



Complaints Procedure

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Person responsible:	Principal	Reviewer:	Governor delegate / Principal		
Related documentation	DfE & EFA Guidance				

Plympton Academy Complaints Procedure

Governors of Plympton Academy have adopted the following procedure to deal with formal-complaints from members of the academy community or general public

Dealing with concerns at the earliest opportunity

Stage 1: If parents, students or members of the public have concerns they should:

a) Discuss their concerns with the member of staff most directly involved
or

b) Discuss their concerns with a senior member of staff

The Academy will acknowledge any informal complaints received within 5 working days and provide a response within 20 working days

If the complainant is not satisfied with the response they will be signposted to move to Stage 2 of the complaints procedure below

Stage 2: Write to the Academy Principal setting out the detail of the complaint

Parents, students and members of the public not satisfied with the response received after raising matters through members of Academy staff (Stage 1 above) should set out their concerns in writing and address them to the Principal.

The Academy will acknowledge any complaints made to the Principal within 5 working days and provide a full response within 20 working days. For particularly complex cases an interim response will be provided within 20 days together with detail of a timescale for concluding any further investigation needed.

At each stage in the procedure, Plympton Academy will keep in mind ways in which a concern or complaint can be resolved. It may acknowledge that the concern or complaint is valid in whole or in part. In addition, it may offer one or more of the following:

- an apology;
- an explanation;
- an admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better;
- an assurance that the event complained of will not recur;
- an explanation of the steps that have been taken to ensure that it will not happen again;
- an undertaking to review academy policies in light of the complaint.

Complainants will be encouraged to state what actions they feel might resolve the problem at any stage. Any misunderstandings that might have occurred will be clarified in order to create a positive atmosphere in which to discuss any outstanding issues.

Stage 3 : Governing Body Complaints panel.

Only where all these avenues have been tried and found unsatisfactory should the complainant take a complaint to Stage 3 of the process and address their concerns to the Chair of Governors or Clerk to the Governing Body.

In circumstances where the Principal considers s/he can do no more to resolve a particular complaint the complainant will also be signposted to write to the Chair of Governors. Complainants will be encouraged to take this step.

Principles informing our complaints procedure

This procedure is designed to:

- be well publicised and easily accessible
- be simple to understand and use
- be impartial
- be non-adversarial
- allow swift handling with established time limits for action and keeping people informed of the progress
- allow a mediation process if agreed by the complainant
- allow for a hearing of a panel of Governors, where appropriate
- respect people's desire for confidentiality, wherever possible
- address all points of issue, provide an effective response and appropriate redress where necessary
- provide information to the academy's Senior Leadership Team so that services can be improved.

Making a Complaint to the Governing Body

Where informal attempts have been unsuccessful in resolving a complaint, the complainant should contact the Chair of Governors or Clerk to the Governing Body at the academy address. If this is on a written form the envelope should be marked 'FOR IMMEDIATE ACTION' and staff in the Academy office will ensure that the letter is forwarded without delay.

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

Whilst it is anticipated that most complaints will be in the form of a letter or e mail, complaints will also be accepted by telephone or in person.

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

- clarify the nature of the complaint and what remains unresolved;
- meet with the complainant or contact them (if unsure or further information is necessary);
- clarify what the complainant feels would put things right.

At this point the chair of governors will decide whether the complaint should go straight to the governors' complaints panel or whether a mediation stage should be offered. Mediation can only proceed if the complainant and the Principal are willing for it to be tried. If mediation is not successful, the complaint will be considered by the governors' complaints panel.

Mediation

Mediation can be a good way to resolve a complaint because:

- It gives both complainant and Principal another opportunity to hear each other's points of view (with a third party facilitating)
- It gives the third party an opportunity to help Principal and complainant identify and build on areas of agreement
- It gives the Principal and complainant a structure within which they can resolve any remaining differences.
- If both the complainant and Principal emerge from the mediation satisfied, that is the best foundation for a continuing positive relationship between them.
- Even if the complaint continues to a governors' panel, the issues to be considered are likely to be much clearer following the mediation.

