



**Wonder**  
Learning Partnership  
Educate | Empower | Engage | Enrich

## Complaints Policy

**This policy is applicable to the Wonder Learning Partnership (WLP)**

**Important:** This document can only be considered valid when viewed on the school website. If this document has been printed or saved to another location, you must check that the version number on your copy matches that of the document online.

<b>Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Approved:</b>	Summer Term 2026
<b>Name of Responsible Committee/Individual:</b>	LGC & Board of Trustees
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## Introduction

All schools are required under Section 29 of the Education Act 2002 to have a complaints procedure in place and to follow it. At Wonder Learning Partnership we recognise that complaints may be made at a school and trust level. This policy sets out Wonder's approach to dealing with complaints at both a school and trust level.

We believe this procedure should be used for dealing with most complaints. However, there are some complaints that may be outside the remit of this policy, for example, staff grievance or disciplinary matters.

### 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.' Concerns can be raised verbally or in writing. They are taken seriously by the Wonder Learning Partnership and are dealt with by the school informally outside of this policy.

A **complaint** may be defined as 'an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action.' For the purposes of this policy, complaints must satisfy the following:

- Be made in writing to the headteacher or equivalent, via the school office
- Be clearly marked as a 'complaint' in the written communication
- Be **either** submitted on the form included in Appendix A **or** provide the same information requested on the form
- Be specific about the focus/foci of the complaint and the actions the complainant would like to see take place to resolve the complaint.

The schools in the Wonder Learning Partnership take complaints seriously and will make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible and to the satisfaction of the complainant. If a complainant has difficulty discussing a complaint with a particular colleague, we will respect these views. In these cases, the Executive Headteacher/Headteacher/Head of School will refer the complainant to another colleague who is able to consider the concern objectively and impartially. The colleague may be more senior but does not have to be.

We understand, however, that there are occasions when people would like to raise their complaints formally. In this case, schools in the Wonder Learning Partnership will attempt to resolve the issue internally, through the stages outlined within this Complaints Policy

## Principals

**This policy sets out to:**

- Encourage resolution of problems by informal means wherever possible.
- Be easily accessible and publicised.

- Be simple to understand and use.
- Be impartial.
- Be non-adversarial.
- Allow swift handling with established time-limits for action and keeping people informed of the progress.
- Ensure a full and fair investigation by an independent person where necessary.
- Respect people's desire for confidentiality.
- Address all the points at issue and provide an effective response and appropriate redress, where necessary.
- Provide information to the school's senior leadership team so that services can be improved.

### **How to make a complaint**

A complaint must be made in writing (letter or email). They may also be made in writing by a third party acting on behalf of a complainant, as long as they have appropriate consent to do so.

Complaints against school staff (except the Executive Headteacher / Headteacher / Head of School) should be made in the first instance, to the relevant school's Executive Headteacher / Headteacher / Head of School via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Complaints that involve or are about the Executive Headteacher / Headteacher / Head of School should be addressed to the Executive Assistant to the Chief Executive Officer (18 Market Place, Malton, YO17 7LX) and forwarded to the school's Chair of Governors (with a copy provided to the Chief Executive Officer), 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 Executive Assistant to the Chief Executive Officer (18 Market Place, Malton, YO17 7LX) and forwarded to the school's Chair of Governors (with a copy provided to the Chair of the Trust), via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Complaints about a member of the Partnership Services Team should be addressed to the Executive Assistant for the attention of the Chief Executive Officer via the Trust Office (18 Market Place, Malton, YO17 7LX). Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Complaints about a Trustee (Executive or non-Executive) of the Trust should be addressed to the Chair of the Trust, via the Trust Office (18 Market Place, Malton, YO17 7LX). Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Contact details for the school and Trust are available on our website.

For ease of use, a template complaint form is included at the end of this policy (appendix A). If you require help in completing the form, please contact the school office. You can also ask a third-party organisation, for example, like the Citizens Advice, to help you.

Please contact us if you require information in alternative formats, or assistance in raising a formal complaint. This includes if you may need meetings to be held in accessible locations.

### **Actioning a complaint**

A complaint will be initially actioned by a nominated colleague within the school. This will not be the Executive Headteacher/Headteacher/Head of School but a classroom teacher (primary), pastoral leader (secondary), middle leader or senior leader, who knows your child best. If a satisfactory outcome cannot be agreed by all parties, then the complaint will be escalated to a senior colleague within the school and follow the process as outlined in this policy.

### **Anonymous or persistent/vexatious complaints or harassment**

We will not investigate anonymous complaints.

We acknowledge that there may be rare occasions when, despite all stages of the policy having been followed, the complainant remains dissatisfied. If, after the complaint has been concluded, the complainant tries to reopen the same issue, the Chair of the Local Governing Committee or Chair of the Trust is able to inform them in writing (via letter) that the procedure has been exhausted and that the matter is now closed.

However, this only applies to complainants who may be vexatious, not the complaint. Please see Appendix D the Trust Persistent/Vexatious Complaints/Harassment Policy. Any new complaints will be investigated in line with the procedure below.

### **Unacceptable conduct**

The school welcomes the expressions of concerns, the receipt of complaints and will work with parents and colleagues to reach a productive outcome that addresses the needs of the child, resolves the issues identified and allows all to refocus on moving forward positively.

The school though will, if the complainant is rude, seeks to intimidate or threaten a colleague, request a parental agreement be imposed, that will clearly outline acceptable standards of conduct and place safeguards in place to protect the wellbeing and health of our colleagues. If matters persist, the school will refer the matter to the Trust.

It should be noted that should a parent feel strongly about a matter that further complaints as set out within this policy can be made to the Department for Education and Ofsted if the desired outcome cannot be achieved by the complainant. It would, though, be inappropriate for parents to seek to threaten members of staff with this outcome as a punishment, or to arrive at the school unannounced with the intent of forcing individuals to leave teaching classes or meetings, to disrupt the running of the school.

## Timescales

We ask that complaints are raised within thirty school days of the incident (if relevant). We will not consider complaints made outside of this time-frame.

If a complaint or response to school communication regarding an ongoing complaint is received outside of term-time, we will consider the complaint or response to have been received on the first school day after the holiday period.

## Scope

This policy covers all complaints about any provision of community facilities or services of the schools in the Wonder Learning Partnership, 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: <a href="http://www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions">www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions</a> . *complaints about the application of the behaviour policy can be made through the school's complaints procedure.
Whistleblowing	Definition of Whistleblowing is the activity of a person, often an employee, revealing information about activity within a private or public organisation that is deemed illegal, immoral, illicit, unsafe, or fraudulent. 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: <a href="http://www.education.gov.uk/contactus">www.education.gov.uk/contactus</a> . 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

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. 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 a school in the Trust or the Trust as a whole in relation to their complaint, we will consider whether to suspend the complaints procedure until those legal proceedings have been concluded.

### **Resolving complaints**

Following an investigation, we will acknowledge whether 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 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
- an apology

If the complainant believes the school or Trust did not handle the 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 Department for Education after they have completed Stage 4.

The Department for Education will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by the Wonder Learning Partnership. They will consider whether the investigation 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 DfE online at: [www.education.gov.uk/contactus](http://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

## **Withdrawing complaints**

A complainant can withdraw their complaint at any time. If a complainant wants to withdraw their complaint, we will ask them to confirm this in writing and submit this in the same way as detailed in Section 7.

## **The complaints process**

### **Stage 1 – Informal Complaints**

It is to be hoped that most complaints can be expressed and resolved on an informal basis. As a result, anyone with a complaint is encouraged to raise their complaint, either personally or through someone else.

It should be noted that schools and the Trust will need to remove a class teacher or senior leader from their responsibilities to undertake a formal complaint, therefore, if matters can be resolved informally the impact upon other children and the teaching will be lessened. We would, therefore, ask for your understanding in seeking a quick and informal resolution.

Prior to submitting a written complaint, we encourage parents and carers to make direct contact with the school to resolve their concerns informally.

Complaints must be addressed and submitted to the Headteacher / Executive Headteacher / Head of School, as detailed in Section 7. This may be done in writing using the Complaint Form which is attached as Appendix A.

We ask that individuals with a complaint do not approach individual governors to raise these concerns. This is because they have no power to act on an individual basis and it may also prevent them from considering the issue if it is escalated to Stage 3 of the procedure. Where the complaint is in relation to the Partnership Services Team, this can be raised with the COO/CEO. Everything possible should be done at this stage to resolve the matter.

At the conclusion of their investigation, the appropriate person investigating the complaint will provide an informal written response within ten school days of the date of receipt of the complaint. This informal response will always be documented and may be an email or letter.

If no response is received from the complainant within 5 working days (including holidays), the school will close the complaint. If, within 5 working days, the complainant responds in

writing expressing dissatisfaction with the school response, the next step is to escalate this informal complaint to a formal complaint.

## Stage 2 – Formal Complaints

A request to escalate to Stage 2, the start of the formal process, must be made within **5 working days** (including holidays) of receipt of the Stage 1 response.

The school 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 investigating officer will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint based on the information they have received on the form. This may involve telephone communication. They may ask what remains unresolved and what the complainant's preferred outcome is. The investigating officer may also consider whether a face-to-face meeting is appropriate and will do so by considering the complexity of the complaint.

