



Good Shepherd Trust

Life in all its fullness

Complaints Policy

Version Number	Version Description	Date of Revision/Review
1	Original	July 2016
2	Reviewed – No Changes	Sep 2019
2	Based on the 2019 DfE Model Complaints Procedure - Original procedures	Nov 2020
3	No legal or procedural changes but significant updates throughout to clarify each stage of the complaint procedure with several new sections describing the distinct types of complaint and how each is handled in full and one to reflect updates to the Ofsted procedure and new web based 'Complain about a school' service.	Sept 2022
4	Revised to include complaints relating to the EYFS statutory framework (applies to schools with EYFS provision only).	Feb 2023
5	Updated only to reflect new unitary authorities and amend links to KAHub and other external websites.	Sept 2023
6	Reviewed (minor formatting changes only)	Oct 2024
7	Reviewed – No Changes	Sept 2024
8	Revised policy – Revised the process and included a flow chart	Sept 2025
9	Next review due	Sept 2028

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 This policy sets out how a complaint can be made to The Good Shepherd Trust (GST) and how GST will manage complaints received.

1.2 The GST very much hopes that you and your child will be happy at our family of schools, and that any concerns that may arise are dealt with in a timely manner by our staff. However, we recognise that there may be occasions when you are not entirely happy with an aspect of the service that we provide, and that you might want the Trust to deal with concerns through a more formal process. This procedure sets out what the Trust or one of our schools will do if you wish to raise a concern informally or make a formal complaint.

2. SCOPE OF THIS COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

2.1 This procedure covers all complaints about any provision or service provided by GST 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.
Exclusion of children from school	Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at: www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions discipline-exclusions/exclusions .
Whistleblowing	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 whistleblowers in education who do not want to raise matters direct with their employer. Referrals can be made at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus .
Staff grievances	Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the school's internal Grievance Procedures.

Staff conduct	Complaints about the conduct of 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 because of a complaint. However, the complainant will be notified that the matter is being addressed.
---------------	---

2.2 If a complainant commences legal action against the Trust in relation to their complaint, we will consider whether to suspend the Complaints Procedure until those legal proceedings have concluded.

3. WHO CAN MAKE A COMPLAINT?

- 3.1 This Complaints Procedure can be used by anyone who uses one of our family of schools, whether a pupil/student, a parent/carer, a provider of a service to the school, or a visitor, about any provision of facilities or services that we provide. If you wish to raise a concern or a complaint on someone else's behalf, the Trust will only deal with this if the person on whose behalf you are complaining is unable to do so for themselves (for example, they are too young or they have a disability that prevents them from complaining themselves) and you have the appropriate consent.
- 3.2 Unless complaints are dealt with under separate statutory procedures (such as appeals relating to exclusions or admissions), we will use this Complaints Procedure. This is compliant with The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

4. THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A CONCERN AND A COMPLAINT

- 4.1 A concern may be defined as 'an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important, for which reassurances are sought.'
- 4.2 A complaint may be defined as 'an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about actions taken or a lack of action.'
- 4.3 It is in everyone's interest that concerns and complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. Many issues can be resolved informally, without the need to use the formal stages of the Complaints Procedure. The Trust takes concerns and complaints extremely seriously and will make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.
- 4.4 If you have difficulty discussing a concern with a particular member of staff, we will respect your views. In these cases, we will refer you to another staff member. Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels unable to deal with a concern, we will refer you

to another staff member. The member of staff may be more senior but does not have to be. The ability to consider the concern objectively and impartially is more important.

4.5 We understand, however, that there are occasions when people would like to raise their concerns formally. In this case, the Trust/school will attempt to resolve the issue internally, through the stages outlined within this Complaints Procedure.

5. HOW TO RAISE A CONCERN OR MAKE A COMPLAINT?

5.1 At The GST, we take complaints and concerns seriously, and we are dedicated to resolving any issues quickly, fairly, and transparently. If you wish to raise a complaint or concern, you can do so in writing, in person or via telephone. If you are making a written complaint, this should be marked as private and confidential.

5.2 Complaints and concerns will be treated in the strictest confidence and in line with the General Data Protection Regulation 2018.

6. ANONYMOUS COMPLAINTS

6.1 We will not normally investigate anonymous complaints. However, we will determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation.

7. THE COMPLAINTS PROCESS

7.1 GST operates a three stage Complaints Process as set out below.

7.2 Investigating Officers throughout the Complaints Process will:

- Act sensitively, independently, and fairly
- Deal with complaints on their merits and have an open mind
- Take measures to address any actual or perceived conflict of interest
- Consider all information and evidence carefully
- Keep the complaint confidential, as far as possible, with information only disclosed if necessary to thoroughly investigate the matter

7.3 Stage 1 – Informal Complaints

7.3.1 The first stage of the process outlined below is an informal stage and, in most cases, informal resolution should be attempted. An informal concern or complaint can be raised verbally or in writing, but you should not raise it with an individual Local Governing Board (LGB) member, as they have no power to act on an individual basis and may need to remain impartial to be part of a panel hearing later in a formal process.

At the informal stage:

If your concern/complaint involves:	You should raise it with:
A staff member	The Headteacher.
The Headteacher	The Headteacher directly, or, if that is not appropriate, the Chair of the LGB who will seek support from the People Partner.
The Local Governing Board	The Clerk to the Trust Board, who seek support from the Governance Lead or the Chair of the Trust Board to support a resolution.
Central Office Staff	The CEO who will seek support from the People Partner.
CEO	The Chair of the Board.

7.3.2 Sometimes further investigation is required before matters can be resolved at the informal stage. This will normally be undertaken by the person to whom you have raised your concern, but that person may delegate investigatory steps, if appropriate. At the conclusion of any investigations, the appropriate person to whom the complaint has been addressed will provide an informal written response. This will be within 10 school days of the date of receipt of the complaint, unless otherwise notified to you.

7.3.3 If matters cannot, or have not, been resolved informally to your satisfaction, you should follow Stage 2 of the Complaints Procedure.

7.4 Stage 2 – Formal Complaints

7.4.1 At the formal stage:

The Trust requires formal concerns or complaints to be put in writing, stating you wish to raise a formal complaint. The following table explains to whom your complaint should be addressed, and who is likely to be involved in the process (subject to discretion on a case-by-case basis, or delegation of duties where appropriate).

If your concern/complaint involves:	It should be addressed to:	The investigator that may be appointed:	The Decision Maker will be:	Stage 3 appeals will be heard by:
A staff member	Headteacher	Headteacher to appoint investigator	Headteacher	Panel
Central Office Staff	CEO	People Partner / SLT member	CEO	Panel

Headteacher	Clerk to the LGB	Trust SLT member	Chair of LGB	Panel
LGB member	Clerk to the Trust Board	Governance Lead	Chair of the Board	Panel
Trust Board Director	Clerk to the Trust Board	Governance Lead	Trust Board Director	Panel
Chief Executive Officer	Clerk to the Trust Board	Trust Board Director or Independent Investigating Officer	Chair of the Trust Board	Panel
Chair of the Trust Board	Clerk to the Trust Board	Independent Investigating Officer	Founding Members	Panel

7.4.2 We will record the date the complaint is received and will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 5 school days.

7.4.3 For ease of use, a template Complaint Form is provided at Appendix 1. If you require help in completing the form, please contact the school or the Trust. You can also ask a third-party organisation, for example, Citizens Advice, to help you.

7.4.4 We will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, ask what remains unresolved and what outcome you would like to see. A face-to-face meeting may be the most appropriate way of doing this if it is not clear from your complaint letter.

7.4.5 It is usual for an investigation to be undertaken as part of a formal complaint. An appropriate investigator may be appointed for this purpose.

7.4.6 During the investigation, the investigator will:

- liaise with the complainant to determine the scope of the complaint and investigation and understand the complaints desired outcomes.
- if necessary, 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.

7.4.7 At the conclusion of the investigation, we will provide a formal written response. We will aim to do this within 20 school days of the date of receipt of the complaint, but if we are unable to meet this deadline, we will provide the complainant with an update and revised response date.

7.4.8 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 Trust/school will take to resolve the complaint.

7.4.9 If matters cannot, or have not, been resolved informally to your satisfaction, you should follow Stage 3 of the Complaints Procedure.

7.5 Stage 3 – Panel Hearing

7.5.1 If you are dissatisfied with the outcome at Stage 2, and wish to take the matter further, you can escalate the complaint to Stage 3 – a panel hearing consisting of at least three people who 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.

7.5.2 A request to escalate to Stage 3 must be made to the Clerk to the Trust Board, within 10 school days of receipt of the Stage 2 response. Requests received outside of this period will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.

7.5.3 The Clerk to the Trust Board will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 5 school days.

7.5.4 The Clerk to the Trust Board will write to you to inform you of the date of the meeting. They will aim to convene a meeting within 20 school days of receipt of the Stage 3 request. If this is not possible, the Clerk to the Trust Board will provide an anticipated date and keep you informed.

7.5.5 If you reject the offer of three proposed dates, without good reason, the Clerk to the Trust Board will decide when to hold the meeting. It will then proceed in your absence based on written submissions from both parties.

7.5.6 You may bring someone along to the panel hearing to provide support. This can be a relative or friend, but not a legal representative. Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

7.5.7 At least 10 school days before the meeting, the Clerk to the Trust Board will:

- confirm and notify you of the date, time, and venue of the meeting, ensuring that, if you are 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 committee at least 5 school days before the meeting.

7.5.8 Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least 3 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.

7.5.9 The panel 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.

7.5.10 The meeting will be held in private. Electronic recordings of meetings or conversations are 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 meetings or conversations take place. Consent will be recorded in any minutes taken.

7.5.11 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.

7.5.12 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 systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future.

7.5.13 The Chair of the Panel will provide you and the Trust/school with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within 10 school days.

7.5.14 The letter to you will include details of how to contact the Department for Education (DFE) if you are dissatisfied with the way your complaint has been handled by the Trust.

7.5.15 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 Trust will take to resolve the complaint.

7.5.16 The panel will ensure that those findings and recommendations are sent by email or otherwise given to you and, where relevant, the person complained about. Furthermore, they will be available for inspection on the school premises by the Headteacher.

7.5.17 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.

8. RESOLVING COMPLAINTS

8.1 At each stage of the procedure, The GST wants to resolve the complaint. If appropriate, we will acknowledge that 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 considering the complaint;
- an apology.

9. TIMESCALES

9.1 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 if exceptional circumstances apply.

9.2 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.

9.3 Complaints raised after a pupil has left the school

Where a complaint is made after a pupil has left the school, the complaint will not normally be investigated in full. However, the information provided will be reviewed and considered as part of the school's ongoing commitment to learning and improvement. The school may use the feedback to identify any lessons learned or opportunities to enhance policies, procedures, or practice, but a formal investigation or detailed response will not usually be undertaken

10. COMPLAINTS RECEIVED OUTSIDE OF TERM TIME

10.1 We will consider complaints made outside of term time as though they have been received on the first school day after the holiday period.

11. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

11.1 COMPLAINANT

11.1.1 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 with respect.
- Refrain from publishing the details of their complaint on social media and respect confidentiality.

11.2 INVESTIGATOR

11.2.1 The investigator dealing with the complaint must understand the extent of the complaint, liaise with the complainant to determine the scope of the complaint and investigation and understand the complainants desired outcome.

11.2.2 The investigator may be an impartial internal person, or an external investigator.

11.2.3 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, as appropriate, to clarify what the complainant feels would put things right.

11.2.4 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 Headteacher or complaints committee that sets out the facts, identifies solutions, and recommends courses of action to resolve problems;

11.3 THE DECISION MAKER

11.3.1 The decision maker will then determine whether to uphold or dismiss the complaint and communicate that decision to the complainant, providing the appropriate escalation details.

11.3.2 The decision maker will review the investigating officers' findings and recommendations, seeking further clarity if required. The decision maker will inform the complainant of the outcome of the complaint.

11.4 CLERK TO THE LAB/TRUST BOARD

11.4.1 The Clerk is the contact point for the complainant in a formal process 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 committee's decision.

11.5 PANEL CHAIR

11.5.1 The Panel Chair, who is nominated in advance of a Panel meeting, should ensure that:

- both parties are asked (via the Clerk to the Trust Board) 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 committee 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;
- 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 panel 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 to the Trust Board.