Mediation may elicit one or more of the responses listed below from either party:

- an acknowledgment that the complaint is valid in whole or in part.
- an apology;
- an explanation;
- an admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better;
- an assurance that the event complained of will not recur;
- an explanation of the steps that have been taken to ensure that it will not happen again;
- an undertaking to review academy policies in light of the complaint.

Governors' Complaints Panel

Where the complainant is still not satisfied that their complaint has been dealt with fully and properly, they may choose to take it to a Governor's Complaints Panel.

The complainant may exercise their right to be accompanied by a friend or colleague to the Panel hearing.

Establishing a complaints panel

- The governing body will agree the composition of the complaints appeals panel at the first meeting of the governing body each year.
- One member of the complaints panel must be independent to the running and management of the academy and therefore drawn from outside of the Governing Body.
- As governors may not be available at all times governing bodies will agree the names of 4 or 5 possible governors from whom a panel of may be drawn. The decision about the membership of a particular panel will depend on factors such as availability, whether any governors have prior knowledge etc. and a decision on composition will be made by the chair of governors.
- The independent member of the panel may be drawn from the local community, from the local authority or from another school
- When the clerk of governors receives a copy of the complaint form he/she will inform the governing body that a complaint has been received and that it has been passed to the panel to deal with. **No further information about the complaint should be shared with other governors.**

Points for governors on a complaints panel

- a) It is important that the appeal hearing is independent and impartial and that it is seen to be so. No governor may sit on the panel if they have had a prior involvement in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it.

- b) The aim of the hearing, which needs to be held in private, will always be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the academy and the complainant
- c) The panel chair will ensure that the proceedings are as welcoming as possible. The layout of the room will set the tone and care is needed to ensure the setting is not intimidating and not adversarial
- d) Governors sitting on the panel need to be aware of the complaints procedure and any other procedures relating to the complaint eg. Anti-bullying policy.

The Chair of the Panel will be nominated by the Chair of Governors and is responsible for ensuring that both complainant and Principal are given a fair hearing and that the panel arrives at its judgement without fear or favour.

Remit of the panel: the complaints panel can:

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

It may:

- Consider and, if appropriate, criticise the way in which an operational decision was communicated – **but cannot overturn the decision itself**
- Consider the thoroughness with which the Principal investigated a complaint about a member of staff – **but cannot expect the Principal to provide details about confidential discussions with that staff member.**
- Consider the manner in which a complaint about any decision was addressed – **but cannot expect the Principal to have changed the decision**
- Consider and, if appropriate, identify limitations in a policy or procedures – **but cannot make or improve policy.** (It can, however, recommend that the policy be reviewed by the governing body to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not recur, and individual panel members can subsequently play their part in improving the policy)
- Consider whether it should recommend that the governing body offer appropriate redress

Format of a Panel Hearing

1. Complainant and Principal will enter the room where the hearing is taking place together.
2. The chair will introduce the panel members and the clerk and outline the process.
3. The complainant is invited to explain the complaint
4. The Principal may question the complainant
5. The panel will question the complainant
6. The Principal is then invited to explain the academy's actions
7. The complainant may question the Principal
8. The panel will question the Principal
9. The complainant is then invited to sum up their complaint.

10. The Principal is then invited to sum up the academy's actions and response to the complaint.
11. The chair explains that both parties will hear from the panel within five working days.
12. Both parties leave together while the panel decides on the issues.
13. The clerk will remain with the panel to clarify

Notes

The hearing should be made as unthreatening as possible to all parties.

The panel may ask questions at any point. Panel members must find ways to ask probing questions while maintaining an air of impartiality.

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

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

Some notes on exceptional circumstances

For the sake of clarity, the description above does not cover exceptional circumstances which might include:

1. The Chair of Governors may not be able to find sufficient governors who have no prior knowledge of the case

If a case has become a major talking point around the community, the chair can nominate governors with minimal prior knowledge. If there are still insufficient governors able to sit on a panel, the governing body in consultation with Governors' Services will put in place an alternative fair process.