During the investigation, the investigating officer will:

- Review any previous attempts to resolve the complaint, if the complainant has previously escalated the complaint as a concern, at Stage 1.
- if necessary, will 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 the investigation, the investigating officer will provide a formal written response within fifteen school days of the date of receipt of the complaint.

The formal 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 already taken, or actions that will be taken to resolve the complaint.

Complaints about the conduct of an individual member of staff will not generally be handled under this Complaints procedure. Complainants will be advised that any complaints received regarding staff conduct will be considered under staff disciplinary procedures at this time, but progress updates and outcomes will not be shared and therefore the matter will remain under the oversight of the appropriate named individual or body. The complainant will, therefore, be informed of this fact, the Trust Director of People, Culture and Performance informed and the complaint will be closed.

If the investigating officer is unable to meet this deadline, they will provide the complainant with an update and revised response date. We acknowledge that complaints can cause anxiety for both the complainant and those involved in the complaint. To this end, we will always try to resolve the complaint in a timely manner and will extend the deadline by no more than **twenty school days**.

As part of the formal response, the investigating officer will always advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 2. If no response is received from the complainant within **5 working days** (including holidays), the school will close the complaint.

### Stage 3: Formal Complaints

In a small number of cases, the matter may not be resolved at Stage 2. When this happens, a request to escalate to Stage 3, the start of the formal process, must be made within **5 working days** (including holidays) of receipt of the Stage 2 response. The school will record the date the response is received and will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within **10 school days**.

The complainant should detail in writing why they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of the complaint. The complainant should submit their concerns using the details, as set out in Section 7. A request to escalate to Stage 3 must be made within five school days of receipt of the Stage 2 response.

At this stage, the complaint will be brokered to a new investigating officer who will then review the decision made at Stage 2. This may also require the Stage 3 investigating officer to contact the complainant to clarify why they are not satisfied with the decision at Stage 2. We may ask for further information or undertake additional investigations, as necessary. Stage 3 aims to determine whether previous due process has been carried out and whether the outcomes are Stage 2 remain upheld or need to change as a result.

Stage 3 complaints will ordinarily be concluded within twenty school days from receipt of written confirmation from the complainant that they wish to escalate to stage 3. In more complex cases, or if a longer period of time is required, the complainant will be informed, in writing (via letter) of the reasons for this and provided with a revised timescale. We will aim to extend the deadline by no more than twenty school days.

At the conclusion of stage 3, feedback to the complainant may take place in a meeting, but a formal response in writing will also be given. If no response is received from the complainant within **5 working days** (including holidays), the school will close the complaint.

### Stage 4: Panel Hearing

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome at Stage 3 and wishes to take the matter further, they can escalate the complaint to Stage 4 – a panel hearing consisting of at least three members who are not employees and 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 4 must be made, via the Trust office, within **5 working days** receipt of the Stage 3 response.

The date the complaint is received will be recorded by the Clerk, and receipt acknowledged in writing (either by letter or email) within 5 school days.

Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.

The Clerk will write to the complainant to inform them of the date of the meeting. They will aim to convene a meeting within twenty school days of receipt of the Stage 4 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.

Only if the complaint is:

- about the school Chair and the Vice Chair of the Trust (combined) or
- the entire school governing body or
- the majority of the school governing body

will Stage 4 will be heard by the Trustees and an independent panel member.

A complainant may bring someone along to the panel meeting to provide support. This can be a relative or friend. Generally, we do not encourage either party to bring legal representatives to the committee meeting. However, there may be occasions when legal representation is appropriate.

For instance, if a school employee is called as a witness in a complaint meeting, they may wish to be supported by union and/or legal representation.

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

At least **seven school days** before the meeting, the Clerk will:

- confirm and notify the complainant of the date, time, and venue of the meeting, ensuring that, if the complainant is invited, the dates are convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible
- request copies of any further written material to be submitted to the panel at least three school days before the meeting.

Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least two school days before the date of the meeting. The panel will not normally accept, as evidence, recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded. The panel meeting will broadly follow the agenda as set out in **Appendix B**.

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

The panel will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented. The panel 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 the school to whom the complaint was made with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within ten school days.

The letter to the complainant will include details of how to contact the Department for Education if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled by the school.

