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St. Mary's C.E. Infant School

Complaints Policy

(Including the Communication Guide)

St. Mary's Infant school is committed to inspiring every child. We embed the Christian value of love across school life because we believe that a child who feels loved, secure and happy is a learning child. We encourage our children to achieve their potential, develop their talents, celebrate their uniqueness, and rejoice in their relationships with others.

March 2017

It is in everyone's interest that complaints about St. Mary's are resolved at the earliest possible stage. The underlying principle is that concerns ought to be handled, if at all possible, without the need for formal procedures.

St. Mary's is committed to ensuring consistency of treatment and fairness and will abide by all relevant employment and equality legislation.



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St. Mary's staff and governors make every effort to address concerns at an early stage. The school operates an open-door policy and encourages parents to discuss any concerns with class teachers, or an appropriate member of the school staff at the earliest opportunity.

The staff and governors recognise that sometimes however parents may wish to make a more formal complaint and they have therefore adopted the following procedure.

Dealing with concerns at the earliest opportunity

The staff and governors of St. Mary's have produced a communications guide which is available on the website and sets out in detail how to raise any concerns that you may have.

In summary if parents, pupils or members of the public have concerns they should:

1. discuss their concerns with the member of staff most directly involved and, if not satisfied;
2. discuss their concerns with the Headteacher.

Only where both avenues have been tried and found unsatisfactory should the complainant take a complaint to the Governing Body.

Principles informing our complaints procedure

This procedure is designed to:

- 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
- allow a mediation process
- allow for a hearing of a panel of Governors
- respect confidentiality
- address all points of issue, provide an effective response and appropriate redress where necessary
- provide information to the school so that services can be improved

Making a Complaint to the Governing Body

Where informal attempts have been unsuccessful in resolving a complaint, the complainant should write to the Clerk to the Governing Body at the school address. The envelope should be marked '**FOR IMMEDIATE ACTION**'.

The complainant will be asked to complete a complaint form (Annex 1) if they have not already done so. A member of staff or the Clerk will offer to help an individual complete the form if appropriate

On receipt of the complaint form the Chair of Governors (or another governor) will:

- clarify the nature of the complaint and what remains unresolved;
- clarify what the complainant feels would put things right.



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At this point the Chair of Governors will decide whether the complaint should go straight to the governors' complaints panel or whether a mediation stage should be offered. Mediation can only proceed if both the complainant and the Headteacher are willing for it to be tried.

Complainants should be encouraged to state what actions they feel might resolve the problem at any stage. An admission that the school could have handled the situation better is not the same as an admission of negligence.

If mediation is not agreed, or is not successful, the complaint will be considered by the governors' complaints panel.

Governors' Complaints Panel

- The clerk of governors will inform the governing body that a complaint has been received and that it has been passed to a panel to deal with. No further information about the complaint will be shared with other governors.
- The hearing must be independent and impartial and be seen to be so. No governor may sit on the panel if they have had a prior involvement in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it.
- At least one member of the panel will be independent of the management and running of the school, for example a governor at another ODST school.
- The aim of the hearing, which will be held in private, will always be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant.
- The complainant may bring a 'friend' to the Governor Complaints Panel meeting.
- Evidence should be provided to the hearing in writing; the attendance of witnesses is not encouraged.
- The clerk is responsible for obtaining papers setting out the case from both sides, with any supporting evidence. These should be copied and sent to panel members, parent(s) and the Headteacher at least five working days before the hearing. This ensures that everyone has ample time to read and understand the papers.
- The Chair of the Panel will be nominated by the Chair of Governors and is responsible for ensuring that both complainant and Headteacher are given a fair hearing.

The complaints panel can:

- dismiss the complaint in whole or in part;
- uphold the complaint in whole or in part;
- decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint;
- recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to ensure problems of a similar nature do not recur.

It may:

- consider and, if appropriate, criticise the way in which an operational decision was communicated – but it cannot overturn the decision itself;
- consider the thoroughness with which the Headteacher investigated a complaint about a member of staff – but cannot expect the Headteacher to provide details about confidential discussions with that staff member;
- consider the manner in which a complaint about any decision was addressed – but cannot expect the Headteacher to change the decision;
- consider and, if appropriate, identify limitations in a policy or procedures – but cannot make or improve



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policy. (It can, however, recommend that the policy be reviewed by the governing body to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not recur, and individual panel members can subsequently play their part in improving the policy.)

- consider whether it should recommend that the governing body offer appropriate redress.

Format of a Panel Hearing

1. Complainant and Headteacher will enter the room where the hearing is taking place together.
2. The Chair will introduce the panel members and the clerk and outline the process.
3. The complainant is invited to explain the complaint.
4. The Headteacher may question the complainant.
5. The panel will question the complainant.
6. The Headteacher is then invited to explain the school's actions.
7. The complainant may question the Headteacher.
8. The panel will question the Headteacher.
9. The complainant is then invited to sum up their complaint.
10. The Headteacher is then invited to sum up the school's actions and response to the complaint.
11. The Chair explains that both parties will hear from the panel within five working days.
12. The Chair checks that both parties have said all they wanted to say and that they feel they have had a fair hearing. If either party says 'no' the chair should attempt to rectify that before the hearing ends.
13. Both parties leave together leaving the panel to decide on the issues.
14. The clerk will remain with the panel.

Notes

The panel may ask questions at any point if an immediate question will help to clarify a point.

The Headteacher must have no contact with members of the governors' complaints panel except when the complainant is present. This means that the Headteacher and complainant must enter and leave the room where the hearing is held together.

The Chair of the panel should discourage the introduction of fresh documentary evidence at the hearing; there should be every encouragement to produce the evidence in advance so that both sides have time to study it. However, if new and relevant evidence is accepted by the Chair, the Chair will adjourn the hearing for a few minutes to allow everyone to read the document. Both parties must leave the hearing room during the adjournment.