2. In exceptional circumstances, it is possible that the complaint is about the Principal

A complaint to the governors' complaints panel will never be against a junior member of staff (it may be against the way the Principal handled a complaint against a junior member of staff) but it is conceivable that a senior manager will appropriately stand in for the Principal. If agreed, the senior manager would be 'the Principal' for the purpose of the panel. There may be exceptional circumstances in which the complaint is against the chair of governors – e.g. for wilfully refusing to deal with a complaint. In those circumstances the procedure above would be adapted and every reference to 'Principal' would be read as 'chair of governors'.

3. The complainant and/or the Principal may wish to call witnesses

The use of witnesses is discouraged. The complaints panel will want to work with **written** witness statements if appropriate, but there may be particular circumstances where the presence of witnesses is necessary to establish key facts. In those cases, witnesses must be agreed in advance. They will remain outside the hearing room until called in to give their evidence. They

can be questioned by the panel members and the other party. They will leave the room when their evidence is completed.

4. The complainant may be a student at the academy

Plympton Academy encourages students to raise concerns and would expect to resolve them before it becomes a formal complaint to the governing body. However, if a student is the complainant, panel members will wish to ensure that the same process is followed but special consideration is given to ensuring that the child is supported and does not feel intimidated. The panel needs to give the views of the child equal consideration to those of adults.

