clause of section 1.*
- 10.6 As previously, any such communication will be logged by the Foundation, including the date of receipt. The Foundation will then progress the complaint to the next (formal review) stage.

11. Stage 2 (formal review) – CEO Review

- 11.1 The CEO (or delegated member of the Executive Leadership Team) will consider the formal complaint and the previous outcomes from Stage 1. If the complaint is about the CEO, then this stage will be undertaken by the Chair of Governors.
- 11.2 The CEO provides a response, normally in writing, typically within five working days of the complainant expressing dissatisfaction with the Executive Leadership Team member's response. If the complaint is about the CEO, then this written response will be provided by the Chair of Governors.
- 11.3 If the complainant remains dissatisfied with the CEO's response (or that of the Chair of Governors if the complaint related to the CEO), they must notify the Foundation of their wish to proceed to Stage 3 (appeal) within ten working days.

12. Stage 3 (appeal) – Independent Panel

- 12.1 If the matter is unresolved at Stage 2, the independent person convenes an appeal hearing, as evidenced by receipt of further communication from the complainant to this effect.
- 12.2 The Foundation's policy, in compliance with Paragraph 31 of The Non-Maintained Special Schools (England) Regulations 2015, mandates that the appeal must be heard by an independent person. This individual is specifically defined as someone who is not, and who never has been, a staff member or governor of the Foundation.
- 12.3 The independent person (or appeal panel in the independent person considers this to be appropriate) considers the complaint afresh. The outcome is notified in writing within five working days of the hearing date.
- 12.4 The appeal hearing should, whenever possible, take place within a maximum of ten working days of receipt of said communication. Both the complainant and the CEO (representing the Foundation) are invited to attend the appeal hearing and all parties (including the person hearing the appeal) should be issued with relevant documentation (anything on record which it is anticipated will be referred to in the hearing) no less than five working days in advance of the hearing.
- 12.5 The Foundation will normally extend to the complainant the right to be accompanied in an appeal hearing, although this right will be restricted to a relative or friend of the complainant, rather than a legal (or media) representative.
- 12.6 The letter of invitation to the appeal hearing should state that due consideration will be given to any relevant disabilities which might affect the complainant's ability to attend or partake in the hearing, such as communication issues or impairment of mobility.
- 12.7 The letter of invitation should also make clear that the complainant may (if unwilling or unable to attend the appeal hearing in person) elect to submit a written statement for consideration in their absence.

- 12.8 The letter of invitation should additionally make clear that if the complainant fails to respond by confirming their intention (either to attend the hearing or to elect to have the complaint heard in their absence) the complaint will not be investigated further, in which event the process will cease at this point.
- 12.9 The appeal hearing will be held within the Foundation (unless a suitable alternative venue is agreed by all parties) and will be minuted (normally by the Governance Professional). The person hearing the appeal should conduct the meeting in accordance with the guidance set out in Appendix 3.
- 12.10 The aim of the appeal hearing is to resolve the complaint impartially and to achieve reconciliation between the Foundation and the complainant. All parties will be notified in writing of the outcome of the appeal within five working days of the date of the hearing.
- 12.11 This is the last stage of the Foundation’s complaints procedure, and the decision of the independent appeal is final.

13. Publishing complaints procedures

- 13.1 Under Section 29(1)(b) of the Education Act 2002, the Foundation must publicise their complaints procedures and, in this context, it is normally expected that The William Henry Smith Foundation will publish their complaints policy on their website.

