Shefford Lower School
Complaints Policy

Written by	Reviewed and Ratified by Governors	Shared with Staff	Last Updated	Review Cycle	Next Review due
Polly Ross, Headteacher	September 2026	September 2026	September 2026	Annual	September 2027

1.0 Statement of Intent

Shefford Lower School aims to resolve all complaints at the earliest possible stage, and where possible, informally, and is dedicated to continuing to provide the highest quality of education possible throughout the procedure. This policy has been created to deal with any complaint against a member of staff or the school as a whole, relating to any aspects of the school or the provision of facilities or services. It is designed to ensure that the school's complaints procedure is straightforward, impartial, non-adversarial, allows a full and fair investigation, respects confidentiality and delivers an effective response and appropriate redress. Any person, including a member of the public, is able to make a complaint about the provision of facilities or services that the school provides. This policy outlines the procedure that the complainant and school must follow. Once a complaint has been made, it can be resolved or withdrawn at any stage.

2.0 Legal Framework

2.1 This policy has due regard to all relevant legislation including, but not limited to, the following:

- Freedom of Information Act 2000
- Education Act 2002
- The Education (Pupil Information) (England) Regulations 2005
- Equality Act 2010
- Immigration Act 2016
- The School Information (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2016
- UK General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)
- Data Protection Act 2018
- In addition, this policy addresses duties set out in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) statutory framework with regards to dealing with complaints about the school's fulfilment of Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) requirements.

2.2 This policy has also due regard to guidance including, but not limited to, the following:

- HM Government (2016) 'Code of Practice on the English language requirement for public sector workers'
- DfE (2021) 'Best practice guidance for school complaints procedures 2020'

2.3 This policy operates in conjunction with the following school policies:

- Records Management Policy
- Data Protection Policy
- Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy
- Grievance Policy
- Behaviour Policy
- Suspension and Exclusion Policy
- Whistleblowing Policy
- Respect Policy

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3.0 Definitions

For the purpose of this policy:

- A "**complaint**" may be generally recognised as an expression or statement of dissatisfaction about actions taken or a lack of action.
- A "**concern**" may be treated as an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important, and for which reassurances are sought.
- The school will class concerns as complaints and follow the same procedures for both, as outlined within this policy.
- Complaints can be resolved formally, through this procedure, or informally dependent on the complainant's choice. Any complaint or concern will be taken seriously, whether formally or informally, and the appropriate procedures will be implemented.
- A "**grievance**" is an issue raised by a member of staff where they feel the school has not implemented a policy or process fairly or properly. Grievances will be dealt with in line with the school's Grievance Policy.
- The definition of "**unreasonable complaints**" is outlined in the 'Managing serial and unreasonable complaints' section of this policy.
- For the purpose of this policy, "**duplicate complaints**" are identical complaints received from a complainant's spouse, partner, grandparent or child. These complaints will not be addressed again, the individual making the second complaint will be informed that the complaint has been dealt with on a local level and if they are dissatisfied with the result, they can appeal to the DfE. Any new details provided by a complainant's spouse, partner, grandparent or child, will be investigated and dealt with in line with the complaints procedure.

4.0 Roles and responsibilities

4.1 The complainant will:

- Cooperate with the school in seeking a solution to the complaint.
- Express the complaint and their concerns in full at the earliest possible opportunity.
- Promptly respond to any requests for information or meetings.
- Ask for assistance as needed.
- Treat any person(s) involved in the complaint with respect.
- Show appropriate conduct and language throughout all meetings regarding the complaint.
- Ensure the complaint is made within 3 months of an incident.

4.2 The complaint investigator will:

- Ensure that all parties involved in the complaint are fully updated throughout each stage of the procedure.
- Guarantee that all parties involved in the procedure are aware of any relevant legislation, including the Equality Act 2010, UK GDPR, Data Protection Act 2018 and Freedom of Information Act 2000.
- Keep up-to-date records throughout the procedure – these records will be kept securely on the school's ICT system and retained in line with the school's Records Management Policy.
- Liaise with all parties involved to ensure the complaints procedure runs smoothly, including the Headteacher, clerk to Governors and Chair of Governors.
- Ensure, where the complainant is dissatisfied with the response, they are allowed to escalate it to the next formal stage and are provided the opportunity to complete the complaints procedure in full.
- Be aware of issues with regard to sharing third party information.
- Understand the complainant's need for additional support, including interpretation support, and be aware of any issues concerning this.

4.3 The Headteacher, or where the complaint is against the Headteacher, the Chair of Governors, will be responsible for:

- Providing a sensitive and thorough interviewing process of the complainant to establish what has happened and who is involved.
- Considering all records, evidence and relevant information provided.
- Interviewing all parties that are involved in the complaint, including staff and pupils.
- Analysing all information in a comprehensive and fair manner.

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- Liaising with the complainant and complaint investigator to clarify an appropriate resolution to the problem.
- Identifying and recommending solutions and courses of actions to take.
- Being mindful of timescales and ensuring all parties involved are aware of these timescales.
- Responding to the complainant in a clear and understandable manner.

4.4 Clerk to the governing board

The clerk will:

- Be the contact point for the complainant and the complaints panel, including circulating the relevant papers and evidence before the complaints panel hearing
- The Clerk will organise the collection of additional information from the complainant and complaints panel by a specific date and in advance of the meeting.
- 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 Regulation (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
- Notify all parties of the committee's decision
- Arrange the complaints panel hearing
- Record and circulate the minutes and outcome of the hearing

4.5 The panel Chair will:

- Ensure that minutes of the meetings are taken on every occasion.
- Explain the remit of the panel to the complainant.
- Ensure that all issues are addressed and that outcomes are reached based on facts and evidence.
- Help to put at ease and console individuals involved who are not used to speaking at such hearings, particularly any pupils involved.
- Conduct the hearing in an informal manner, ensuring that everyone is treated with respect and courtesy.
- Ensure that the room's layout and setting is informal and non-adversarial while still setting the appropriate tone.
- Confirm that no member of the panel has previously been involved in the earlier stages of the procedure or has an external interest in the outcome of the proceedings.
- Give both the complainant and the school the opportunity to state their case and seek clarity without undue interruption.
- Provide copies of any written material or evidence to everyone in attendance of the meeting, ensuring that everyone has seen the necessary material, provided it does not breach confidentiality or any individual's rights to privacy under the DPA 2018 or UK GDPR.
- Organise a short adjournment of the hearing if required.
- Continuously liaise with the panel clerk and complaint investigator to ensure the procedure runs smoothly.
- Help to provide the support necessary where the complainant is a child.

4.6 All panel members will be aware that:

- The review panel meeting is independent and impartial.
- No individual with prior involvement in the complaint, or the circumstances surrounding it, is permitted to sit on the panel.
- The aim of the panel is to achieve a reasonable resolution and, ultimately, attain a harmonious reconciliation between the parties involved.
- Reconciliation between the school and complainant is not always achievable, and it may only be possible to establish facts and make recommendations to reassure the complainant that their case has been taken seriously.
- The panel can:
    - Dismiss or uphold the complaint, in whole or in part.
    - Decide on appropriate action to be taken.

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- Recommend changes that the school can make to prevent reoccurrence of the problem.

- Complainants may feel nervous or inhibited in a formal setting and, therefore, the proceedings should be as welcoming as possible.
- When a child is present at the hearing, extra care needs to be taken to ensure that the child does not feel intimidated, as well as ensuring the child's view is represented equally.

4.7 The panel clerk will:

- Continuously liaise with the complaint investigator.
- Record the proceedings.
- Set the date, time and venue of all hearings, ensuring that this is appropriate, convenient and accessible to all parties involved.
- Collate all written material or evidence involved and send it to the parties involved in timely advance of the hearing.
- Greet all parties as they arrive at the hearing.
- Ensure that the minutes of the panel hearing are circulated.
- Notify the relevant parties of the panel's decision and any other actions to be taken.

5.0 General Principles:

- This procedure is intended to allow you to raise a concern or complaint relating to the school, or the services that it provides.
- An anonymous concern or complaint will not be investigated under this procedure, unless there are exceptional circumstances.
- The vast majority of concerns or complaints can be resolved at the informal stage by raising the matter with a member of staff, or with the Headteacher, at the school.
- Complaints that are not resolved informally should be raised formally with the Headteacher (unless the complaint is about the Headteacher, in which case it should be addressed to the Chair of Governors. Complaints about the Chair of Governors should be referred to the Vice-Chair of Governors).
- Complaints may be both discussed informally or raised formally with the Headteacher. Formal complaints to the Headteacher should be made in writing, using the Formal Complaint Form at Appendix 1.
- If you remain dissatisfied having raised your complaint formally with the Headteacher, you may wish to ask the Chair of Governors to review your complaint, using a formal Complaint Form, via the school office, marking the letter private and confidential. The Chair of Governors may decide to delegate any resulting enquiry to another Governor.
- To enable a proper investigation, concerns or complaints should be brought to the attention of the school as soon as possible. In general any matter raised more than 3 months after the event that is being complained of, will not be considered. However, the school may use its discretion to investigate complaints raised after this time in exceptional circumstances, such as where there were valid reasons for the delay.

6.0 The Process:

We hope to resolve your complaint as quickly as possible. We will acknowledge receipt of your complaint within 3 school days and will arrange to meet with you to discuss your concern as soon as possible. If you are making a formal complaint, we will usually let you know how we intend to investigate it within 5 school days. Circumstances allowing, we will endeavour to complete any investigation so that we can let you know the outcome within 10 school days. However, some complaints require the school to seek independent/ external advice and may take longer. We will inform you if this is likely to be the case and will keep you informed of progress. The flowchart on the following page will help you decide the best person to speak to, depending on what your complaint is about. Pages 3-4 explain what you may expect to happen at each stage.

You always have:

- The option to take complaints that you feel are serious directly to the Headteacher.
- An option to resolve your complaint informally.
- An option to make a formal complaint if you remain unhappy.
- The option to ask for the process to be reviewed by the Governing Body Appeals Panel if you are not happy with the way the school has responded.
- The option to withdraw a complaint, by confirming this in writing.

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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 policy or result in the procedure being suspended until those public bodies have completed their investigations.

If a complainant commences legal action against Shefford Lower School in relation to their complaint, then we will consider whether to suspend the complaints procedure in relation to their complaint until those legal proceedings have concluded.

6.1 Complaints about staff

Any complaint made against a member of staff will be initially dealt with by the Headteacher, and then by a committee of the Governing Body if not resolved in accordance with the flow charts below. Any complaint made against the Headteacher will be initially dealt with by a suitably skilled member of the Governing Body and then by a committee of the Governing Body in accordance with the flow charts below.

6.2 Complaints about our fulfilment of early years requirements

We will investigate all written complaints relating to our school's fulfilment of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) 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 11) and make this available to Ofsted on request.

If parents/carers are not satisfied with our response, they can contact Ofsted by:

- Calling: 0300 123 4666
- Emailing: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

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

6.3 Complaints about Governors

Complaints may be made against:

- The Chair of Governors.
- The vice Chair of Governors.
- Any other member of the Governing Body
- The Governing Body as a whole.

These complaints should be made to the clerk (or nominated clerk) to the Governing Body, who will then arrange for the complaint to be heard. For complaints about the entire Governing Body, or the Chair or vice Chair of Governors, the clerk to Governors will determine the most appropriate course of action, depending on the nature of the complaint. This action may involve sourcing an independent investigator to initially deal with the complaint and then getting the complaint to be heard by co-opted Governors from another school. Under some circumstances, it may be necessary to deviate from the complaints procedure. Any deviation will be documented, along with the reasons for this. Information about a complaint will not be disclosed to a third party without written consent from the complainant.