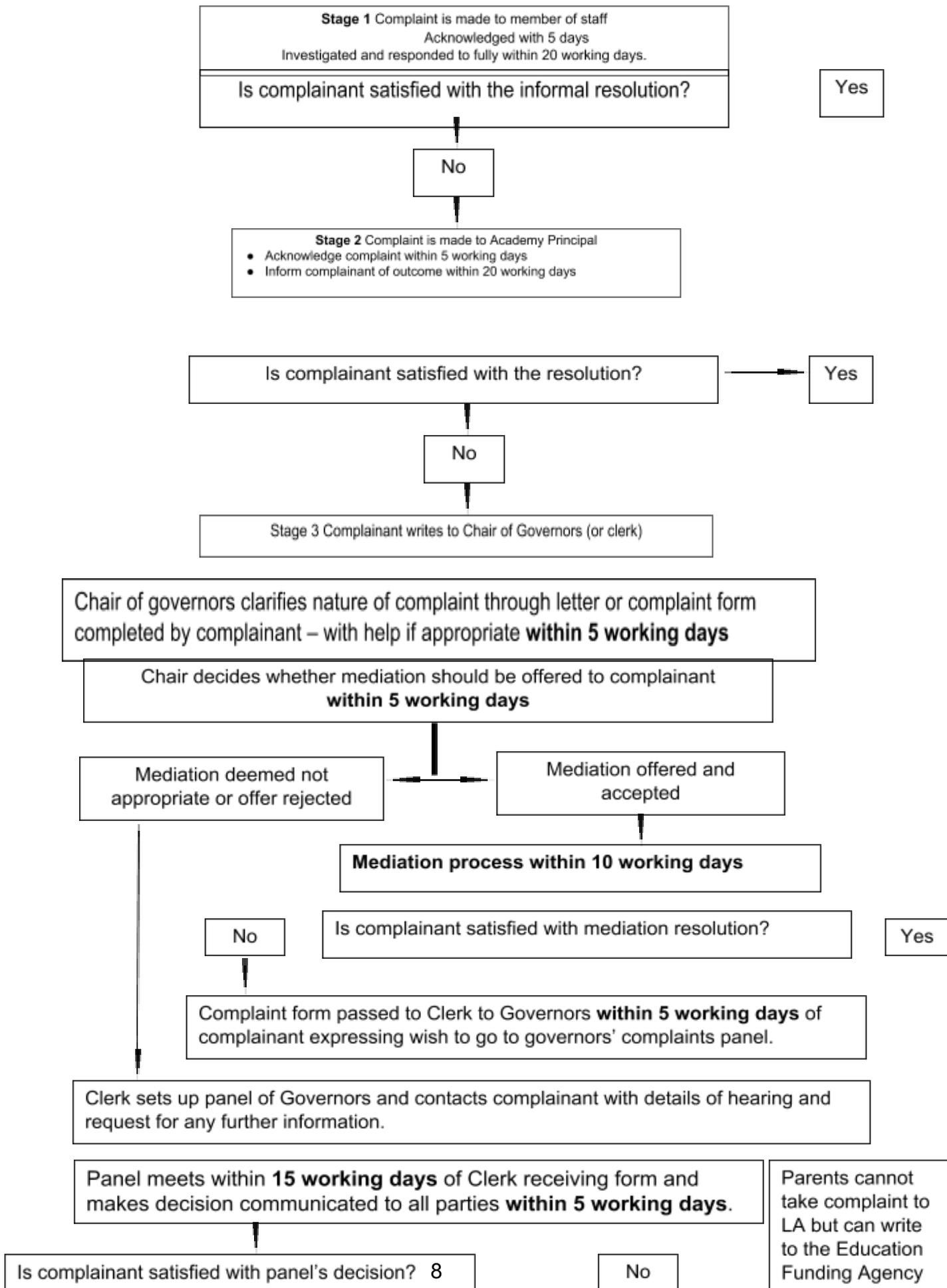
Writing the decision letter

The clerk should ensure that s/he has clear wording stating the panel decision about each of the issues that the panel considered before the panel is allowed to finish. The clerk will use that wording to draft the decision letter. This should be sent to all members of the panel for checking. Once approved by all three panel members, it should be sent to the complainant with a copy to the Principal. The letter should clearly express how seriously the panel considered the complaint. The clerk should ensure that the letter outlines the facts and gives no hint of partiality. The clerk should ensure that the letter reaches the complainant and the Principal in five working days.

Monitoring Complaints

As well as addressing an individual's complaint, the process of listening to and resolving complaints contribute to academy improvements. When individual complaints are heard, issues may be identified that need to be addressed. The monitoring and review of complaints by the academy and Governing Body are a useful way to evaluate the academy's performance. Any discussion of complaints by the Governing Body or others in the academy community should not name or be able to identify individuals. The flowchart below summarises the complaints process.

Complaints process



Stage 1 Complaint is made to member of staff
Acknowledged with 5 days
Investigated and responded to fully within 20 working days.

Is complainant satisfied with the informal resolution?

Yes

No

Stage 2 Complaint is made to Academy Principal

- Acknowledge complaint within 5 working days
- Inform complainant of outcome within 20 working days

Is complainant satisfied with the resolution?

Yes

No

Stage 3 Complainant writes to Chair of Governors (or clerk)

Chair of governors clarifies nature of complaint through letter or complaint form completed by complainant – with help if appropriate **within 5 working days**

Chair decides whether mediation should be offered to complainant **within 5 working days**

Mediation deemed not appropriate or offer rejected

Mediation offered and accepted

Mediation process within 10 working days

No

Is complainant satisfied with mediation resolution?

Yes

Complaint form passed to Clerk to Governors **within 5 working days** of complainant expressing wish to go to governors' complaints panel.

Clerk sets up panel of Governors and contacts complainant with details of hearing and request for any further information.

Panel meets within **15 working days** of Clerk receiving form and makes decision communicated to all parties **within 5 working days**.

Parents cannot take complaint to LA but can write to the Education Funding Agency

Is complainant satisfied with panel's decision? 8

No

Annex 1 Complaint form

Notes

The form on the next page can be used by any person making a complaint about the operation of the Academy which is not covered by an alternative specific procedure.

Help in completing this form it is available from the academy.

If it is appropriate for a member of staff to look into this complaint, it should be returned to the Principal.

If it is appropriate that it should be dealt with by the Governing Body, it should be returned to the Clerk to the Governors at the academy.

