

CATTON GROVE PRIMARY SCHOOL



Complaints Procedure

Approved by:	Loretta Bolaney	Date: 01.09.23
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Introduction

All schools in Norfolk want their pupils to be healthy, happy and safe, and to achieve. They recognise that parents, guardians or carers play an important part in making this happen. Cooperation between parents, staff and governors leads to a shared sense of purpose and a good atmosphere in the school.

Each level of the procedure set out below offers the opportunity for concerns and complaints to be resolved as quickly as possible.

Aims

When responding to complaints, we aim to:

- Be impartial and non-adversarial
- Facilitate a full and fair investigation by an independent person or panel, where necessary
- Address all the points at issue and provide an effective and prompt response
- Respect complainants' desire for confidentiality
- Treat complainants with respect and courtesy
- Make sure that any decisions we make are lawful, rational, reasonable, fair and proportionate, in line with the principles of administrative law
- Keep complainants informed of the progress of the complaints process
- Consider how the complaint can feed into school improvement evaluation processes

We try to resolve concerns or complaints by informal means wherever possible. Where this is not possible, formal procedures will be followed.

The school will aim to give the complainant the opportunity to complete the complaints procedure in full.

Legislation and guidance

This document meets the requirements of section 29 of the Education Act 2002, which states that schools must have and make available a procedure to deal with all complaints relating to their school and to any community facilities or services that the school provides.

It is also based on guidance for schools on complaints procedures from the Department for Education (DfE), including the model procedure, and model procedure for dealing with serial and unreasonable complaints.

In addition, it addresses duties set out in the Early Years Foundation Stage statutory framework with regards to dealing with complaints about the school's fulfilment of Early Years Foundation Stage requirements.

The difference between a complaint and a concern

Definitions

The DfE guidance explains the difference between a concern and a complaint:

- A concern is defined as “an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought”
- A complaint is defined as “an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action”

How to raise a complaint

The following information outlines the stages of raising a concern or complaint.

You must raise the complaint within three months of the incident or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within three months of the last of these incidents. We will consider complaints made outside of this time frame only if exceptional circumstances apply.

If a complaint is made outside of term time, we will consider the complaint on the first day after the holiday period.

Stage 1 – informal

A concern or complaint can be made in person, in writing or by email. They may also be made by a third party acting on behalf of a complainant, as long as they have appropriate consent to do so. Concerns should be raised with either the Class Teacher or Year Leader. It is best to resolve issues at this point. If the complainant is unclear of who to contact or how to contact, they should contact the school office on 01603 426728 or office@cattongrove.norfolk.sch.uk

Guidance on informal Stage 1:

- Concerns should initially be handled informally in a manner that offers the best way of resolving issues.
- A Class Teacher or Year Leader should offer an appointment to discuss the issue as quickly as possible, as this will give both parties time to talk about it calmly and politely without being interrupted. This can allow parties to remain calm. It will also show a commitment to resolving issues.
- It is important for parents to recognise that schools are busy organisations and that it may not be possible to offer an appointment straight away.
- The parties involved should be encouraged to offer their view of what would be a realistic resolution to the problem.

Stage 2 - informal

Parents, carers or guardians dissatisfied with the result of the discussions with the class teacher or head of year should ask for an appointment to meet with the headteacher or, in a larger school, a member of the leadership team, a deputy headteacher or assistant headteacher.

If a resolution to the issue is proving difficult to find, the headteacher, a member of the leadership team, a deputy headteacher or assistant headteacher can speak to one member of the governing body about the issue who may be willing to offer informal intervention. However, there is no obligation on any governor to become involved at this level.

If everyone involved is unable to resolve the issue, then it may be necessary to ask for information or support from a Children's Services Representative. The issue that is the focus of the complaint will determine the person contacted. The headteacher, member of the leadership team, deputy headteacher or assistant headteacher should know who to ring or the Customer Service Centre will be able to offer information on 0844 800 8001 or e-mail: information@norfolk.gov.uk

Guidance on informal level 2:

- It is always best to resolve issues informally at the earliest possible time but if the person is not satisfied with the result of the talk with the teacher or head of year then he/she can ask for an appointment to meet with the headteacher or, in a larger school, a member of the leadership team, a deputy head or assistant headteacher.
- It is in everyone's interest, particularly the child or children, for concerns and complaints to be sorted out quickly and smoothly.
- The aim should be that discussions end on a positive note with no bad feeling.
- It is good practice for headteachers or member of the leadership team, a deputy head or assistant headteacher to write a letter to parents summarising what has been agreed regarding the issue.
- The headteacher, a member of the leadership team, a deputy head or assistant headteacher may feel that a particular governor's input would be helpful in bringing about a resolution but there is no obligation on any governor to become involved at this level.
- The advice from a Children's Services Representative will be designed to help facilitate a resolution to the problem as quickly as possible.

It is hoped that most problems will have been resolved by now.

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

Stage 3 – formal complaint letter to headteacher

An issue that has not been resolved through the informal stages 1 and 2 can become an official complaint.

Parents, carers or guardians wishing to move to Stage 3 should write a formal letter of complaint to the headteacher. The letter will need to set out clearly the issues which have previously been discussed and why the parent, carer or guardian considers the issue to be unresolved. The school will make reasonable adjustments to allow a complaint to be made in other formats should it prove to be necessary.

Headteachers should consider the complaint and discuss a resolution with the complainant. The headteacher should offer a resolution to the complainant in writing within 10 school days of receipt of the letter/email.

Guidance on Stage 3 - formal:

- An unresolved issue can now move to a formal complaint. This is a serious step to be taken. In consideration of future home/school relationships everyone concerned will need to negotiate an agreement and concentrate on finding a resolution to the issue.
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Complainants should not approach individual governors to raise concerns or complaints. They have no power to act on an individual basis and it may also prevent them from considering complaints at Stage 3/4 of the procedure.

Complaints against school staff (except the headteacher) should be made in the first instance, to the headteacher via the school office by hand or to office@cattongrove.norfolk.sch.uk. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Complaints that involve or are about the headteacher should be addressed to the Chair of Governors, via the school office by hand or to office@cattongrove.norfolk.sch.uk. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Complaints about the Chair of Governors, any individual governor or the whole governing body should be addressed to the Clerk to the Governing Body via the school office by hand or to office@cattongrove.norfolk.sch.uk. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

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

Stage 4 – formal complaint requesting a Governors’ Complaints Panel.

If the complainant feels the complaint has not been resolved he/she should proceed to Stage 4, a Governors’ Complaints Panel.

If, the concern or complaint is specifically about the headteacher and is unable to be resolved at the informal stage, then it will be necessary for the complainant to formally complain to the Chair of Governors. The school will provide the Chair of Governor’s name and the complainant should write to him or her at the school address marking the envelope ‘urgent, private and confidential’. The Chair of Governors should acknowledge the complainant’s letter in writing within 5 school days of receipt and contact a Governor Support Service Officer for advice.

Should a complaint be made against the Chair of Governors or any member of the governing body it should be made to the Clerk who will then arrange for it to be considered by the Chair or Vice Chair as appropriate.

Should the complaint refer to the whole governing body, again it should be addressed to the Chair who will determine the most appropriate course of action. This may involve asking the LA's Governor Services team to investigate.

Time Scales:

Receipt of complainant's letter	Acknowledgement within 5 school days
Receipt of complainant's letter	Governors' Panel meeting within 15 school days (unless this goes into school holidays)
Written documentation sent to Governors' Panel Members and complainant and headteacher	5 school days before meeting.
Governors' Panel members decision communicated to all concerned	As soon as possible but within 10 school days of meeting.

Complainants wishing to move to Stage 4 of the formal complaints' procedure will need to write a letter to the Chair of Governors to request that a Governors' Complaints Panel meets to hear the complaint. This formal complaint letter must be received within 10 school days of the last meeting with the headteacher concerning the issue. The complainant should write to the Chair of Governors at the school address marking the envelope 'urgent and confidential'. The letter will need to set out the complaint that has previously been formally discussed with the headteacher and show why the matter is not resolved.

Before the meeting:

The chair of governors should appoint a clerk to the Governors' Complaints Panel, acknowledge the complainant's letter in writing within 5 school days of receipt and arrange for a panel of governors to meet within 15 school days of receipt. It must be recognised that if the letter is received within 14 school days to the end of term it may not be possible to organise the governors' panel meeting. In this case the matter should be dealt with within 10 school days of the school reopening.

The headteacher should be given a copy of the complainant's letter and written documentation should be requested from the school. The clerk should send both the complainant's letter and the school documentation to the Governors' Complaints Panel members, complainant and headteacher (and anyone else involved in the meeting) at least 5 school days before the date of the meeting.

The complainant and headteacher will be invited to attend the Governor's Complaints Panel meeting to give a verbal statement in support of their documentation. Each of them can bring someone to support them if they wish.

At the meeting:

The complainant and headteacher (or his representative) should provide all the relevant information they wish and the Governors' Complaints Panel members should clarify any points. After the complainant and headteacher (or his representative) have provided all the information they wish, the chair will ask all parties to leave except the panel members and the clerk.

After the meeting:

The Governors' Complaints Panel will write to all concerned within 10 school days to explain their decision and suggest a resolution to the problem, if appropriate. The decision of the Governor's Complaints Panel is final.

The decision of the Governors' Complaints Panel will not be investigated. If, however, the complainant feels that the School and Governors have not followed the school's complaints procedure correctly, he/she can contact a Children's Services Officer for assistance. In this case he/she should ring Customer Services on 0844 800 8001 who will arrange for an officer to get back to him/her.

Chapter 3, paragraph 14 of a Guide to the Law for School Governors states: under the Education Act 1996, paragraphs 496 and 497, anyone can complain to the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he or she believes that a governing body is acting "unreasonably" or is failing to carry out its statutory duties properly. However, intervention can only occur if the governing body or the Local Authority has failed to carry out a legal duty or has acted "unreasonably" in the performance of a duty. Intervention would have to be expedient in the sense that there would have to be something that the Secretary of State for Education and Skills could instruct either party to do to put matters right.

Guidance on level 4 - formal:

Before the meeting:

- *The formal complaints letter should be passed to the vice-chair if the chair will be unable to receive the letter within 5 days.*
- *Members of the Governors' Complaints Panel should have no prior knowledge of the complaint and it is, therefore, unlikely that staff governors will be members of the panel.*

At the meeting:

- *The Complaints Panel must be made up of at least three members and a clerk.*
- *Although this is a formal meeting, every effort should be made to make it as informal as possible for all concerned.*
- *Everyone attending should be in the room at the same time*
- *Consideration may need to be given to the seating arrangements to make everyone feel equal and comfortable.*
- *The clerk should take notes of the meeting, listing who is present: Governors, stating who is the Chair of the Governors' Complaints Panel, Headteacher (or his/her representative) and any other members of school staff*

- Parents and anyone accompanying them e.g. friend and Clerk*
- *The chair of the Governors' Complaints Panel should open the meeting stating the purpose and the format of the meeting to clarify this to all in attendance.*
 - *People present should introduce themselves stating their reason for being at the meeting.*
 - *The chair of the Governors' Complaints Panel should request a verbal statement from the complainant in support of his or her written letter of complaint and why s/he feels the issue has not been resolved. The Governors' Complaints Panel members can ask questions to make sure they understand the issue from the parent's point of view.*
 - *The chair of the Governors' Complaints Panel should request a verbal statement from the headteacher (or his representative) in support of his/her written account of the complaint and the steps taken to resolve the issue. The Governors' Complaints Panel members can ask questions to make sure they understand the issue from the headteacher's point of view.*
 - *The members of the Governors' Complaints Panel should make sure they fully understand the issues and ask any further questions to clarify any points that are still not clear to them.*
 - *The chair of the Governors' Complaints Panel must ask the complainant and the headteacher (or his representative) if they are satisfied that they have provided all the information they wanted or if there is something they wish to add and if they feel they have had a fair hearing.*
 - *When the Governors' Complaints Panel members understand all the issues, the chair will ask all parties to leave except the panel members and the clerk.*

After the meeting:

- *The Governors' Complaints Panel members then discuss the issues in private and the clerk remains to record the decision.*
- *The Panel members will need to consider the information, come to a decision and suggest a way to resolve the issue taking into account the best interests of the child or children.*
- *When the Panel have reached a decision the Clerk will inform everyone concerned in writing as soon as possible, but in any event, within 10 school days of the panel meeting.*

The decision of the Governor's Complaints Panel is final.

Once a Governor's Complaints Panel has heard a complaint, and correct procedures have been followed, that specific complaint cannot be reopened. If a request is received in this respect, the chair of governors should inform the complainant that the matter is closed.

Any complaints concerning the conduct of school staff will be handled in accordance with the school's internal disciplinary procedures. The details of such an investigation will remain confidential.

Some complaints regarding admissions, the curriculum or special educational needs are covered by statutory regulations. The headteacher or deputy headteacher can give information about these issues or advice can be sought from the Customer Service Centre on 0844 800 8001 or e-mail: information@norfolk.gov.uk

Extended Schools: the governing body should ensure that any third party provider offering activities and services through the extended schools programme has their own

complaints procedure in place. Governors would need to have a discussion around, and make a decision about, what happens when the third party provider's complaints process is exhausted and the matter is not resolved and whether it should then be referred to a Governors' Complaints Panel. This would ensure that the Governors are kept aware of complaints about provision.

Vexatious Complainants: it is important to distinguish between people who make a number of complaints because they really think things have gone wrong, and people who are being difficult. Complainants can be frustrated and aggrieved and it is therefore important to consider the merits of the case rather than their attitude. Even though someone has made vexatious complaints in the past, it cannot be assumed that the next complaint is also vexatious. Each complaint must be considered as to whether it is vexatious or genuine. There is no way of avoiding evaluating each complaint.

Roles and responsibilities

The complainant

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

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

The investigator

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

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

The complaints co-ordinator

The complaints co-ordinator can be:

- The headteacher
- The designated complaints governor
- Any other staff member providing administrative support

The complaints co-ordinator will:

- Keep the complainant up to date at each stage in the procedure
- Make sure the process runs smoothly by liaising with staff members, the headteacher, chair of governors, clerk and LA

- Be aware of issues relating to:
 - Sharing third party information
 - Additional support needed by complainants, for example interpretation support or where the complainant is a child or young person
- Keep records

Clerk to the governing board

The clerk will:

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

Committee chair

The committee chair will:

- Chair the meeting, ensuring that everyone is treated with respect throughout
- Make sure all parties see the relevant information, understand the purpose of the committee, and are allowed to present their case

Principles for investigation

When investigating a complaint, we will try to clarify:

- What has happened
- Who was involved
- What the complainant feels would put things right

Time scales

The complainant must raise the complaint within 3 months of the incident. If the complaint is about a series of related incidents, they must raise the complaint within 3 months of the last incident.

We will consider exceptions to this time frame in circumstances where there were valid reasons for not making a complaint at that time and the complaint can still be investigated in a fair manner for all involved.

When complaints are made out of term time, we will consider them to have been received on the first school day after the holiday period.

If at any point we cannot meet the time scales we have set out in this policy, we will:

- Set new time limits with the complainant
- Send the complainant details of the new deadline and explain the delay

Complaints about our fulfilment of early years requirements

We will investigate all written complaints relating to the school's fulfilment of the Early Years Foundation Stage requirements, and notify the complainant of the outcome within 28 days of receiving the complaint. The school will keep a record of the complaint (see section 10) and make this available to Ofsted on request.

Parents and carers can notify Ofsted if they believe that the school is not meeting Early Years Foundation Stage requirements, by calling 0300 123 4666, or by emailing enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk. An online contact form is also available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted#org-contacts>.

We will notify parents and carers if we become aware that the school is to be inspected by Ofsted. We will also supply a copy of the inspection report to parents and carers of children attending the setting on a regular basis.

Referring complaints on completion of the school's procedure

If the complainant is unsatisfied with the outcome of the school's complaints procedure, they can refer their complaint to the DfE.

The DfE will not re-investigate the matter of the complaint. It will look at whether the school's complaints policy and any other relevant statutory policies that the school holds were adhered to. The DfE also looks at whether the school's statutory policies adhere to education legislation.

The DfE will intervene where a school has:

- Failed to act in line with its duties under education law
- Acted (or is proposing to act) unreasonably when exercising its functions

If the complaints procedure is found to not meet regulations, the school will be asked to correct its procedure accordingly.

For more information or to refer a complaint, see the following webpage: <https://www.gov.uk/complain-about-school>

We will include this information in the outcome letter to complainants. The DfE will consider reports of a major failure to meet the standards. Where appropriate, it can arrange an emergency inspection to look at pupil welfare and health and safety, and make sure that the school deals with serious failings.

For more information or to refer a complaint, see the following webpage: <https://www.gov.uk/complain-about-school>

Persistent complaints

Unreasonably persistent complaints

Most complaints raised will be valid, and therefore we will treat them seriously. However, a complaint may become unreasonable if the person:

- Has made the same complaint before, and it's already been resolved by following the school's complaints procedure
- Makes a complaint that is obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific, defamatory or repetitive
- Insists on pursuing a complaint that is unfounded, or out of scope of the complaints procedure, beyond all reason

- Pursues a valid complaint, but in an unreasonable manner e.g. refuses to articulate the complaint, refuses to co-operate with this complaints procedure, or insists that the complaint is dealt with in ways that are incompatible with this procedure and the time frames it sets out
- Makes a complaint designed to cause disruption, annoyance or excessive demands on school time
- Seeks unrealistic outcomes, or a solution that lacks any serious purpose or value

Steps we will take

We will take every reasonable step to address the complainant's concerns, and give them a clear statement of our position and their options. We will maintain our role as an objective arbiter throughout the process, including when we meet with individuals. We will follow our complaints procedure as normal (as outlined above) wherever possible. If the complainant continues to contact the school in a disruptive way, we may put communications strategies in place. We may:

- Give the complainant a single point of contact via an email address
- Limit the number of times the complainant can make contact, such as a fixed number per term
- Ask the complainant to engage a third party to act on their behalf, such as Citizens Advice
- Put any other strategy in place as necessary

Stopping responding

We may stop responding to the complainant when all of these factors are met:

- We believe we have taken all reasonable steps to help address their concerns
- We have provided a clear statement of our position and their options
- The complainant contacts us repeatedly, and we believe their intention is to cause disruption or inconvenience

Where we stop responding, we will inform the individual that we intend to do so. We will also explain that we will still consider any new complaints they make.

In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, we will immediately inform the police and communicate our actions in writing. This may include barring an individual from our school site.

Duplicate complaints

If we have resolved a complaint under this procedure and receive a duplicate complaint on the same subject from a partner, family member or other individual, we will assess whether there are aspects that we hadn't previously considered, or any new information we need to take into account.

If we are satisfied that there are no new aspects, we will:

- Tell the new complainant that we have already investigated and responded to this issue, and that the local process is complete
- Direct them to the DfE if they are dissatisfied with our original handling of the complaint

If there are new aspects, we will follow this procedure again.

Complaint campaigns

Where the school receives a large volume of complaints about the same topic or subject, especially if these come from complainants unconnected with the school, the school may respond to these complaints by:

- Publishing a single response on the school website
- Sending a template response to all of the complainants

If complainants are not satisfied with the school's response, or wish to pursue the complaint further, the normal procedures will apply.

Record keeping

The school will record the progress of all complaints, including information about actions taken at all stages, the stage at which the complaint was resolved, and the final outcome. The records will also include copies of letters and emails, and notes relating to meetings and phone calls.

This material will be treated as confidential and held centrally, and will be viewed only by those involved in investigating the complaint or on the review panel.

This is except where the secretary of state (or someone acting on their behalf) or the complainant requests access to records of a complaint through a freedom of information (FOI) request or through a subject access request under the terms of the Data Protection Act, or where the material must be made available during a school inspection.

Records of complaints will be kept securely, only for as long as necessary and in line with data protection law and our privacy notices.

The details of the complaint, including the names of individuals involved, will not be shared with the whole governing board in case a review panel needs to be organised at a later point.

Where the governing board is aware of the substance of the complaint before the review panel stage, the school will (where reasonably practicable) arrange for an independent panel to hear the complaint.

Complainants also have the right to request an independent panel if they believe there is likely to be bias in the proceedings. The decision to approve this request is made by the governing board, who will not unreasonably withhold consent.

Learning lessons

The governing board where appropriate, and respecting confidentiality, to determine whether there are any improvements that the school can make to its procedures or practice to help prevent similar events in the future.

Monitoring arrangements

The governing board will monitor the effectiveness of the complaints procedure in making sure that complaints are handled properly. The governing board will track the number and nature of complaints, and review underlying issues as stated in section 11.