11.6 PANEL MEMBER

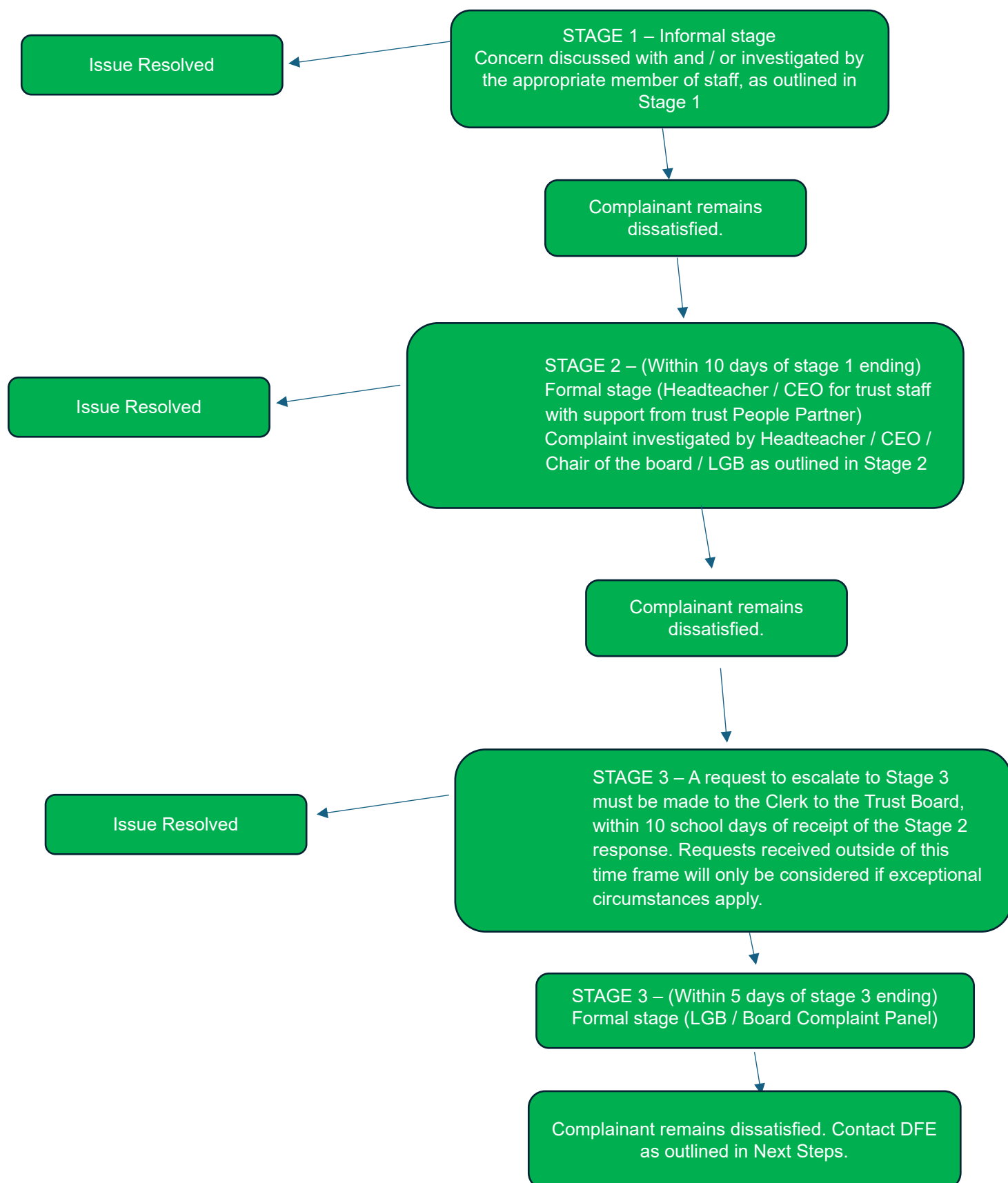
11.6.1 Panel members should be aware that:

- the meeting must be independent and impartial and should be seen to be so;
- no LGB member/Trust Board Director may sit on the committee 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;
- careful consideration of the atmosphere and proceedings should ensure that the complainant does not feel intimidated.

12. NEXT STEPS

- 12.1 If you believe the school/Trust did not handle your complaint in accordance with the published Complaints Procedure, or they acted unlawfully or unreasonably in the exercise of their duties under education law, you can contact the DFE after they have completed Stage 3.
- 12.2 The DFE will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by the Trust. They will consider whether the 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](#).
- 12.3 You can refer your complaint to the DFE online:
[https://form.education.gov.uk/service/Contact the Department for Education](https://form.education.gov.uk/service/Contact_the_Department_for_Education) by telephone on 0370 000 2288 or by writing to:

Ministerial and Public Communications Division
Department for Education Piccadilly Gate Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

Complaint procedure stages flowchart

Stage 2 – Complaint Form (Headteacher)

Your name:	
Student's Name (<i>if applicable</i>):	
Your relationship to the student:	
Address:	
Postcode:	
Contact Telephone Number:	
Email:	
Please give details of your complaint:	
What action, if any, have you already taken to try to resolve your complaint? (<i>Who did you speak/write to and what was the response?</i>)	
Please attach/include information about how your initial concern has tried to be resolved at Stage 1:	

What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?

Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details:

Signature:

Date:

Please return the completed form to the Headteacher

OFFICIAL USE ONLY:

Date received:

Date acknowledgement sent:

Date response sent:

By whom:

Stage 3 – Complaint Form (Chair of Local Governing Body)

Your name:	
Student Name (<i>if applicable</i>):	
Your relationship to the student:	
Address:	
Postcode:	
Contact Telephone Number:	
Email:	

Please give details of your complaint:

What action have you already taken to try to resolve your complaint?
(*Who did you speak/write to and what was the response?*)

--

What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?

--

Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details:

--

Signature:

Date:

Please return the completed form to Clerk to Local Governing Body 

OFFICIAL USE ONLY:

Stage 3 - Complaint Form (Chair of Local Governing Body)

Date received:	
Date acknowledgement sent:	
Date response sent:	
By whom:	