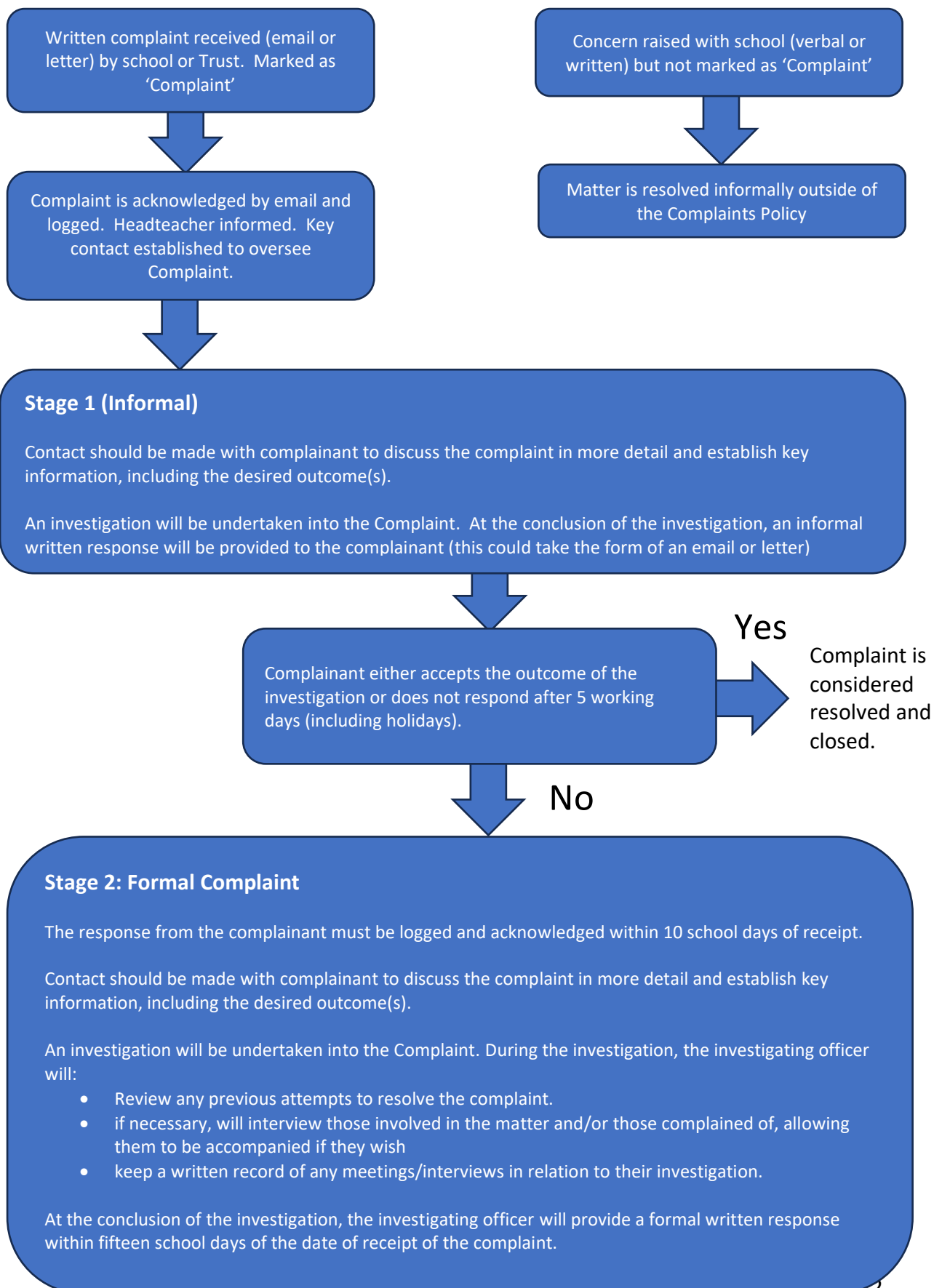
The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions the school will take to resolve the complaint.

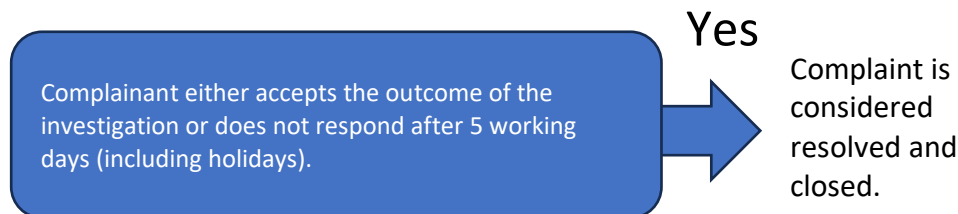
The panel will ensure that those findings and recommendations are sent by electronic mail or otherwise given to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about. Furthermore, they will be retained, securely and confidentially for inspection on the school premises.

A written record will be kept of all complaints, and of whether they are resolved at the preliminary stage or proceed to a panel hearing, along with what actions have been taken, regardless of the decision.

All correspondence statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential, except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the 2008 Act requests access to them.