The decision letter

The clerk will ensure that s/he has clear wording stating the panel decision about each of the issues that the panel considered before the panel is allowed to finish.

The clerk will ensure that the letter reaches the complainant and the Headteacher within five working days of the hearing.

Can I take my complaint further?

For most complaints, parents cannot take their appeal further than the LGB and neither ODST (as the employer) nor the Local Authority will investigate school matters on a parent's behalf nor would they review how the school has dealt with a complaint. The only grounds on which ODST may review the LGB panel's



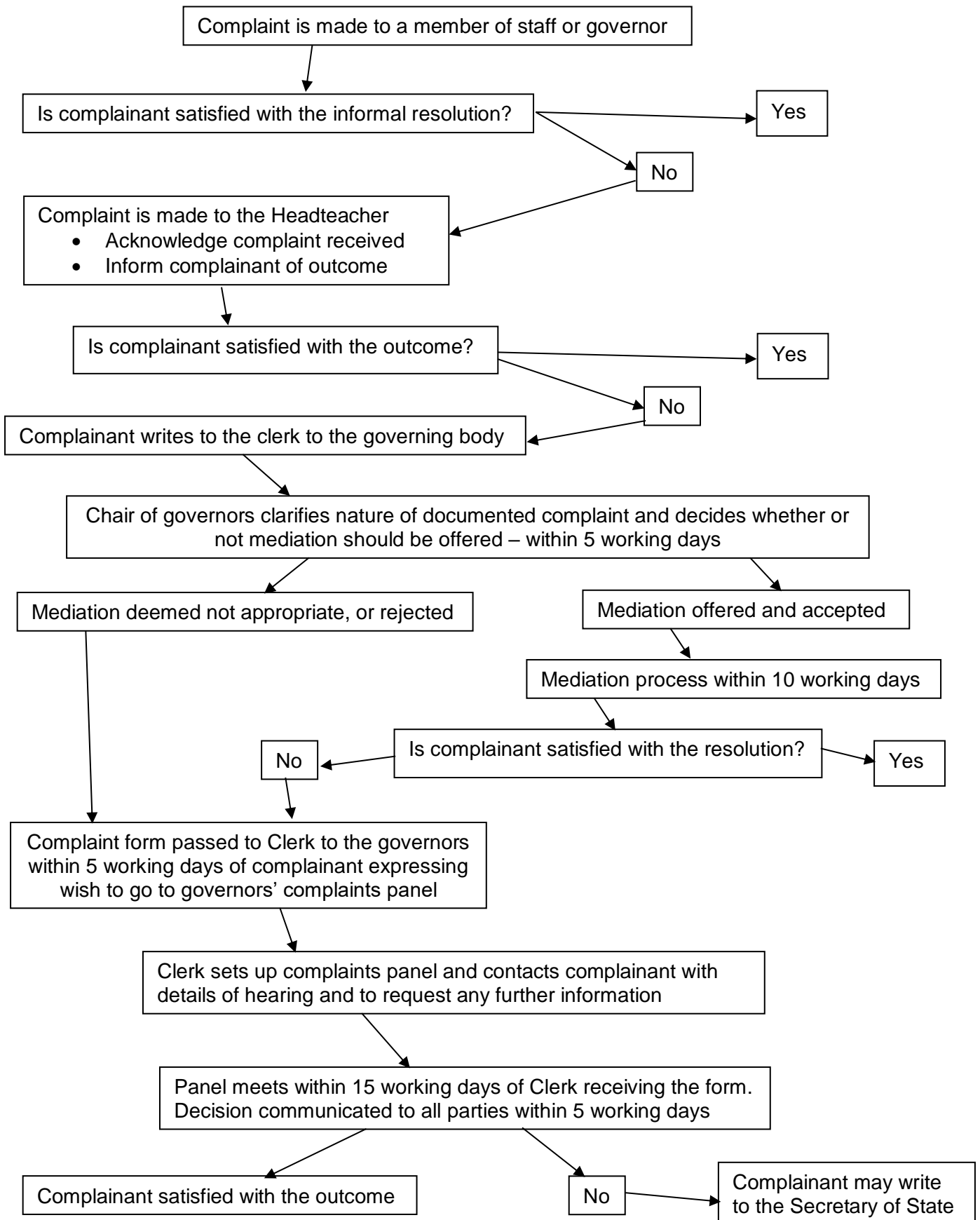
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decision on a complaint are with regard to the tests of illegality, irrationality or procedural impropriety; i.e. ODST would review whether the LGB complaints panel has acted fairly and reasonably but it would not consider the detailed submissions put as evidence to the complaint panel by both parties. Any such panel would be expected to comprise a combination of Trustees, committee members and/or officers of the ODST. If, following these steps, you still feel that the school has acted unreasonably or not followed the correct procedures, you can write to the Secretary of State for Education via <http://www.education.gov.uk/help/contactus/dfe>

The flowchart overleaf summarises the complaints process.



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Annex 1 Complaint form

A member of school staff or the Clerk to the Governors can give help completing this form.

If it is appropriate for a member of staff to look into this complaint, it should be returned to the Headteacher. If it is appropriate that it should be dealt with by the governing body, it should be returned to the Clerk to the Governors at the school.

Complaint form

Please complete and return to the Clerk to the Governors who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

Your name:

Address:

.....

.....

Postcode:

Daytime telephone number:

Evening telephone number:

If applicable, name of child(ren) at school:

.....

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?)



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Your relationship to the school, e.g. parent, carer, neighbour, member of public:

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 of acknowledgement sent:

By Whom:

Complaint referred to:

Date: