

Complaints Policy

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1 Who can make a complaint?

This complaints procedure applies to parents and carers of children registered at our schools. Unless a complaint is dealt with under a separate statutory procedure, such as an appeal relating to exclusion or admissions, we will use this complaints procedure. Where someone who is not a parent or carer, including a member of the public, raises a concern about our provision of facilities or services, we may respond to this outside the formal procedure, at the Trust's discretion.

- This policy is intended for complaints made by people who are not employees of the Trust. Complaints from staff are dealt with under the Trust's internal grievance procedures.
- Where a complaint appears to have been generated using an artificial intelligence (AI) tool, the Trust reserves the right to question the complaint and seek clarification directly from the complainant about the specific issues raised, before responding. Complaints generated using AI should be identified as such, and failure to do so may invalidate a complaint
 - We advise against using public AI tools to draft complaints about your child: these tools may store or republish personal information, and can introduce inaccurate material such as outdated rules or law from other jurisdictions.
- If we find it difficult to identify the key concerns from a complaint, we will seek clarification and may suggest a call or meeting to clarify the issues before proceeding.

1.1 Definition of a complaint

A complaint is defined as an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about actions taken or a lack of action.

It is in everyone's interest that complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. Many issues can be resolved informally, without the need to use the formal stages of this procedure. South Downs Education Trust takes concerns seriously and will make every effort to resolve matters as quickly as possible. Informal concerns of this kind should not be addressed through this formal complaints policy.

1.2 How to make a complaint

A complaint can be made in person, in writing or by telephone. A complaint may also be made by a third party acting on behalf of a complainant, provided they have the complainant's consent to do so.

- Complaints about school staff (other than the Headteacher), should be made in the first instance to the Headteacher of the relevant school, via the school office. Please mark correspondence Private and Confidential.
- Complaints about a Headteacher should be addressed to the CEO, via the trust office at office@sdetrust.net. Please mark correspondence Private and Confidential.
- Complaints about the Chair of Governors, an individual governor or the whole governing body should be addressed to the Trustee Clerk, via the trust office. Please mark correspondence Private and Confidential.
- Complaints about the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) or a trustee should be addressed to the Chair of the Trust Board, via the trust office. Please mark correspondence Private and Confidential. If the complaint concerns the Chair, it will be referred to the Vice Chair for consideration. If a complaint concerns the Chair and Vice Chair jointly, the entire board, or the majority of the board, it will be escalated to an independent panel of trustees with no prior involvement in the matter.

For ease of use, a complaint form is included at section 6 of this policy. If you need help completing the form, please contact the school office; you may also ask a third-party organisation, such as Citizens Advice, for support.

In accordance with equality law, we will consider reasonable adjustments to enable complainants to access and complete this procedure, for example providing information in alternative formats, assisting with raising a formal complaint or holding meetings in accessible locations.

1.2.1 Anonymous complaints

We will not investigate anonymous complaints.

1.3 Time scales

A complaint must be raised within three months of the incident, or, where a series of related incidents has occurred, within three months of the last of these incidents. We will consider complaints made outside this time frame where exceptional circumstances apply.

1.3.1 Complaints received outside of term time

A complaint made outside of term time will be treated as received on the first school day after the holiday period.

2 Scope of this complaints procedure

This procedure covers all complaints about any provision of facilities or services by South Downs Education Trust, other than complaints dealt with under other statutory procedures, including those listed below.

Exceptions	Who to contact
Admissions to schools	Concerns about admissions are handled through a separate process: either the statutory appeals process or via the local authority.
Matters likely to require a child protection investigation	Complaints about child protection matters are handled under our safeguarding policy and relevant statutory guidance. For urgent concerns, contact the local authority designated officer (LADO) or the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH): LADO@westsussex.gov.uk or 03302 226450.
Exclusion of children from school	Guidance on raising concerns about exclusion is at www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions . Complaints about the application of the behaviour policy can be made through this complaints procedure.
Whistleblowing	We have an internal whistleblowing procedure for all employees, including temporary staff and contractors. The Secretary of State for Education is the prescribed person for education whistleblowers who do not wish to raise matters with their employer directly; referrals can be made at www.education.gov.uk/contactus .
Staff grievances	Complaints from staff are dealt with under the Trust's internal grievance procedures.
Staff conduct	Complaints about staff are dealt with under the Trust's internal disciplinary procedures, where appropriate. A complainant will not be informed of any disciplinary action taken against a staff member, but will be told that the matter is being addressed.
Data protection	Handled under section 4 of this policy.