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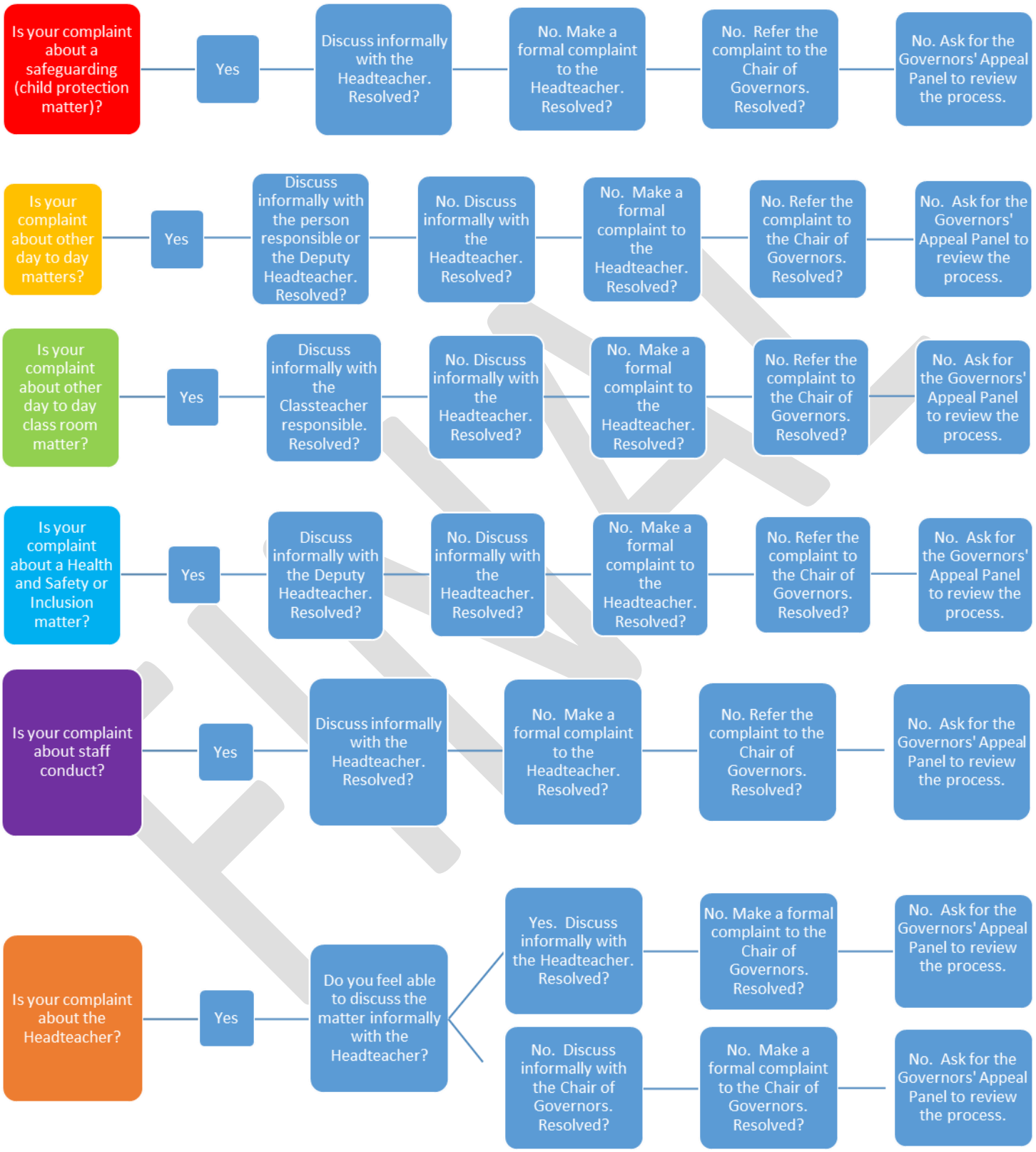
6.4 The flow chart below illustrates the procedure and who you should talk to about your complaint:



7.0 Complaints in relation to pupil suspensions and exclusions

Parents may ask for the decision to exclude their child to be reviewed by the Governing Body. However, the Headteacher has the discretion to decide appropriate consequences, including fixed period exclusions, and the Governing Body would only expect to review these decisions in exceptional circumstances e.g. in the event that the policy had not been followed or an allegation of misconduct. Parents wishing to make representations should write to the Clerk to the Governing Body, via the school office and marked private and confidential, asking for the decision to exclude to be reviewed by the Governing Body and giving the reasons for making the request. If your complaint is because you believe the Headteacher has not followed the school's policies in respect of the exclusion, please make your complaint in writing, marked private and confidential, to the Chair of Governors, via the school office. Other complaints relating to suspensions and exclusions are likely to fall into the categories above, e.g. staff conduct, the Headteacher's conduct, in which case the processes above should be followed.

8.0 Informal Stage

It is normally appropriate to communicate directly with the member of staff concerned so that they have an opportunity to resolve the matter informally. This may be by letter, by telephone or in person by appointment, requested via the school office. Many concerns can be resolved by simple clarification or the provision of information and it is anticipated that most complaints will be resolved by this informal stage. The member of staff the complaint has been made against can discuss the concern with the Headteacher to seek support. In the case of serious concerns it may be appropriate to address them directly to the Headteacher (or, if the complaint is about the Headteacher, to the Chair of the Governing Body).

If you are uncertain about who to contact, please seek advice from the school office, the Headteacher or the Clerk to the Governing Body. To prevent any later challenge or disagreement over what was said, brief notes of meetings and telephone calls will be kept and a copy of any written response added to the record. These notes will be kept securely on the school's ICT system and, where appropriate, encrypted. Within 15 school days, the complainant and the relevant member of staff will discuss the issue in a respectful and informal manner to seek a mutual resolution. Notes will be taken during this discussion. At this stage, the complainant will be asked what they think might resolve the issue – any acknowledgement that the school could have handled the situation better is not an admission of unlawful or negligent action. If an appropriate resolution cannot be sought at this informal level, or if the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome following the initial discussions, the complainant may wish to proceed to the next level of the procedure.

9.0 Formal Stage

If your concern or complaint is not resolved at the informal stage you may choose to make a formal complaint. A Formal Complaint Form is attached at appendix 1 to help you to include the information that will be needed. The complaint form can be completed by a third party acting on behalf of the complainant, if they have the complainant's consent to do so

Formal complaints should be made to the Headteacher, who will be responsible for ensuring that it is investigated appropriately. If the complaint is about the Headteacher, you should forward your complaint to the Chair of the Governing Body. This should be done in writing via the school office, addressed to the Chair of Governors and marked private and confidential. The Chair of Governors, will seek to resolve the issue informally, e.g. by arranging a meeting with the complainant within 10 days, before moving to the next stage of the procedure.

This stage of the process will be completed within 10 school days. Where the situation is recognised as complex, and it is deemed to be unable to be resolved within this timescale, the Headteacher or clerk to Governors will contact the complainant to inform them of the revised target date via a written notification. An appointment with the Headteacher will be made as soon as reasonably practical, to avoid any possible worsening of the situation.

Where the Headteacher or Chair of Governors has made reasonable attempts to accommodate the complainant with dates for a complaint meeting and they refuse or are unable to attend, the meeting will be convened in their absence and a conclusion will be reached in the interests of drawing the complaint to a close. Where there are communication difficulties, the complaint may be made in person or via telephone. To prevent any later challenge or disagreement over what was said, brief notes of meetings and telephone calls will be kept, and a copy of any written response added to the record. These notes will be kept securely on the school's ICT system and, where appropriate, encrypted. In terms of a complaint being made against a member of staff, the Headteacher will discuss the issue with the staff member in question. Where necessary, the Headteacher will conduct interviews with any relevant parties, including witnesses and pupils, and take statements from those involved. All discussions will be recorded by the Headteacher or the clerk to Governors, and findings and resolutions communicated to the complainant either verbally or in writing.

Once all facts are established, the Headteacher will contact the complainant in writing with an explanation of the decision. The complainant will be advised of any escalation options and provided with details of this process. The complainant will also be provided with copies of minutes, subject to any necessary redactions under the Data Protection Act 2018 and the UK GDPR. Any further action

the school plans to take to resolve the issue will be explained to the complainant in writing. If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome suggested, the procedure will progress to the next stage of the procedure.