## Appendix A – Complaints Process





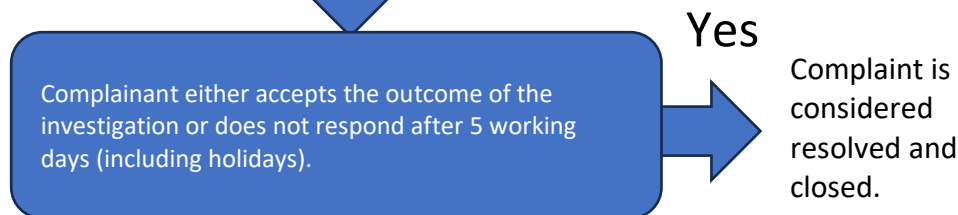
### Stage 3: Formal Complaint (escalated)

The response from the complainant must be logged and acknowledged within 10 school days of receipt.

A new investigating officer must be appointed to investigate the complaint. The investigating officer will review the investigation, decision(s) and outcome(s) established during the Stage 2 investigation. As part of this process, the investigating officer may make contact with the complainant to seek more information and detail.

The investigation should normally be completed within 20 school days of receipt of the initial response escalating to Stage 3.

At the conclusion of stage 3, feedback to the complainant may take place in a meeting, but a formal response in writing will also be given.



### Stage 4: Panel Hearing

The response from the complainant must be logged and acknowledged within 10 school days of receipt.

A panel hearing must be convened, consisting of at least three members who are not employees and 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. At least seven school days before the meeting, the Clerk will:

- confirm and notify the complainant of the date, time, and venue of the meeting, ensuring that, if the complainant is invited, the dates are convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible
- request copies of any further written material to be submitted to the panel at least three school days before the meeting.

The chair of the panel will provide the complainant and the school to whom the complaint was made with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within 10 school days. The letter to the complainant will include details of how to contact the Department for Education if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled by the school.



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What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage (maximum of 100 words)?  
Please enter in the box below

--

Are you attaching any documents that are relevant to the process? If so, please give details.

Signature:

Date:

## Appendix C – Sample Panel Agenda

A Hearing by the Complaints Appeals Panel of (Name of School) Local Governing Committee will be held at (insert venue) on (insert date) at (insert time)

The order of business for the hearing is set out below:

1. Introductions.
2. The Chair to outline the procedure.
3. (Name of complainant) to explain his/her\* complaint.
4. Through the Chair, the Executive Headteacher/Headteacher/Head of School and the Panel may ask questions.
5. Executive Headteacher/Headteacher/Head of School to explain the school's response.
6. Through the Chair, (Name of complainant) and the Panel may ask questions.
7. The Executive Headteacher/Headteacher/Head of School to make a statement in summary.
8. (Name of complainant) makes a statement in summary.
9. All, with the exception of the Panel and the Clerk to leave whilst the Panel considers its decision. Written notice of the decision will be sent to the Complainant and the Executive Headteacher/ Headteacher/ Head of School within 5 school working days of the hearing.
10. The Panel will then consider the complaint in private session.

Clerk to the Committee of (Name of school) Local Governing Committee

Enclosures: List all the enclosures to accompany the agenda e.g.:

- A copy of the Complaints Policy.
- A copy of the original complaint and concern (if raised at Stage 1).
- Copies of letters / documents between the complainant and the school in connection with the complaint.
- Copy of written submissions from the complainant and the Executive Headteacher/Headteacher/ Head of School.
- Any relevant guidance.

## Appendix D – Sample Panel Agenda

### C1. Complainant

The complainant will receive a more effective response to the complaint if they:

Explain the complaint in full as early as possible.

Co-operate with the school in seeking a solution to the complaint.

Respond promptly to requests for information or meetings or in agreeing the details of the complaint.

Ask for assistance as needed.

Treat all those involved in the complaint with respect.

Refrain from publicising the details of their complaint on social media and respect confidentiality.

### C2. Investigator

The investigator's role is to establish the facts relevant to the complaint by:

- Providing a comprehensive, open, transparent, and fair consideration of the complaint through:
  - Sensitive and thorough interviewing of the complainant to establish what has happened and who has been involved.
  - Interviewing staff and children/young people and other people relevant to the complaint
  - Consideration of records and other relevant information.
  - Analysing information.
- Liaising with the complainant and the complaints coordinator as appropriate to clarify what the complainant feels would put things right.