If another body, such as the police, a local authority safeguarding team or a tribunal, is investigating an aspect of a complaint, this may affect our ability to meet the time scales in this procedure, or may lead to the procedure being suspended until that investigation concludes. We will inform the complainant of a revised time scale if this happens.

If a complainant begins legal action against South Downs Education Trust in relation to their complaint, we will consider whether to suspend the complaints procedure until those proceedings conclude.

2.1 Resolving complaints

At each stage of this procedure South Downs Education Trust wants to resolve the complaint. Where appropriate we will acknowledge that a complaint is upheld in whole or in part.

We may also 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 does not recur
- an explanation of the steps that have been or will be taken to help ensure it does not happen again, and an indication of the timescale for any changes
- an undertaking to review a school policy in light of the complaint
- an apology.

2.1.1 Withdrawal of a complaint

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

2.2 Confidentiality

Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential, except where the Secretary of State for Education or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the Education and Skills Act 2008 requests access to them. We will share as much information as possible with a complainant, while respecting the privacy and legal rights of pupils, staff and others involved.

2.3 Stage 1: informal complaints

It is hoped that most complaints can be raised and resolved informally.

Complaints should be raised in the first instance with the class teacher, year head, subject head or Headteacher. Complainants should not approach individual governors to raise complaints: governors have no power to act on an individual basis, and doing so may prevent them from considering the complaint at Stage 3 of this procedure.

At the conclusion of an informal investigation, the person investigating the complaint will provide a written response within 10 school days of the date the complaint was received.

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

2.4 Stage 2: formal complaints

- A formal complaint must be made to the Headteacher or CEO, unless it concerns them, via the school office. This may be done in person or in writing, using the complaint form where possible. The form is provided to help ensure we have the information needed to consider a complaint, but a complaint will not be rejected solely because it was not made using this form.

- The Headteacher/ CEO will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge it in writing, by letter or email, within 5 school days.
- In this acknowledgement, the Headteacher/ CEO will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, what remains unresolved and what outcome the complainant would like to see. The Headteacher/CEO may consider whether a face-to-face meeting is the most appropriate way of doing this.

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Note: the Headteacher may delegate the investigation to another member of the school or Trust leadership team, but not the decision to be taken.

During the investigation, the Headteacher, or the investigator, will:

- if necessary, interview those involved in the matter, and anyone complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish
- keep a written record of any meetings or interviews held as part of the investigation.

At the conclusion of the investigation, the Headteacher will provide a formal written response within 10 school days of the date the complaint was received.

If the Headteacher is unable to meet this deadline, they will provide the complainant with an update and a revised response date.

The response will set out any action taken to investigate the complaint, and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reasons for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of the action South Downs Education Trust will take to resolve the complaint.

The Headteacher will advise the complainant how to escalate their complaint if they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 2.

If the complaint concerns the Headteacher, a member of the governing body or Trustees, including the Chair or Vice Chair, a suitably skilled governor will be appointed to carry out all the actions at Stage 2.

Complaints about the Headteacher or a member of the governing body/ Trustees must be made to the Clerk, via the school office.

If the complaint is:

- jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair, or
- about the entire governing body, or
- about the majority of the governing body Stage 2 will be escalated to the CEO of the Trust.

Stage 2 will be escalated to the CEO of the Trust.

2.5 Stage 3: panel hearing

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the procedural elements or the outcome at Stage 2 and wishes to take the matter further, they can escalate the complaint to Stage 3.

A panel hearing consists of at least three people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint, including 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 3 must be made to the Clerk, via the school office, within 10 school days of receipt of the Stage 2 response, using the complaint form where possible. Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.

The Clerk will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge it in writing, by letter or email, within 5 school days.

The Clerk will write to the complainant to inform them of the date of the meeting, and will aim to convene the meeting within 20 school days of receipt of the Stage 3 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. The meeting will then proceed in the complainant's absence, on the basis of written submissions from both parties.

If the complaint is:

- jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair, or
- about the entire governing body, or
- about the majority of the governing body,

Stage 3 will be heard by the trustees and an independent panel member.

A complainant may bring someone to the panel meeting to provide support, such as a relative or friend. Generally, we do not encourage either party to bring legal representation to the meeting; however, there may be occasions when this is appropriate. For instance, if a school employee is called as a witness, they may wish to be supported by a union representative or by legal representation.

Note: complaints about staff conduct will not generally be handled under this complaints procedure. Complainants will be advised that any staff conduct complaint will be considered under the Trust's staff disciplinary procedures, where appropriate, but the outcome will not be shared with them.

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

At least 5 school days before the meeting, the Clerk will:

- confirm and notify the complainant of the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that, where 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 3 school days before the meeting.

Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least 2 school days before the date of the meeting. The panel will not accept, as evidence, a recording of a conversation obtained covertly, or without the informed consent of everyone recorded.

The panel will not review any new complaint at this stage, or consider evidence that has not been presented at Stage 1 or Stage 2 of the original complaint. A new complaint must be dealt with from Stage 1 of this procedure.

The meeting will be held in private. An electronic recording of the meeting is not normally permitted, unless a complainant's own disability or special needs require it. Prior knowledge and consent of all parties attending must be sought before the meeting takes place, and consent will be recorded in the minutes.

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 resolve the complaint
- where appropriate, recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in future.

The Chair of the panel will provide the complainant and South Downs Education Trust with a full explanation of the decision and the reasons for it, in writing, within 5 school days.

The letter to the complainant will include details of how to contact the Department for Education (DfE) if they remain dissatisfied with how their complaint has been handled by South Downs Education Trust.

The panel's findings and recommendations will be sent by email, or otherwise given, to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about. They will also be available for inspection on the school premises by the proprietor and the Headteacher/CEO.

A written record will be kept of all complaints, and of whether they are resolved at an earlier stage or proceed to a panel hearing. This record will include the action taken, regardless of whether the complaint is upheld.

3 Complaint escalated to or about the Trust, CEO, or a Trustee

If a complaint is escalated to South Downs Education Trust, or a complainant wishes to complain directly about the Trust, the complaint should be sent to the CEO for investigation.

- This may be done in person or in writing, using the complaint form where possible. The form is provided to help ensure we have the information needed to consider a complaint, but a complaint will not be rejected solely because it was not made using this form.

The CEO will write to the complainant acknowledging the complaint within 5 school days of the date the written complaint was received. The acknowledgement will confirm that the complaint will be investigated under Stage 2 of this policy, and will confirm the date for providing a response.

Following the investigation, the CEO will write to the complainant confirming the outcome within 10 school days of the date the complaint was received. If this time limit cannot be met, the CEO will write to the complainant within 5 school days of the original date, explaining the reason for the delay and providing a revised date.

If the complaint concerns the CEO or a trustee, it will be investigated by the Chair of the Trust Board. If a formal complaint is received about the Chair, it will be referred to the Vice Chair for investigation. Note: where the Chair of the Trust Board has investigated a complaint, they will write the letter of outcome to the complainant and provide a copy to the CEO.

If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of the previous stage, they should write to the Clerk to the Trust Board within 10 school days, asking for the complaint to be heard before a complaint panel.

The Clerk will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge it in writing, 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, and will aim to convene the meeting within 20 school days of receipt of the 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. The meeting will then proceed in the complainant's absence, on the basis of written submissions from both parties.

If the complaint is:

- jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair, or
- about the entire Trust Board, or
- about the majority of the Trust Board,

Stage 3 will be heard by a completely independent panel.

3.1.1 The complaint panel

The complaint panel will consist of three members. None of the panel members will have been involved in the events that led to the complaint, or in dealing with the complaint at an earlier stage, or have detailed prior knowledge of the complaint.

One panel member will be independent of the management and running of the Trust. This means that the independent panel member will not be a trustee or an employee of the Trust.

A complainant may bring someone to the panel meeting to provide support, such as a relative or friend. Generally, we do not encourage either party to bring legal representation to the meeting; however, there may be occasions when this is appropriate. For instance, if a Trust employee is called as a witness, they may wish to be supported by a union representative or by legal representation.

Note: complaints about staff conduct are not generally handled under this complaints procedure. Complainants will be advised that any staff conduct complaint will be considered under the Trust's staff disciplinary procedures, where appropriate, but the outcome will not be shared with them.

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend. At least 5 school days before the meeting, the Clerk will:

- confirm and notify the complainant of the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that, where 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 3 school days before the meeting.
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Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least 2 school days before the date of the meeting. The panel will not normally accept, as evidence, a recording of a conversation obtained covertly, or without the informed consent of everyone recorded.

The panel will not review any new complaint at this stage, or consider evidence unrelated to the original complaint. A new complaint must be dealt with from Stage 1 of this procedure.

The meeting will be held in private. An electronic recording of the meeting is not normally permitted, unless a complainant's own disability or special needs require it. Prior knowledge and consent of all parties attending must be sought before the meeting takes place, and consent will be recorded in the minutes.

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 resolve the complaint
- where appropriate, recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in future.

The Chair of the panel will provide the complainant and South Downs Education Trust with a full explanation of the decision and the reasons for it, in writing, within 5 school days.

The letter to the complainant will include details of how to contact the Department for Education (DfE) if they remain dissatisfied with how their complaint has been handled by South Downs Education Trust.

The panel's findings and recommendations will be sent by email, or otherwise given, to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about. They will also be available for inspection on the school premises by the proprietor and the Headteacher/CEO.

A written record will be kept of all complaints, and of whether they are resolved at an earlier stage or proceed to a panel hearing. This record will include the action taken, regardless of whether the complaint is upheld.

4 Unreasonably persistent or vexatious complaints

We recognise that complaints often relate to matters that are important and emotionally significant, and that a complainant may feel strongly about the issues raised. We will always try to treat complainants with respect, and ask that communication with the Trust remains respectful in return.

Where a complainant's behaviour becomes unreasonable, abusive or intimidating, or where there is a persistent refusal to engage with this procedure, we may suspend consideration of the complaint or place proportionate restrictions on future contact. We will write to the complainant to explain our reasons if we take this step.

5 Offensive or threatening complaints

South Downs Education Trust will not consider a complaint that a member of staff or a trustee reasonably considers to be offensive, for example where it contains abusive, discriminatory or threatening language. Where this is the case, we will write to the complainant to explain that the complaint cannot be considered in its current form, and will invite them to resubmit it in a way that allows us to address the substance of their concern.

6 Offensive or threatening complaints

Where we receive a large number of similar or near-identical complaints about the same issue at the same time, for example as part of a co-ordinated campaign, we may respond collectively with a single reply addressing the common concerns raised.

7 Closure of a complaint

Once we have provided a formal written response, if a complainant remains dissatisfied they should tell us they wish to escalate to the next stage of this procedure. Continuing to correspond about the same issues is not a substitute for escalation; we will direct a complainant to the next stage rather than enter into repeated exchanges on the same points.

If we do not hear further from a complainant within four school weeks of sending our response, we will write to confirm that the complaint is closed. A complainant may ask us to reopen a closed complaint where special circumstances apply.

8 Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

We work with West Sussex County Council to provide support for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). We will always try to help, but responsibility for some aspects of SEND provision rests with the local authority rather than the school.

- What the school is responsible for: teaching with reasonable adjustments, SEN support from the school's own resources, monitoring progress, putting support plans in place and reviewing these with parents and carers.
- What the local authority is responsible for: deciding whether to carry out an assessment for an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), issuing and maintaining the EHCP, and providing the funding and services specified within it.
- What an EHCP sets out: the child's needs, the provision required to meet those needs and who must deliver it. Schools must implement the parts of the plan within their control; the local authority must provide the provision it is responsible for.

Some support depends on national or local funding decisions outside the Trust's control. We will always do our best within the resources available. If a parent or carer is unsure who is responsible for a particular aspect of SEND support, they should ask the school.

9 Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

We take concerns about how personal data is handled seriously.

Where a complainant believes their personal data has been processed inappropriately, they have a statutory right to raise a complaint under section 164A of the Data Protection Act 2018.

9.1 How to raise a Data Protection concern

Please contact us directly in the first instance, so we can investigate: office@sdetrust.net
Please include as much detail as possible to help us respond effectively.

9.2 How we will handle your concern

We will acknowledge receipt of a data protection complaint within 30 calendar days. We will investigate fairly and impartially, and respond without undue delay, setting out our findings and any action taken. We may contact the complainant to ask for further information or clarification. We keep records of data protection complaints for audit and monitoring purposes.

9.3 If you remain dissatisfied

A complainant has the right to escalate their concern to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) at www.ico.org.uk or by calling 0303 123 1113

10 Next steps

If a complainant believes that the school or Trust did not handle their complaint in accordance with this published procedure, or acted unlawfully or unreasonably in the exercise of its duties under education law, they can contact the Department for Education (DfE) once Stage 3 has been completed.

The DfE will not normally reinvestigate the substance of a complaint or overturn a decision made by South Downs Education Trust. It will consider whether the Trust has adhered to education legislation and any statutory policies connected with the complaint, and whether it has followed Part 7 of the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

A complainant can contact the DfE online at www.education.gov.uk/contactus or by telephone on 0370 000 2288.

11 Next steps

11.1 Complainant

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

- explain the complaint in full as early as possible
- co-operate with the school in seeking a resolution
- respond promptly to requests for information or meetings, or when agreeing the details of the complaint
- ask for assistance as needed
- treat everyone involved in the complaint with respect
- refrain from publicising the details of their complaint on social media, and respect confidentiality.

11.2 Investigator

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

- sensitive and thorough interviewing of the complainant to establish what has happened and who has been involved
- interviewing staff, children or 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 co-ordinator, 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 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 for responding

- prepare a comprehensive report for the Headteacher/CEO or complaints committee, setting out the facts, identifying solutions and recommending a course of action to resolve the problem.

The Headteacher/CEO 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.

11.3 Complaints co-ordinator

This may be the Headteacher, CEO, a designated complaints governor or trustee, or another staff member providing administrative support. The complaints co-ordinator should:

- ensure that the complainant is fully updated at each stage of the procedure
- liaise with staff members, the Headteacher/CEO, the Chair of Governors, the Chair of the Trust Board or the Clerk, to ensure the smooth running of the complaints procedure
- be aware of issues regarding sharing third-party information, and additional support that may be needed by a complainant, including interpretation support or where the complainant is a child or young person
- keep records.

11.4 Clerk to the governing body or Trust Board

The Clerk is the contact point for the complainant and the committee, and should:

- ensure that everyone involved in the complaints procedure is aware of their legal rights and duties, including any arising under school complaints legislation, education law, the Equality Act 2010, the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act 2018 and the UK General Data Protection Regulation
- set the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring the dates are convenient to all parties, where they are invited to attend, and that the venue and proceedings are accessible
- once complaint has reached stage 3, collate written material relevant to the complaint including 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 committee's decision.

11.5 Committee chair

The committee chair, who is nominated in advance of the 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, where all parties are invited to attend, everyone is treated with respect and courtesy
- a complainant who may not be used to speaking at such a meeting is put at ease; this is particularly important where the complainant is a child or young person
- the remit of the committee is explained to the complainant
- written material is seen by everyone in attendance, provided this does not breach confidentiality or an individual's right to privacy under the Data Protection Act 2018 or the UK General Data Protection Regulation
- if a new issue arises, everyone is given the opportunity to consider and comment on 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 and key findings of fact are made
- the committee is open-minded and acts independently
- no committee member 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, and the complaints co-ordinator, where the school has one.

11.5.1 Committee member

Committee members should be aware that:

- the meeting must be, and should be seen to be, independent and impartial. No governor or trustee may sit on the committee if they have had prior involvement in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it
- the aim of the meeting is to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant. We recognise that a 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 and carers often feel emotional when discussing an issue that affects their child
- extra care is needed when the complainant is a child or young person, and is present during all or part of the meeting; the atmosphere and proceedings should ensure that the child or young person does not feel intimidated
- the committee should respect the views of the child or young person and give them equal consideration to those of adults
- where the child or young person is the complainant, the committee should ask in advance whether any support is needed to help them present their complaint. Where the child's parent is the complainant, the committee should give the parent the opportunity to say which parts of the meeting, if any, the child needs to attend
- the parent should be advised that agreement might not always be possible where the parent wishes the child to attend a part of the meeting that the committee considers is not in the child's best interests
- the welfare of the child or young person is paramount.

12 Record keeping and learning from complaints

We keep a written record of all formal complaints, the stage at which each was resolved, and any action taken, regardless of outcome. This record is available to the Trust Board and, on request, to the Secretary of State for Education or an inspection body such as Ofsted.

We use complaint information as a learning tool. The Trust Board receives a regular summary of complaints, including trends and themes, and considers what steps can be taken to prevent recurring issues and improve communication and practice across our schools.

13 Next steps

If the complainant believes the school / trust did not handle their 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 DfE after they have completed Stage 3.

The DfE will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by South Downs Education Trust. They will consider whether <South Downs Education Trust 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 Department for Education online at: <https://www.gov.uk/complain-to-dfe>

14 Complaint Form

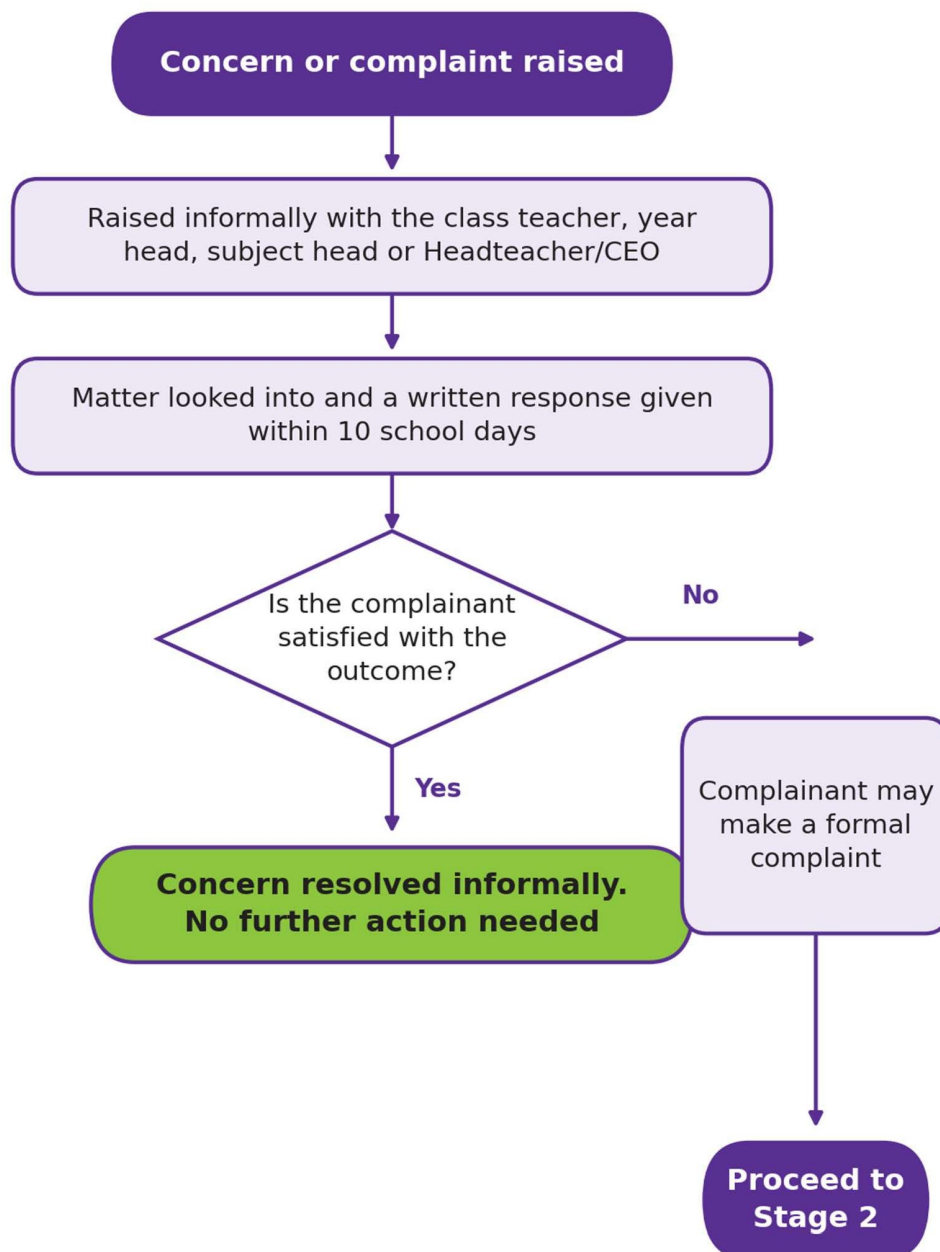
Please complete and return to *either Headteacher/CEO/ Clerk* who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken. To ensure the complaint is forwarded to the correct person, please see heading 1.2 on page 3.

Your name:	
Pupil's name (if relevant):	
Your relationship to the pupil (if relevant):	
Address: Postcode: Daytime telephoning number: Evening telephoning number: Email address:	
Please give details of your complaint, including whether you have spoken to anybody at the school about it.	
What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage/ What are you hoping to achieve?	
Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details.	
Signature:	
Date:	
Official use	
Date acknowledgement sent:	
By whom:	
Complaint referred to:	
Action taken:	
Date:	

15 Appendix 1: Stage 1, informal complaints flow chart

This flow chart summarises the Stage 1 process set out in section 2.3 above for school or Trust level complaints.

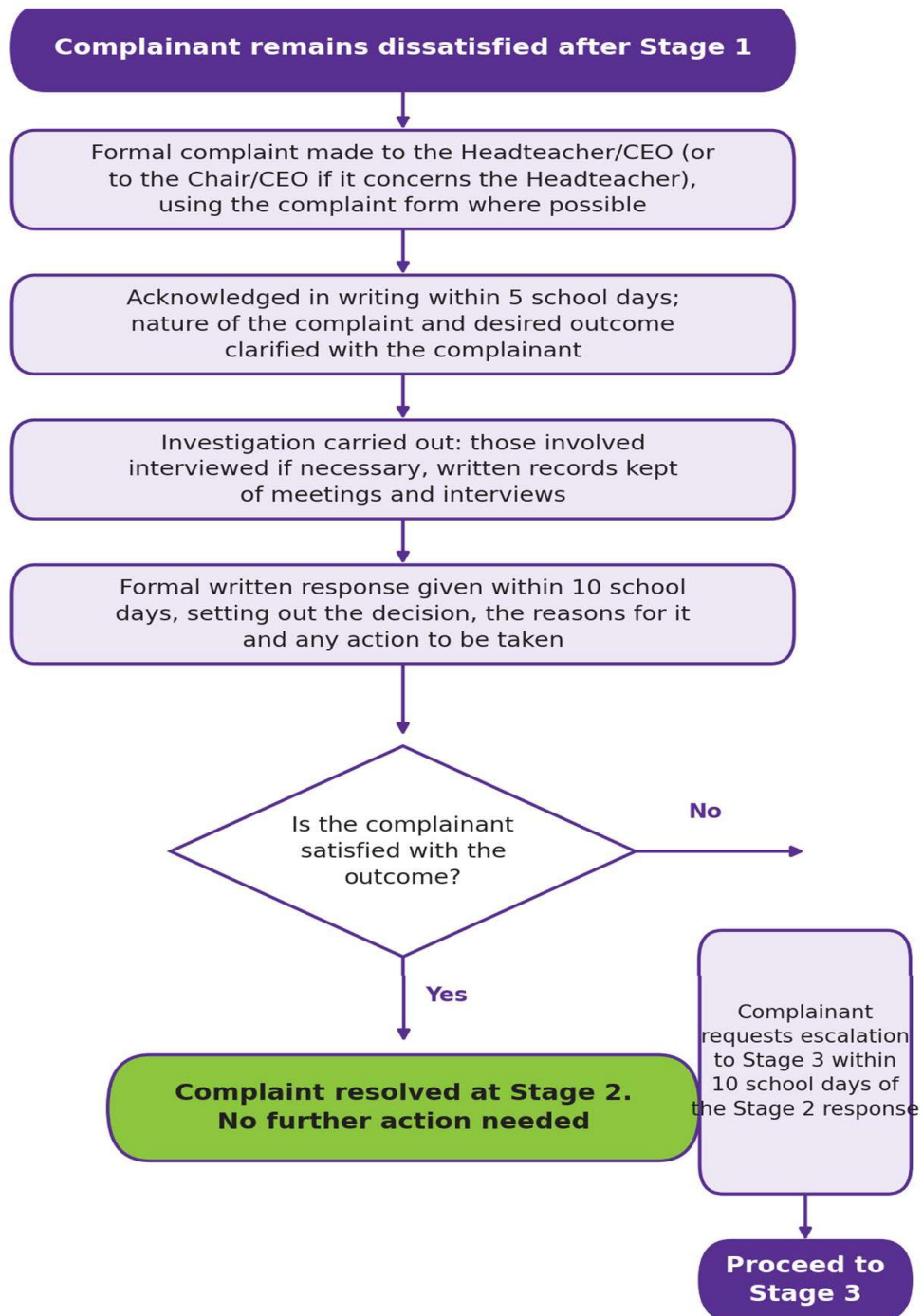
Appendix 1: Stage 1, informal complaints



16 Appendix 2: Stage 2, formal complaints flow chart

This flow chart summarises the Stage 2 process set out in section 2.4 above.

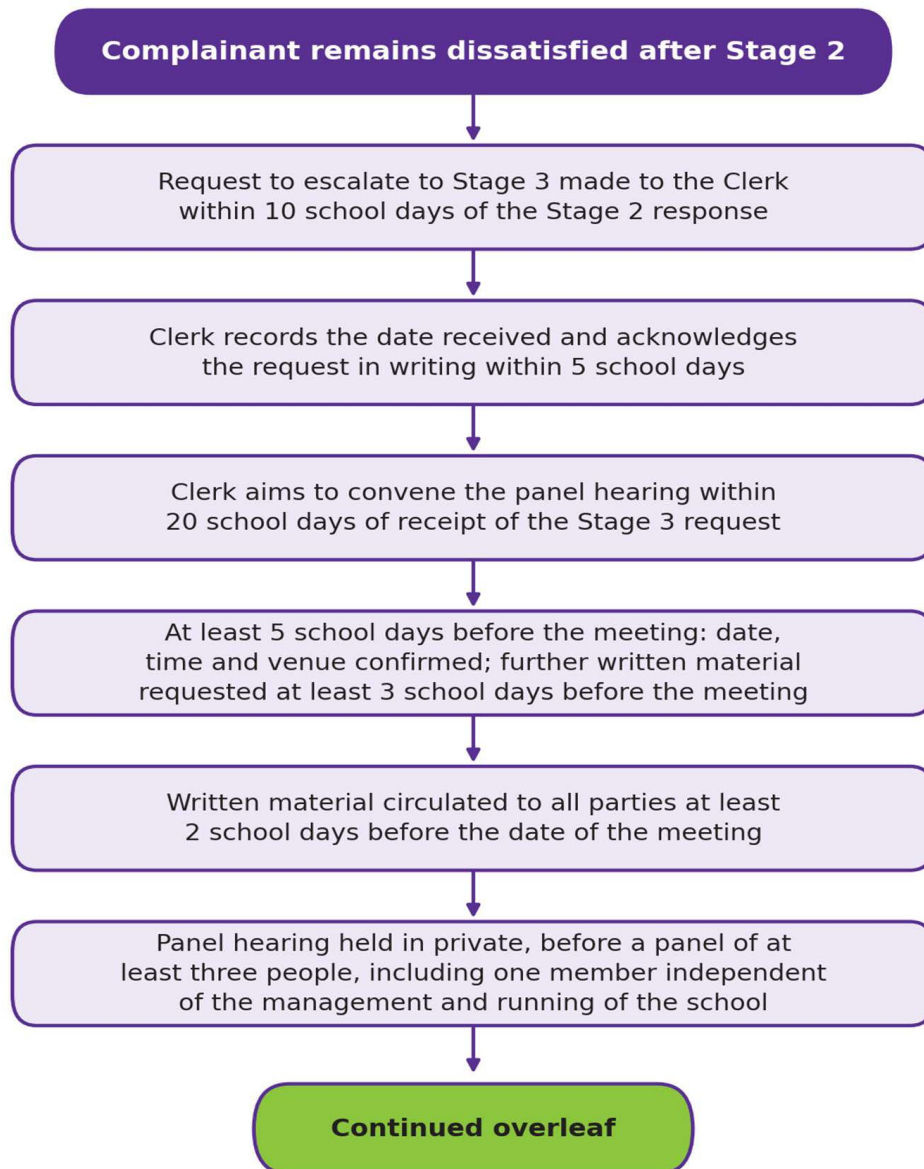
Appendix 2: Stage 2, formal complaints



17 Appendix 3: Stage 3, panel hearing flow chart

This flow chart summarises the Stage 3 process set out in section 2.5 above.

Appendix 3: Stage 3, panel hearing, flow chart (part 1 of 2)



Appendix 3: Stage 3, panel hearing, flow chart (part 2 of 2)