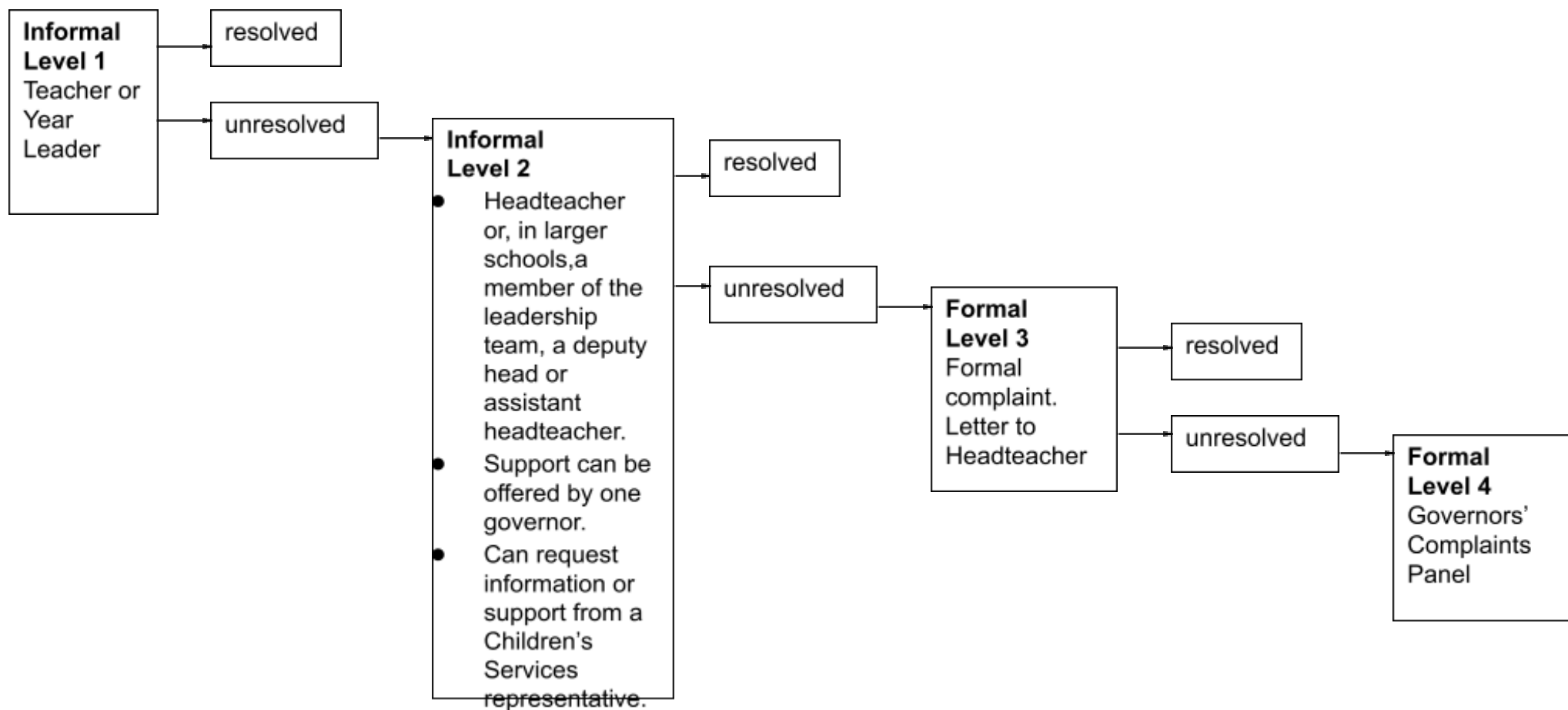
The complaints records are logged and managed by [job title of staff member]. This policy will be reviewed by [the headteacher/job title of other staff member/full governing board/name of committee/name or role of individual governor] every [frequency – the DfE recommends at least once every 2 to 3 years]. At each review, the policy will be approved by an individual governor.

Links with other policies

Policies dealing with other forms of complaints include:

- Child protection and safeguarding policy and procedures
- Admissions policy
- Exclusions policy
- Staff grievance procedures
- Staff disciplinary procedures
- SEN policy and information report
- Privacy notices

Flowchart of procedure for handling concerns and complaints:



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