#### The investigator should:

- Conduct interviews with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning.
- Keep notes of interviews or arrange for an independent note taker to record minutes of the meeting.
- Ensure that any papers produced during the investigation are kept securely pending any appeal.
- Be mindful of the timescales to respond.
- Prepare a comprehensive report for the Executive Headteacher/ Headteacher/Head of School or complaints committee that sets out the facts, identifies solutions and recommends courses of action to resolve problems.
- The Executive Headteacher/Headteacher/Head of School or complaints committee will then determine whether to uphold or dismiss the complaint and communicate that decision to the complainant, providing the appropriate escalation details.

### C3. Clerk to the Governing Body / Trust Board

The Clerk is the contact point for the complainant and the panel and should:

- Ensure that all people involved in the complaint procedure are aware of their legal rights and duties, including any under legislation relating to school complaints, education law, the Equality Act 2010, the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act (DPA) 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR).
- Set the date, time, and venue of the meeting, ensuring that the dates are convenient to all parties (if they are invited to attend) and that the venue and proceedings are accessible.
- Collate any written material relevant to the complaint (for example: stage 1 paperwork, school, and complainant submissions) and send it to the parties in advance of the meeting within an agreed timescale.
- Record the proceedings.
- Circulate the minutes of the meeting.
- Notify all parties of the panel's decision.

#### **C4. Panel Chair**

The committee's chair, who is nominated in advance of the complaint meeting, should ensure that:

- Both parties are asked (via the Clerk) to provide any additional information relating to the complaint by a specified date in advance of the meeting.
- The meeting is conducted in an informal manner, is not adversarial, and that, if all parties are invited to attend, everyone is treated with respect and courtesy.
- Complainants who may not be used to speaking at such a meeting are put at ease. This is particularly important if the complainant is a child/young person.
- The remit of the panel is explained to the complainant.
- Written material is seen by everyone in attendance, provided it does not breach confidentiality or any individual's rights to privacy under the DPA 2018 or GDPR.
- If a new issue arises it would be useful to give everyone the opportunity to consider and comment upon it; this may require a short adjournment of the meeting.
- Both the complainant and the school are given the opportunity to make their case and seek clarity, either through written submissions ahead of the meeting or verbally in the meeting itself.
- The issues are addressed.
- Key findings of fact are made.
- The committee is open-minded and acts independently.
- No member of the panel has an external interest in the outcome of the proceedings or any involvement in an earlier stage of the procedure.
- The meeting is minuted.
- They liaise with the Clerk.

#### **C5. Panel Member**

Panel members should be aware that:

- The meeting must be independent and impartial and should be seen to be so.
- No governor / trustee may sit on the panel if they have had a prior involvement in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it.
- The aim of the meeting should be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant.
- We recognise that the complainant might not be satisfied with the outcome if the meeting does not find in their favour. It may only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations.
- Many complainants will feel nervous and inhibited in a formal setting.
- Parents/carers often feel emotional when discussing an issue that affects their child.
- Extra care needs to be taken when the complainant is a child/young person and present during all or part of the meeting.

Careful consideration of the atmosphere and proceedings should ensure that the child/young person does not feel intimidated.

The panel should respect the views of the child/young person and give them equal consideration to those of adults.

If the child/young person is the complainant, the panel should ask in advance if any support is needed to help them present their complaint. Where the child/young person's parent is the complainant, the panel should give the parent the opportunity to say which parts of the meeting, if any, the child/young person needs to attend.

However, the parent should be advised that agreement might not always be possible if the parent wishes the child/young person to attend a part of the meeting that the panel considers is not in the child/young person's best interests. The welfare of the child/young person is paramount.

## Appendix E – Trust Persistent/Vexatious Complaints/Harassment Policy

The aims of this policy are to:

- Uphold the standards of courtesy and reasonableness that should characterise all communication between the school and persons who wish to express a concern or pursue a complaint.
- Support the wellbeing of children, staff and everyone else who has legitimate interest in the work of the Trust, school, including trustees, governors and parents.
- Deal fairly, honestly, openly and transparently with those who make persistent or vexatious complaints and those who harass members of staff in school while ensuring that other stakeholders suffer no detriment.
- Ensure a consistency in approach with parents that are being seen to be unreasonable.

Schools in the Wonder Learning Partnership expect parents/carers/members of the public who wish to raise concerns or complaints to:

- Treat all school staff with courtesy and respect.
- Respect the needs and well-being of children and staff in the school.
- Avoid any use, or threatened use, of violence to people or property.
- Avoid any aggression or verbal abuse.
- Recognise the time constraints under which members of staff in schools work and allow the school a reasonable time to respond.
- Recognise that resolving a specific problem can sometimes take some time.
- In the case of a complaint follow the school's complaints procedure.
- Avoid unnecessary escalation prior to exhausting the school's complaints procedure.
- Not to discuss the complaint with unauthorised / unofficial third parties, e.g. social media, other pupils/students and their parents.

Who is a persistent complainant?

For the purpose of this policy, a persistent complainant is a parent/carer/member of the public who complains about issues, either formally or informally, or frequently raises issues that the complainant considers to be within the remit of the school, and whose behaviour is unreasonable.

Such behaviour may be characterised by:

- Frequently complaining about a variety of different things, or the same issue, through a number of different channels in an obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific and/or repetitious manner.
- Seeking unrealistic outcomes relative to the issue being raised and stating that their intention is to persist until that outcome is achieved.
- Insisting upon pursuing valid complaints in an unreasonable manner.

- Persistently making the same complaint with minor differences but never accepting the outcome of any investigation into their complaint.
- Challenging a historical decision/action which cannot be changed.
- Contacting the school frequently in a lengthy and/or complicated way.
- Behaving aggressive and provocative towards the school and/or individual members of staff. Changing aspects of the complaint or the desired outcome part way through the investigation and/or after the investigation is completed and a conclusion has been reached.
- Refusing to co-operate with the investigation process.
- Insisting on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the adopted procedure or with good practice.
- Making what appear to be groundless complaints about the staff dealing with the complaint and seeking to have them replaced by someone more senior or with a person the complainant names.
- Refusing to accept information provided, for no justifiable reason.
- Making statements the complainant knows are not true or persuading others to do so.
- Supplying manufactured 'evidence' or other information the complainant knows is incorrect.
- Raising a large number of detailed but unimportant questions and insisting that they are all fully answered.
- Lodging a number of complaints in batches over a period of time, resulting in related complaints being at differing stages of the complaints procedure.
- Pressing for further investigation of matters that have already been addressed.
- Electronically recording meetings and conversations without the prior knowledge and consent of the other persons involved.
- Using obscene, racist, offensive or threatening language in written or verbal communications.
- Threatening or aggressive or abusive behaviour in direct personal contact with staff.
- Using the vehicle of valid new complaints to resurrect issues which were included in previous complaints; and/or
- Persistently sending communications which demand responses or making telephone calls seeking interviews.
- With staff, after the school has closed the investigation into a complaint and all rights of review and appeal have been exhausted.
- Uses freedom of information and/or subject access requests excessively and unreasonably.
- Insistent on only dealing with the Executive Headteacher/ Headteacher/ Head of School on all occasions irrespective of the issue and the level of delegation in the school to deal with such matters;
- Insistent upon repeatedly pursuing a complaint when the outcome is not satisfactory to the complainant but cannot be changed.

For the purpose of this policy, harassment is the unreasonable pursuit of such actions outlined in the points above in such a way that they:

- Appear to be targeted over a significant period of time on one or more members of school staff and/or
- Cause ongoing distress to individual member(s) of school staff and/or
- Have a significant adverse effect on the whole/parts of the school community and/or
- Are pursued in a manner which can be perceived as intimidating and oppressive by the recipient. This could include situations where persistent demands and criticisms, whilst not particularly taxing or serious when viewed in isolation, have a cumulative effect over time of undermining confidence, well being and health.

**Our strategy for dealing with persistent or vexatious complainants:**

In the first instance, we will verbally inform the complainant that his/her behaviour is considered to be becoming unreasonable/unacceptable and, if it is not modified, action may be taken in accordance with this policy. This will be confirmed in writing (Model 1 letter).

If the behaviour is not modified the school will take some or all of the following actions as necessary, having regard to the nature of the complainant's behaviour and the effect of this on the school community:

- Inform the complainant in writing that his/her behaviour is now considered by the school to be unreasonable/unacceptable and, therefore, to fall under the terms of this policy (see Model Letter 2).
- Inform the complainant that all meetings with a member of staff will be conducted with a second person present and that notes of meetings may be taken in the interests of all parties (see Model Letter 2).
- Inform the complainant that, except in emergencies, all routine communication with the complainant to the school should be by letter only (see Model Letter 2).
- In circumstances considered extreme by the Executive Headteacher/Headteacher/Head of School and CEO of the Trust, a parent or family member may be banned from the school site with immediate effect. This would only happen if staff, pupil or student's safety has been threatened, and the presence of the banned person on site would have a significant repercussion for members of the wider school community.
- Consider taking advice from the LA on pursuing a case under Anti-Harassment legislation.
- Consider taking advice from the HR / Legal Services about putting in place a specific procedure for dealing with complaints from the complainant, i.e. the complainant will not be able to deal directly with the Executive Headteacher/Headteacher/Head of School but only with a third person to be identified by the governing body of the school, who will investigate, determine whether or not the complaint is reasonable or vexatious and then advise the Executive Headteacher/ Headteacher/ Head of School accordingly.
- End conversations/meetings politely if the staff member believes they are being abused or intimidated and re-schedule with another person at the school.

New complaints may still be considered even if the person making them is, or has been, subject to the Policy for Dealing with Persistent or Vexatious Complaints and/or Harassment in Schools. However, the school will be advised by the HR / Legal Services.

### **Reviewing decisions and withdrawing 'Persistent or Vexatious' status**

Each school in the Trust will review as appropriate, and at a minimum once in a school year, any sanctions applied in the context of this policy.

### **Threats to involve the media**

Threats involving the media and/or legal action will be treated respectfully; the school will respond to any letters or approaches from the media or solicitors. The Executive Headteacher/Headteacher/Head of School will contact the Trust Communications Officer in the first instance who will communicate with the Local Authority's Press Office (if needed) when concerned about statements being made to the media, or if they are contacted by the media.

## Model Letter 1: Behaviour is considered to fall below a reasonable/ acceptable standard

Initial letter informing a complainant that his/her behaviour is considered to fall below a reasonable/ acceptable standard

Dear

This letter is to inform you that the school considers your actions in [describe actions, dates, behaviour] on ..... when you ..... to be unreasonable/unacceptable [delete as appropriate].

We would ask you to bear in mind the fact that such behaviour on a school site can be disruptive and distressing to pupils/students, staff, and parents/carers [delete if behaviour complained of did not occur on school site e.g., persistent use of e- mail, verbally abusive telephone calls].

We are aware that you have raised some concerns and would advise you that these are usually dealt with most effectively through the School's Complaints Procedure.

At the moment we are dealing with these issues by [describe actions being taken to resolve concern].

Please note that the Trust's Policy for Dealing with Persistent or Vexatious Complaints/Harassment sets out standards of behaviour expected of all people in their dealings with the School.

These include:

- Behaving reasonably.
- Treating others with courtesy and respect.
- Resolving complaints using the School's Complaints Procedure.
- Avoiding physical and verbal aggression at all times.

The Policy also indicates the steps that we may take if these standards are breached.

These include:

- Making special arrangements for meetings and communication with the school.
- Considering a ban from the school premises.
- Considering legal action.

I would ask that you allow school time to resolve the issues according to the correct procedures and would assure you that we shall take every step to move this process forward as quickly as possible.

Yours sincerely

Insert Name

Executive Headteacher/Headteacher/Head of School (delete as appropriate)

## Model Letter 2: Behaviour considered to fall under the terms of the policy

Informing a complainant that his/her behaviour is now considered to fall under the terms of the policy for dealing with persistent or vexatious complaints/ harassment

Dear

You will recall that I wrote to you on [insert date] telling you that I felt your behaviour was unreasonable.

I am now writing to inform you that in view of your behaviour on [date], when you [describe actions/behaviour] it has been decided that the School's Policy for Dealing with Persistent or Vexatious Complaints/Harassment Policy will apply from the date of this letter.

In the circumstances I have made the following arrangements for your future contact with the school: [\*Delete A or B as applicable]

\*A For the foreseeable future, should you wish to meet with any member of staff, I would ask you to note:

- All routine communication, including any request for a meeting between you and the school, will be by letter only. Letters from you need to be addressed to ..... at the school address; email correspondence will not be responded to.
- An appointment will be arranged and confirmed in writing as soon as possible.
- A third party from the school will be present.
- In the interests of all parties, formal notes of this meeting may be made.

\*B For the foreseeable future, all meetings arising from any written communication with the school will not be conducted by a member of staff but will be conducted by ..... representing the school. I would ask you to note:

- All routine communication, including any request for a meeting between you and the school, will be by letter only. Letters from you need to be addressed to ..... at the school address; email correspondence will not be responded to.
- An appointment will be arranged and confirmed in writing as soon as possible.
- A third party will be present.
- In the interests of all parties, formal notes of this meeting may be made.

Exceptionally, these arrangements do not apply to any emergency involving [insert name of pupil/student] – in which case you should contact the school in the usual way.

While these arrangements are in place, with respect to normal access to information available on Parents' Evenings (if applicable), this will be provided in a summary written report.

These arrangements take effect straightaway. If you wish to make a representation about the contents of this letter, which may include any expressions of regret on your part and any assurances that you are prepared to give about your future good conduct, you can do so by writing to me at the school by [state ten working days from the date of the letter]. If on receipt of your comments I consider that the arrangements outlined above should continue, you will be supplied with details of how to review a circumstance of your case. I do hope that the difficulties we are currently experiencing can soon be resolved.

Yours sincerely

Insert Name

Executive Headteacher/Headteacher/Head of School (delete as appropriate)