14. Documentation of complaints

- 14.1 A written record will be kept of all formal complaints, and this will specify, firstly, whether they are resolved following a formal procedure (Stage 1), a formal review (Stage 2) or proceed to an appeal hearing (Stage 3), and, secondly, will record any action taken by the Foundation in response to complaints submitted (regardless of whether they are upheld).
- 14.2 Any findings of an appeal hearing (and/or recommendations made as an outcome of an appeal hearing) will be provided to the complainant (and, where relevant, to the individual or body complained about) and will be made available for inspection on the Foundation premises by the CEO and the governing body.
- 14.3 All documentation (correspondence, statements and any other records, whether in electronic format or hard copy) relating to individual complaints of a formal nature will be stored in an appropriate manner and will be kept confidential, other than as specifically stated above and/or where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under relevant legislation requests access to them.
- 14.4 Should the complainant make a request to record the proceedings of the Stage 3 hearing by use of an electronic recording device (such as a mobile phone) it is at the discretion of the Foundation whether to permit this, and a decision to do so would require the agreement of all parties.
- 14.5 Given (understandable) concern that such recordings may be lost, leaked, or even subsequently edited by third parties prior to wider (external) distribution the Foundation will not normally accede to such requests, although consideration will be given to whether this might constitute a reasonable adjustment should the complainant be disadvantaged by, for instance, communication difficulties.

- 14.6 Should permission be given to record such a hearing, considerable care must be taken to ensure that the interests of persons who may be rendered identifiable during the proceedings (including those who may not themselves be present) are safeguarded appropriately.
- 14.7 It is advisable to make clear to complainants that covert recording of proceedings is not permitted, and that any material obtained by such means will not be admissible at any stage of the complaints procedure.

15. Complaints unresolved at conclusion of process

- 15.1 There will be occasions when, despite all stages of the procedures having been followed, the complainant remains dissatisfied. If the complainant attempts to reopen the same issue following the appeal hearing, the chair of the governing body should inform them in writing that the procedure has been exhausted and that the matter is now closed.

16. Other policies and procedures

- 15.1 This policy will be supported by the following policies and procedures:
- Disciplinary Policy
 - Grievance Policy

Appendix 1: Complaint Form

Please complete and return to a member of the Executive Leadership Team who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

Executive Leadership Team

Head of School: Karl.adamski@whsfoundation.org.uk

Deputy Principal: Damien.talbot@whsfoundation.org.uk
(Residential Care/Safeguarding)

Deputy Principal: Leanne.clarke@whsfoundation.org.uk
(Further Education)

Your name:

Student's name:

Your relationship to the Student:

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:

Appendix 2: Guidance for staff investigating a complaint

It is suggested that, at each stage, the person investigating the complaint* makes sure that they:

- establish **what** has happened so far, and **who** has been involved
- take details of the complaint to clarify the nature of the complaint and what remains unresolved
- meet with the complainant or contact them (if unsure or if further information is necessary)
- clarify what the complainant feels would put things right
- interview all persons identified by the complainant as being relevant to the matter (and any others deemed appropriate) allowing them to be accompanied if they wish
- conduct such interviews with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning if felt necessary or appropriate
- keep notes of all interviews undertaken.

An appointment to discuss the issue, if deemed appropriate, should normally be offered as quickly as possible, as this will give both parties time to talk about it calmly and politely without being interrupted. Complaints need to be considered and resolved as quickly and efficiently as possible. However, where further investigation is necessary, new time limits can be set and the complainant sent details of the new deadline and an explanation for any consequent delay.

It is appropriate to consider ways in which a complaint could be resolved at each individual stage of the procedure, and it may be instructive to encourage complainants to state what actions they feel might resolve the problem at any stage.

It may be sufficient to acknowledge that the complaint is valid in whole or in part and, in addition, it may be appropriate to offer one or more of the following:

- an explanation
- an apology
- an assurance that the event complained of will not happen again
- an explanation of the steps that have been taken[†] to ensure that there will be no recurrence
- an undertaking to review Foundation policies and/or procedures in the light of the complaint and, if found appropriate, to modify practice and protocols accordingly
- an admission that the situation could (or should) have been handled differently, or better (this is not the same as an admission of negligence).

An effective complaints procedure will identify areas of agreement between the parties. It is also of equal importance to clarify any misunderstandings that might have occurred as this can create a more positive atmosphere in which to discuss any outstanding issues.

**All staff investigating a complaint should have received (through CPD) appropriate instruction on how to conduct an enquiry and respond to the complainant in an appropriate manner.*

[†]*If a complaint is upheld which does lead to disciplinary action being taken against a member of staff, such detailed information cannot be divulged to the complainant – the latter should merely be informed that “**appropriate management action has been taken**”.*

Appendix 3: Guidance for appeal hearing

It is important that the appeal hearing is independent and impartial. No individual may hear an appeal if they have had prior involvement in the circumstances surrounding the complaint, and accordingly an appeal can only be heard by an individual (an 'independent person') who has had no direct involvement in any matter detailed in the complaint and who is not, and who never has been, a staff member or governor of the school, or a parent of a child registered at the Foundation.

The aim of the hearing, which should be held in private, is to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the Foundation and the complainant. However, it must be recognised that the complainant may not be satisfied with the outcome if the hearing does not find in their favour. It may only be possible to establish the facts and to make recommendations which will satisfy the complainant that their complaint has been addressed seriously.

It is acknowledged that many complainants feel nervous and inhibited in a formal setting. Parents often feel emotional when discussing an issue that affects their child. The parent or carer may, should they wish, be accompanied at the hearing. The individual hearing the appeal will ensure that the proceedings are as welcoming as possible. The layout of the room will set the tone and care is needed to ensure the setting is informal and not adversarial.

The role of the Governance Professional

The Governance Professional is the contact point for the complainant and is required to:

- ensure that the individual who is to hear the appeal is wholly independent of the Foundation and has no detailed prior knowledge of the complaint
- 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
- ensure that the letter inviting the parent/carers to attend should indicate that they may be accompanied by a friend or relative
- 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
- minute the proceedings, listing who is present, and make everyone aware of the confidential nature of the process
- notify all parties (following conclusion of the hearing) of the outcome of the appeal

At the meeting:

- the person hearing the appeal (hereinafter referred to as the chair) will be completely independent of the Foundation
- the chair will be accompanied the Governance Professional
- although this is a formal meeting, every effort should be made to make it seem as informal as possible to all concerned with the parent or carer put at ease – the parent or carer may, should they wish, be accompanied at the hearing
- the chair should open the meeting, ensuring that any necessary introductions are made before stating the purpose and the format of the meeting and thus clarifying process to all in attendance
- the chair should intimate that the meeting will be minuted and that its outcome will be final, whilst indicating that a written record of the complaint and its outcome will be forwarded to the complainant in due course

- the chair should clarify the position in relation to recording the hearing, and emphasise that covert recording is not permissible
- the chair should request a verbal statement from the complainant in support of his or her written letter of complaint to clarify why they feel the issue has not yet been resolved to their satisfaction
- the chair may ask questions to make sure they understand the complainant's point of view is understood
- the chair should request a verbal statement from the principal (or his or her representative) in support of his or her written account of the complaint and the steps taken in an attempt to resolve the issue
- the chair may ask questions to make sure they understand the issue from the principal's (or Foundation's) point of view
- the chair must ask, in turn, the complainant and the principal (or their representative) whether they are satisfied that they have provided all the information they wanted to present or if there is anything further that they wish to add
- the chair should also ascertain whether the complainant feels they have had a fair hearing
- when all the above points have been covered, the chair will ask all parties (except the clerk) to leave

After the meeting:

- the chair will need to consider the information presented in the meeting in order to come to a decision and suggest a way to resolve the issue, taking into full account the best interests of the child or children and young people concerned
- the chair will consider the issues in private (although the clerk will remain to record their decision)
- the chair can decide to:
 - dismiss the complaint in whole or in part
 - uphold the complaint in whole or in part
 - decide on any appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint
 - recommend changes to the Foundation's systems or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not recur
- once the chair has reached a determination the clerk will inform everyone concerned in writing as soon as possible but in any event within five working days of the meeting
- the outcome letter will also contain advice as to what the complainant should do if they wish to take the matter further, although it should be noted that (as long as the correct procedure has been followed) the decision of the chair will be final
- a record must be kept of the outcome of the hearing
- written records of complaints will be maintained and reported annually to governors