10.0 Making a formal complaint:

A Complaint Form is provided to assist you (appendix 1, and is also available electronically on the school's website). You should include details which might assist the investigation, such as names of potential witnesses, dates and times of events , and copies of relevant documents. If you have already raised your complaint informally, please explain the actions you have taken, the outcomes to date and why you feel the matter is still unresolved. It is very important that you include a clear statement of the actions that you would like the school to take to resolve your concern. Without this, it is much more difficult to proceed.

Please pass the completed form/ complaint in a sealed envelope, marked private and confidential, to the school office. The envelope should be addressed to the Headteacher (or, if the complaint is about the Headteacher, to the Chair of the Governing Body). The Headteacher (or Chair) may invite you to a meeting to clarify your concerns and to explore the possibility of an informal resolution. If you accept that invitation, you may be accompanied by a friend, if you wish, to assist you in explaining the nature of your concerns.

It is possible that your complaint will be resolved through a meeting with the Headteacher (or Chair). If not, arrangements will be made for the matter to be fully investigated, using the appropriate procedures. In any case you should learn in writing, usually within 5 school days of the school receiving your formal complaint, of how the school intends to proceed. This notification should include an indication of the anticipated timescale, however this can vary depending upon the type of compliant. Any investigation will begin as soon as possible and when it has been concluded, you will be informed in writing of the outcome. Once a response has been sent then the matter will be considered closed. If your complaint has been dealt with by the Headteacher and you are still not satisfied with the outcome you may ask for your complaint to be reviewed by the Chair of Governors. The Chair of Governors' will always aim to resolve the matter amicably but reserves the right to convene a Governors Panel, consisting of 3 Governors to review the matter. Please send a copy of your original complaint to the Chair of Governors, together with a written explanation giving the reasons you remain dissatisfied and explaining what would constitute a satisfactory outcome to your complaint.

11.0 Investigation by the Chair of Governors

The Chair of Governors will carry out an investigation and consider all available evidence. Where the Chair of Governors has already been involved, e.g. in complaints against the Headteacher, the investigation will be carried out by the vice Chair of Governors. The complainant and the Headteacher will be informed of the outcome within 20 school days of the Chair of Governors receiving the complaint. The complainant will be advised of any escalation options and will be provided with details of this process. The complainant will also be provided with copies of minutes, subject to any necessary redactions under the Data Protection Act 2018 and the UK GDPR. If the complainant is not satisfied with the manner in which the process has been followed, considers the decision to be perverse, or believes that the Chair has acted unreasonably, they may request that the Governing Body reviews the complaint via an appeal.

12.0 Appeals Process

If you are not satisfied with the outcome provided by the School then you can appeal by writing to the Chair of the Governors, within 5 school days of receiving notice of the outcome. You need to include a statement specifying why you wish to appeal the decision made by the School. A Complaint Appeals Request form is provided for your convenience. Where there are communication difficulties, the complaint may be made in person or via telephone. To prevent any later challenge or disagreement over what was said, brief notes of meetings and telephone calls will be kept, and a copy of any written response added to the record. These notes will be kept securely by the clerk to Governors. For the process please see Appendix 4

Written acknowledgement of the complaint will be made within 3 school days. This will inform the complainant that a CAP will hear the complaint within 20 school days. Neither the school nor the complainant should bring legal representation to the CAP proceedings; however, there are occasions where legal representation may be appropriate, e.g. where a school employee is a witness in a complaint, they may be entitled to bring union or legal representation. The Chair of Governors, or another nominated governor, will convene a CAP comprising of three members of the Governing Body. If the whole Governing Body is aware of the substance of a complaint before the CAP has been completed, an independent panel will be arranged to hear the complaint. At least one member of the panel will be independent of the management and running of the school. This means they will not be a governor, employee, or otherwise connected to the school.

If the complainant believes there is likely to be bias in the proceedings, they reserve the right to request an independent p anel – complainants should provide evidence to support their request. Where the appearance of bias is sufficient to taint the decision reached, the request will likely be granted by the Governing Body.

To appoint a governor from another school onto an independent complaints panel, the Governing Body does not have to enter into, or already be in, a formal arrangement under the School Governance (Collaboration) (England) Regulations 2003. Where an independent panel is arranged on an ad-hoc, informal basis, Governors who are suitability skilled and who can demonstrate their independence will be sourced. Governors from any category of governor or associate members of another Governing Body can be approached to take part in an independent panel. Five days' notice will be given to all parties attending the CAP, including the complainant. Prior to the hearing, the Chair of Governors will have written to the complainant informing them of how the review will be conducted. The Headteacher will also have a copy of this letter. At the hearing, all participants will be given the opportunity to put their case across and discuss any issues. The CAP will consider issues raised in the original complaint and any issues which have been highlighted during the complaints procedure.
The meeting will allow for:

- The complainant to be present and accompanied at the hearing if they wish.
- The complainant to explain their complaint and the Headteacher to explain the reasons for their decision.
- The complainant to question the Headteacher, and vice versa, about the complaint.
- Any evidence, including witnesses who have been prior approved by the Chair of the CAP, to be questioned.
- Members of the CAP to question both the complainant and the Headteacher.
- Final statements to be made by both parties involved.

The complainant and the person complained about, where relevant, will receive a written response, via email or otherwise, explaining the panel's findings and recommendations within 15 school days. This response will also explain whether there are any further rights of appeal and to whom they need to be addressed. Where relevant, the person complained about will receive a summary of the panel's findings and recommendations. They will also receive a copy of the minutes, subject to any necessary redactions under the Data Protection Act 2018 and the UK GDPR.

12.1 Final stage: Appeal
If a complaint has completed the school's process and the complainant remains dissatisfied, they have the right to refer their complaint to the Secretary of State using the online form or in writing to:
Ministerial and Public Communications Division
Department for Education
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD
The Secretary of State has a duty to consider all complaints raised but will only intervene where the Governing Body has acted unlawfully or unreasonably and where it is expedient or practical to do so. In this case, the word "unreasonably" is used in a strict sense and means acting in a way that no reasonable school or Governing Body could act in the circumstances.

13 Complaints not covered by this procedure
There are a variety of areas where the complaints procedure does not apply because of other separate statutory procedures being in place. The school will deal with complaints regarding these topics in line with the procedures outlines below.
The following complaints should be directed to the LA:

- Statutory assessments of SEND
- School reorganisation proposals
- Admissions to schools

Complaints about child protection matters will be handled in line with the school's Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy and in accordance with relevant statutory guidance. Any child protection complaints should be directed to the LADO or the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH). Complaints concerning admissions will be directed to the appropriate admissions authority.

Complaints regarding exclusions will be dealt with in accordance with procedures outlined in the school's Suspension and Exclusion Policy. The school has an internal whistleblowing procedure for all employees, including contractors and temporary staff outlined in the Whistleblowing Policy. Any whistleblowers not wishing to raise the issue with their employer will direct their complaint to the DfE. Volunteers who have concerns about the school or a member of staff should make their complaint in line with this policy. Volu nteers may also be able to complain to the LA or DfE, depending on what the complaint is about.

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Staff grievances and disciplinary procedures will be dealt with in line with the school's Grievance Policy. In these cases, complainants will not be informed of the outcome of any investigations; however, they will be notified that the matter is being addressed. This complaints procedure is not to be used when addressing any complaints made about services provided by a third party who may use the school premises or facilities. The Headteacher will ensure all third-party suppliers have their own complaints procedures in place, and all complaints concerning this should be directed to the service provider.

Complaints about the content of national curriculum should be made to the DfE. Complaints about how the school delivers the curriculum, including RE and RSHE, will be dealt with using this complaints procedure.
Requests for information and issues with the school's process for dealing with FOI requests, will be dealt with in accordance with the Freedom of Information Policy.

14.0 Exceptional circumstances
The DfE expects complainants to have completed the school's complaints procedure before directing a complaint to them. The exceptions to this include when:

- Pupils are at risk of harm.
- Pupils are missing education.
- A complainant is being prevented from having their complaint progress through the school's complaints procedure.
- The DfE has evidence that the school is proposing to act or is acting unlawfully or unreasonably.

If a social services authority decides to investigate a situation, the Headteacher or Governing Body may postpone the complaints procedure. Where a matter can be resolved through a legal appeal, it will not be considered as a formal complaint. The key areas are: admissions decisions, certain decisions relating to formal assessment of SEND, and decisions to permanently exclude a child. If a complainant commences legal action against the school in relation to their complaint, the school will consider whether to suspend the complaints procedure, until those legal proceedings have concluded.

14.1 Managing serial and unreasonable complaints
The school is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, and to providing a high-quality service to those who complain. The school will not normally limit the contact complainants have with it; however, the school will not expect staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour and will take action to protect staff from that behaviour, including that which is abusive, offensive or threatening.
A complaint may be regarded as unreasonable when the person making the complaint:

- Refuses to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcomes sought by raising the complaint, despite offers of assistance.
- Refuses to cooperate with the complaints investigation process while still wishing their complaint to be resolved.
- Refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of a complaints procedure.
- Insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the adopted complaints procedure or with good practice.
- Introduces trivial or irrelevant information which the complainant expects to be taken into account and commented on, or raises large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions, and insists they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales.
- Makes unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues and seeks to have them replaced.
- Changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds.
- Repeatedly makes the same complaint (despite previous investigations or responses concluding that the complaint is groundless or has been addressed).
- Refuses to accept the findings of the investigation into that complaint where the school's complaints procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed including referral to the DfE.
- Seeks an unrealistic outcome.
- Makes excessive demands on school time by frequent, lengthy, complicated and stressful contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with.
- Uses threats to intimidate.
- Uses abusive, offensive or discriminatory language or violence.
- Knowingly provides falsified information.

- Publishes unacceptable information on social media or other public forums.

Complainants should limit the numbers of communications with a school while a complaint is being progressed. It is not helpfu l if repeated correspondence is sent (either by letter, phone, email or text) as it could delay the outcome being reached. Whenever possible, the Headteacher or Chair of Governors will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying an 'unreasonable' marking. If the behaviour continues, the Headteacher will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and asking them to change it. For complainants who excessively contact the school causing a significant level of disruption, the school may specify methods of communication and limit the number of contacts in a communication plan. This will usually be reviewed after six months.

A decision to stop responding will only be considered in circumstances where the following statements are true:

- Every reasonable step has been taken to address the complainant's concerns.
- The complainant has been given a clear statement of the school's position and their options.
- The complainant contacts the school repeatedly, making substantially the same points each time.

If the above criteria are met, in making a decision to stop responding the school will also consider if the complainant is often abusive or aggressive in their communication, makes insulting personal comments about staff or threats towards them, and if the schoo l believes their intent is to disrupt or inconvenience the school. The school will not stop responding to a complainant on the basis that they are difficult to deal with or they ask complex questions. In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, the concerns and actions taken will be put in writing immediately and the police informed. This may include banning an individual from the premises.

14.2 Complaints campaigns

For the purposes of this policy, "**complaints campaigns**" are where the school receives large volumes of complaints that are all based on the same subject. Where the school becomes the subject of a complaints campaign from complainants who are not connected with the school, a standard, single response will be published on the school's website. If the school receives a large number of complaints about the same subject from complainants who are connected to the school, e.g. parents, each complainant will receive an individual response. If complainants remain dissatisfied with the school's response, they will be directed to the DfE.

14.3 Barring from the premises

The school premises is private property and therefore any individual may be barred from entering the premises. If an individu al's behaviour is cause for concern, the Headteacher or Chair of Governors will ask the individual to leave the premises. The Headteacher will notify the parties involved in writing, explaining that their implied licence for access to the premises has been temporarily revoked and why, subject to any representations that the individual may wish to make. The individual involved will be given the opportunity to formally express their views regarding the decision to bar them. This decision to bar will be reviewed by the Chair of Governors or a committee of the Governing Body, taking into account any discussions following the incident. If the decision is made to continue the bar, the individual will be contacted in writing, informing them of how long the bar will be in place, and when the decision will be reviewed. Anyone wishing to make a complaint regarding a barring order can do so in writing, including email, to the Headteacher or Chair of Governors. Once the school's complaints procedure is completed, the only remaining avenue of appeal is through the Courts.

15.0 Role of the DfE

If a complainant remains dissatisfied once the complaint procedure has been completed, they have the right to refer their complaint to the Secretary of State. If a complainant wishes to escalate a complaint of bias, the DfE will require evidence to be submitted with the complaint. The Secretary of State will only intervene when they believe that the Governing Body has acted unlawfully or unreasonably. They will not overturn a school's decision about a complaint except in exceptional circumstances, such as the school acting unlawfully. When making a final decision about a complaint, the school reserves the right to seek advice from the DfE on whether they are acting reasonably and lawfully; however, they will not be able to advise on how to resolve the complaint

16.0 Transferring data

When a pupil changes school, the pupil's educational record will be transferred to the new school and no copies will be kept. The school will hold records of complaints separate to pupil records while a complaint is ongoing, so that access to these records can be maintained. Information that the school retains relating to a complaint will be stored securely and in line with the school's Records Management Policy.

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17. Record keeping and confidentiality

Our 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 stored securely, and will be viewed only by those involved in investigating the complaint or the panel hearing.

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 UK GDPR the Data Protection Act 2018, or where the material must be made available to Ofsted with regard to complaints from parents of pupils at the school

Records of complaints will be kept securely, for at least 6 years from the date the complaint is resolved, and in line with data protection law and our privacy notices and records management policy/ retention schedule.

The details of the complaint, including the names of individuals involved, will not be shared with the whole governing board in case a panel hearing needs to be organised at a later point. The exception to this is when a complaint is made against the whole governing board and they need to be aware of the allegations to respond.

Where the governing board is aware of the substance of a complaint (that is not about the board) before the panel hearing 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.

18. Learning lessons

The governing board will review any underlying issues raised by complaints with the headteacher, 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.

19. Equal Opportunities

This policy will be implemented in a fair and objective manner and without prejudice to any person regardless of their ethnicity, age, religious faith, gender, sexual orientation or disability. If you need this policy produced in another format please let the school know.

20. Monitoring and Review of this policy

The implementation of this policy will be monitored by the Governing Body. This policy will be reviewed annually taking into account any legislative changes and the latest guidance issued by the DfE or earlier if the occasion arises. The school will publish this policy on its website and will include information about the number of formal complaints received in the previous academic year."

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Appendix 1

Shefford lower School Formal Complaint Form

Please complete this form and return it to the school office marked private and confidential, addressed to the Headteacher (or Chair of Governors), who will acknowledge its receipt and inform you of the next stage in the procedure.

Your name: ……

Relationship with school (e.g. parent of a pupil on the school roll):
……

Pupil's name (if relevant to your complaint):
……

Your Address:

Telephone numbers
Daytime: Evening:

e-mail address:

Please give concise details of your complaint, (including dates, names of witnesses etc…), to allow the matter to be fully investigated:

You may continue on separate paper, or attach additional documents, if you wish.

Number of Additional pages attached =

FINAL

What action, if any, have you already taken to try to resolve your complaint? (i.e. who have you spoken with or written to and what was the outcome?)

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

Signature:

Date:

School use:
Date Form received:
Received by:
Date acknowledgement sent:
Acknowledgement sent by:

Complaint referred to:			
Date:			

FINAL

Appendix 2

Shefford Lower School Complaint Appeals Request Form

If you feel your complaint is not resolved and you would like to appeal to the Governing Body to review it, please complete this form and return it to the Chair of the Governing Body, who will acknowledge its receipt and inform you of the next stage in the procedure.

Your name: ……

Your Address:

Telephone numbers:
Daytime: Evening:

e-mail address:

Dear Chair of Governors,

I submitted a formal complaint to the school on……..and I am dissatisfied by the procedure that has been followed.

My complaint was submitted to …… and I received a response from …….. on …….. .

I have attached copies of my formal complaint and of the response(s) from the school.

I am dissatisfied with the way in which the procedure was carried out, because:

You may continue on separate paper, or attach additional documents, if you wish.

FINAL

Number of Additional pages attached =

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

Signature:

Date:

<u>School use</u>
Date Form received:
Received by:
Date acknowledgement sent:
Acknowledgement sent by:

Request referred to:			
Date:			

FINAL

Appendix 3

Governing Body Meetings

Complaints Appeals Panel

A meeting of the panel will take place, usually within 10 school days of receipt of a written request, to consider the matter.

The appeal will be conducted by a panel of 3 members of the Governing Body.

The panel can:

- Dismiss the complaint in whole or in part;
- Uphold the complaint in whole or in part;
- Decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint;
- Recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not recur.

The review will normally be conducted through a consideration of written submissions, but reasonable requests, from any of the parties, to make oral representations will be considered by the Chair of Governors. The Chair of Governors will decide the whether a Written Submission or Oral Hearing is appropriate and his/her decision is final.

Written Submission Process

The panel will first receive written evidence from the complainant. The complainant should clearly explain why they are unhappy with the outcome and what would constitute a satisfactory outcome to the complaint.

The panel will then invite representatives of the school to supply a written statement as a response. This could be the Headteacher, Chair of Governors or independent advisors used by the School depending upon the type of complaint.

The panel will have access to all the relevant information.

The complainant and the school representative(s) will be informed in writing of the outcome, usually within 5 school days of the panel meeting.

Once a decision is made by the panel, the matter will then be closed as far as the school is concerned.

Oral Hearing Process

Subject to the Chair of Governors agreeing to an Oral hearing.

A meeting of the panel will take place, usually within 10 school days of receipt of a written request, to consider the matter.

The appeal will be conducted by a panel of 3 members of the Governing Body.

The Process:

Panel meetings are intended to be investigatory, rather than adversarial, the persons giving evidence or making representations to the panel will attend separately.

The complainant (who may be accompanied by a friend if they wish) will present their case to the panel and explain clearly why they are unhappy with the outcome and what would constitute a satisfactory outcome to the complaint.

The person appointed to investigate the complaint will be invited to attend this meeting in order to make representations. (they may where appropriate be accompanied by workplace colleagues or representatives from their professional associations).

The Panel reserves the right to call other professionals/advisors to the Panel.

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The panel will have access to all the relevant information.

The complainant and the school representative(s) will be informed in writing of the outcome, usually within 5 school days of the panel meeting.

Once a decision is made by the panel, the matter will then be closed as far as the school is concerned.

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Appendix 4:

Example letters that may be used in response

a) Response to spurious complainant

Dear

Following receipt of your communications and careful consideration of the same, I regret that I am unable to deal with this matter under the Governing Body's Complaints Procedure as:

[It will be appropriate to include SOME of the following statements]

- You have not identified any specific actions of which you might complain
- Your concerns are presented as conclusions rather than specific actions of which you complain.
- The concerns that you identify relate to historical actions and any evidence which might have enabled an objective investigation of your complaint is no longer available.
- The substance of your complaint has been addressed under this procedure already.
- The concerns that you raise do not fall within the scope of this procedure.
- You have not identified any potential sources of evidence which might allow the matter to be investigated.

If you wish my decision to be reviewed then you may take advantage of the procedure set out in the school's Formal Complaint Procedure, by writing to the Chair of the Governing Body.

Yours sincerely,

Headteacher
Or Chair of Governing Body

b) **Acknowledgement of receipt of formal complaint *and* invitation to meet**

Dear …….

I have received your formal complaint, dated …… . I am grateful that you have brought this to my attention.

The school and Governing Body take any complaint most seriously. Therefore I would like to meet with you, as soon as possible, so that I may understand the details of your concerns more clearly. You are welcome to be accompanied to the meeting by a friend, if you would find this helpful. Please telephone……, in order to arrange an appointment./ I can offer you an appointment at …. on ,…….Please let me know if this is convenient.

I hope that we will be able to resolve your concerns through our meeting, but if not I will ensure that the appropriate investigation takes place. This should begin within 5 days of our meeting.

Yours sincerely,

Headteacher
Or Chair of Governing Body

FINAL

c) **Acknowledgement of receipt of formal complaint referred by a third party [e.g. LA, Diocese, MP]**

Dear …….

I have received a copy of the documentation that you sent to ……. setting out a complaint about…….This has been passed to the school as it has responsibility for these matters.

The school and Governing Body take any complaint most seriously. Therefore I would like to meet with you, as soon as possible, so that I may understand the details of your concerns more clearly. You are welcome to be accompanied to the meeting by a friend, if you would find this helpful. Please telephone ……, in order to arrange an appointment./ I can offer you an appointment at ……..on ……. Please let me know if this is convenient.

Meanwhile I would be grateful if you would complete and return the Formal Complaint Form that is enclosed, along with details of the school's complaints procedure.

I hope that we will be able to resolve your concerns through our meeting, but if not I will ensure that the appropriate investigation takes place. This should begin within 5 days of our meeting.

Yours sincerely,

Headteacher
Or Chair of Governing Body

d) **Acknowledgements of receipt of formal complaint and advising complainant that the matter has been referred**

Dear …….

I have received your formal complaint, dated …… I am grateful that you have brought this to my attention.

However, the matters that are of concern to you are the responsibility of the Governing Body/ LA/ service provider, so I have forwarded your documentation to ……. You should be contacted, in the near future, to be advised of how they intend to proceed.

If I can be of any further assistance, please do let me know.

Yours sincerely,

Headteacher

FINAL

e) Acknowledgements of receipt of formal complaint and advising complainant that the matter is being dealt with under a confidential school procedure

Dear …….

I have received your formal complaint, dated …… . I am grateful that you have brought this to my attention.

The school and Governing Body take any complaint most seriously. Therefore I have initiated an immediate investigation. It is possible that the investigator will wish to meet with you to clarify the evidence that you have provided so far. If so, he/she will write to you to make suitable arrangements.

As your concerns relate to the conduct/capability of a member of staff, the investigation will be carried out under the school's personnel procedures. This means that the detail of the procedure and its outcome must remain confidential to the school and the member of staff concerned.

OR

As your concerns relate to the behaviour of a pupil, the investigation will be carried out under the school's pupil conduct and disciplinary procedures. This means that the detail of the procedure and its outcome must remain confidential to the school and the parents of the child concerned.

In due course, I may be able to provide you with some information about the outcomes of the investigation and the processes that have been followed, but in any event will let you know when the matter has been concluded.

If I can be of any further assistance, please do let me know.

Yours sincerely,

Headteacher
Or Chair of Governing Body

f) **NOTIFICATION OF DECISION REGARDING FORMAL COMPLAINT**

Dear

Following receipt of your complaint and careful consideration of all the available relevant evidence, I/the panel have/has concluded that: *(Select from the following)*

- There is insufficient evidence to reach a conclusion, so the complaint cannot be upheld. If you are able to provide additional evidence forthwith I/we will reconsider this decision.
  or
- The concern is not substantiated by the evidence in that ……
  or
- The concern was substantiated in part/in full, as ……. The school will review its practices/procedures ..... with the intention of avoiding any reoccurrence. Parents will be informed in due course of any policy changes.
  or
- In order to address fully the matters investigated, the school has initiated appropriate internal procedures. Due to the nature of these procedures, their outcome must remain strictly confidential. We are confident, however, that the circumstances that gave rise to your complaint should not recur.
  or
- In order to address fully the matters of concern that you identified, the panel recommended that the Governing Body should review its ..... policy, as a matter of urgency. We are confident that this should prevent similar concerns arising in future.

I hope that we may now put this matter behind us and work together for the benefit of your child's progress.

Yours sincerely,

Headteacher/Chair of Governing Body/Chair of Panel

FINAL

g) **APPEALS OUTCOME NOTIFICATION**

Dear

Having carefully considered your representations in the context of the relevant evidence, the Governing Body Complaints Appeal Panel has concluded that the school followed the relevant procedure appropriately in respect of your complaint.

Summary of reasons ……

Therefore, the matter is now closed as far as the school is concerned.

Or

Having carefully considered your representations in the context of the relevant evidence, the Governing Body Complaints Appeals Panel has concluded that the school followed the relevant procedure appropriately in respect of your complaint except …….. .

Therefore, the following action will be taken ……. .

Once this action has been completed the school will consider the matter to be closed.

Or

Having carefully considered your representations in the context of the relevant evidence, the Governing Body Complaints Appeals Panel has concluded that the school followed the relevant procedure appropriately in respect of your complaint except …….. .

However the panel determined that this procedural failure did not affect the outcome of the consideration of your complaint so, while we regret this error, we will now consider this matter to be closed as far as the school is concerned.

Yours sincerely,

Chair of Complaints Appeals Panel

c.c. Headteacher
Chair of Governors

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Appendix 5

Paragraph for Inclusion in School Prospectus / Website

Raising Concerns and Resolving Complaints

From time to time parents, and others connected with the school, will become aware of matters which cause them concern. To encourage resolution of such situations the Governing Body has adopted a "School Complaints Procedure".

The procedure is devised with the intention that it will:

- Usually be possible to resolve problems by informal means
- Be simple to use and understand
- Be non-adversarial
- Provide confidentiality
- Allow problems to be handled swiftly through the correct procedure
- Address all the points at issue
- Inform future practice so that the problem is unlikely to recur.

Full details of the procedure may be obtained from the School Office, the School Website, or from the Clerk to the Governing Body.

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Appendix 6

Leaflet that could be sent to persons who make spurious/vexatious or abusive complaints, if the policy is adopted by the Governing Body

Shefford Lower School
Policy For Handling Unreasonably Persistent, Harassing Or Abusive Complainants

The Headteacher and Governing Body are fully committed to the improvement of our school. We welcome feedback from parents/carers and will always try to resolve any concerns as quickly as possible. There is a procedure for parents to use if they wish to make a formal complaint.

Sometimes, however, parents or carers pursuing complaints or other issues treat staff and others in a way that is unacceptable. Whilst we recognise that some complaints may relate to serious and distressing incidents, we will not accept threatening or harassing behaviour towards any members of the school community.

The aim of this leaflet is to provide information about our school policy on unreasonably persistent complainants or harassment of staff.

What do we mean by 'an unreasonably persistent complainant'?

An unreasonably persistent complainant may be anyone who engages in unreasonable behaviour when making a complaint. This will include persons who pursue complaints in an unreasonable manner.

Unreasonable behaviour may include:

- actions which are
    - out of proportion to the nature of the complaint, or
    - persistent – even when the complaints procedure has been exhausted, or
    - personally harassing, or
    - unjustifiably repetitious

- an insistence on
    - pursuing unjustified complaints and/or
    - unrealistic outcomes to justified complaints
    - pursuing justifiable complaints in an unreasonable manner (eg using abusive or threatening language; or
    - making complaints in public or via a social networking site such as Facebook; or
    - refusing to attend appointments to discuss the complaint.

What is 'harassment'?

We regard harassment as the unreasonable pursuit of issues or complaints, particularly if the matter appears to be pursued in a way intended to cause personal distress rather than to seek a resolution.

Behaviour may fall within the scope of this policy if:

- it appears to be deliberately targeted at one or more members of school staff or others, without good cause;
- the way in which a complaint or other issues is pursued (as opposed to the complaint itself) causes undue distress to school staff or others;
- it has a significant and disproportionate adverse effect on the school community.

What does the school expect of any person wishing to raise a concern?

The school expects anyone who wishes to raise concerns with the school to:

- treat all members of the school community with courtesy and respect;
- respect the needs of pupils and staff within the school;
- avoid the use of violence, or threats of violence, towards people or property;
- recognise the time constraints under which members of staff in schools work and allow the school a reasonable time to respond to a complaint;
- follow the school's complaints procedure.

Schools' responses to unreasonably persistent complaints or harassment

This policy is intended to be used in conjunction with the school's complaints procedure. Taken together, these documents set out how we will always seek to work with parents, carers and others with a legitimate complaint to resolve a difficulty.

However, in cases of unreasonably persistent complaints or harassment, the school may take some or all of the following steps, as appropriate:

- inform the complainant informally that his/her behaviour is now considered by the school to be unreasonable or unacceptable, and request a changed approach;
- inform the complainant in writing that the school considers his/her behaviour to fall under the terms of the Unreasonably Persistent Complaints/ Harassment Policy;
- require all future meetings with a member of staff to be conducted with a second person present. In the interests of all parties, notes of these meetings may be taken;
- inform the complainant that, except in emergencies, the school will respond only to written communication and that these may be required to be channelled through the Local Authority.

Physical or verbal aggression

The Governing Body will not tolerate **any** form of physical or verbal aggression against members of the school community. If there is evidence of any such aggression the school may:

- ban the individual from entering the school site, with immediate effect;
- request an Anti-Social Behaviour Order (ASBO);
- prosecute under Anti-Harassment legislation.
- call the police to remove the individual from the premises, under powers provided by the Education Act 1996.

Legitimate new complaints will always be considered, even if the person making them is (or has been) subject to the Unreasonably Persistent Complaints/ Harassment Policy. The school nevertheless reserves the right not to respond to communications from individuals subject to the policy.

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Appendix 7 – Investigating a Complaint

Preparation

STEPS TO TAKE	GUIDANCE
☐ Log the complaint formally, as set out by your complaints procedure	
☐ Appoint an investigator	This can be the headteacher, or an appropriate member of senior staff, unless the complaint is related to: • The headteacher – in this case, your investigator should be the chair of governors or another suitably skilled governor • A governor – your investigator should be a suitably skilled member of the governing board, as directed by the clerk • Your chair – the clerk should decide whether the investigator should be the vice chair or someone external • Your whole governing board – your investigator should be appointed externally, as directed by the clerk
☐ Make sure that your human resources lead has a record of the complaint	HR lead is the School Business Manager at Shefford Lower School.
☐ Ensure complaints co-ordinator informed of the complaint and have the resources they need to carry out their job	Check your complaints policy/procedures if you're unsure who your complaints co-ordinator is and what their role is.
☐ Seek external advice, if appropriate	Use your own judgement to decide if you'll seek external support. It's a good idea to do this for complaints that: • Are complex • Are technical or require special knowledge, e.g. financial impropriety • Are sensitive • Might lead to staff dismissal Depending on the nature of the complaint, you might seek advice from: • Your LA • Appropriate HR or legal experts • The police • External conduct authorities (e.g. exam regulators, financial conduct authorities, the Information Commissioner's Office, etc.)
☐ Take steps to make sure you preserve any evidence that may be scrutinised	For example: • Make copies of electronic or paper records • Make copies of any CCTV footage, especially if it's automatically taped over after a certain period of time

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☐ Acknowledge receipt of the complaint within your stated timeframe	Check your complaints procedure to find out how much time you have to acknowledge a complaint. Your acknowledgement should: • Be written and dated • Specify how the complaint will be investigated and by whom • Set out the timescale of the investigation and response • Inform the complainant how they can contact the school to get assistance or clarification through the process of the investigation • Ask what the complainant feels would resolve the issue (if this isn't set out in the complaint)

Investigating the complaint

STEPS TO TAKE	GUIDANCE
☐ Formally record the complainant's statement	The complainant should get a chance to state their case either in person or in writing, to ensure a fair investigation. If they make a verbal statement, record what was said using the complainant's own language. Ask the complainant to sign a copy of their statement (whether it was a written communication they sent you or a transcript you recorded) to confirm it as their formal account.
☐ Conduct witness interviews and collect statements (if any)	Keep records of interviews: • If you record the interview in audio or video form, make sure to get permission first If you write notes or a transcript of interviews, use the subject's own words rather than summarising.
☐ If the complaint involves a pupil, contact the parents/carers of the pupil(s) involved	If a pupil needs to be interviewed, they should be accompanied by: • A parent/carer, if possible; or if not, • A staff member who the pupil feels comfortable with but who is not involved in the complaint
☐ Examine any evidence / documentation	For example: • Emails or text messages • CCTV footage • The contents of a computer • Financial records Seek help from a limited number of staff, if necessary. For example, you may need support from: • Your school business manager • Your head of IT Remind these staff members of the need to maintain confidentiality

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	throughout the investigation.
☐ Make a note of any evidence you weren't able to obtain, and why not	This might be statements, interviews, or physical evidence. You will be able to prove that you tried to get this information to carry out a full investigation, if the outcome is later appealed.
☐ Inform the complainant of any extensions to the timescale of the investigation (if required)	Offer a brief explanation of why the timescale was extended, to demonstrate that you are taking the issue seriously, for example that someone you need to interview has been unavailable.

Resolving the investigation

STEPS TAKEN	ADVICE
☐ Deliver a written response	Your response should contain: • Actions you've taken to investigate the complaint • An explanation of your decision and how you reached it • If applicable, details of actions that the school will take to resolve the complaint You may also wish to offer the complainant a further meeting to explain how the investigation was carried out and how your decision was reached. Make it clear that this meeting is not an opportunity to appeal the outcome of the investigation.
☐ **If complainant is satisfied**: formally declare the complaint closed	Keep investigation records in line with your school data retention policy and your data protection requirements.
☐ **If the complainant is not satisfied**: inform the complainant how they can escalate their complaint by referring the matter to your governing body	Make sure that the complainant knows about their right to appeal, and any relevant timescales to do so.

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