The complaint form is only one way of submitting a complaint and complaints will be accepted by the Academy in the form of a letter, an e mail, by telephone or in person

Plympton Academy

Complaint form

Please complete and return to the academy's main reception.

Your name:

Address:

.....

.....

Postcode:

Daytime telephone number:

Evening telephone number:

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

Please give details of your complaint:

(Use a separate sheet if necessary)

What action, if any, have you already taken to try and resolve your complaint? (Who did you speak to and what was the response?)

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

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

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

Signature:

Date:

Official Use:

Date of acknowledgement sent:

By whom:

Complaint referred to:

Date:

Appendix 2

Sharing your concerns about your child's education A guide for parents

Plympton Academy recognises that at times things can go wrong. This guidance will help you understand how to resolve concerns you may have about your child's education.

The academy has procedures for dealing with concerns or complaints and we value any feedback about our services, including compliments and suggestions. If you are concerned about any aspect of your child's education, you should contact your child's Head of Academic Progress in the first instance.

The academy's governing body has overall responsibility for the academy and for ensuring the well-being of students and that all students receive an appropriate and high standard of education.

The Principal is responsible for making decisions on a daily basis about the academy's internal management and organisation. Therefore, you should contact the academy if you are concerned about an issue such as:

- your child's academic progress
- special education needs provision
- your child's welfare
- bullying
- something that has happened in academy.

How do I complain to the academy?

First, we hope you will speak to the relevant member of staff as soon as you have a concern. This will be the pastoral support team, class teacher, form tutor or Head of Academic Progress.

This informal approach is nearly always the quickest and most effective way of resolving your concerns. (Stage 1 of the process. Your complaint should be acknowledged within 5 days and fully investigated within 20 working days)

If you feel that your concern has not been resolved, then it is important to speak to or write to the Principal who will look into your concern. (Stage 2 of the process. Your complaint should be acknowledged within 5 days and fully investigated within 20 working days)

If you are unhappy with the Principal's response you should address your complaint to the Chair of Governors/Clerk to the Governing Body at the academy address. If in written form mark your envelope 'FOR IMMEDIATE ATTENTION'. (Stage 3 of the process)

This is how your complaint will be handled

Within 5 working days the chair of governors will clarify the nature of your complaint by asking you to complete a complaint form and will offer help in completing the form, if appropriate

Within 5 working days of receiving the form the Chair will decide whether mediation should be offered to help you and the Principal explore possible resolution.

If mediation is agreed, the chair of governors will endeavour to set up the meeting **within 10 working days**. If that timescale is not possible you will be told the reason.

If mediation is not deemed appropriate or if it is not successful, the Chair of Governors or Clerk will set up a panel of governors to meet **within 15 working days** to consider your complaint. The clerk will provide details of the hearing and will request any further information you may wish to provide.

You will be able to bring a 'friend' with you to that hearing.

The complaints panel will consist of three governors who (as far as possible) will have no prior knowledge of the events being complained of. The panel will be supported by a clerk who will take notes during the hearing and will stay with the panel while they make their decision in case governors need to be reminded about responses to a particular question. The panel will hear the complaint impartially and make their decision without fear or favour.

Five working days before the hearing the clerk will send to you, the complainant, the Principal and the three panel members, copies of all papers submitted by both sides so that there is sufficient time to read the evidence before the hearing.

At the hearing,

1. You and the Principal will be invited into the room where the panel is being held at the same time.
2. After introductions, you, the complainant will be invited to explain your complaint,
3. The Principal may question you
4. The panel will question you
5. The Principal will be invited to explain the academy's actions
6. You, the complainant may question the Principal
7. The panel will question the Principal
8. The panel may ask questions at any point.
9. You, the complainant will then be invited to sum up your complaint.
10. The Principal will then be invited to sum up the academy's actions and response to the complaint.
11. The chair will explain that you and the Principal will hear from the panel **within five working days**.
12. Both you and the Principal will leave together while the panel decides on the issues.
13. The clerk will remain with the panel.

Can I take my complaint further?

For most complaints, you **cannot** take your complaint to the local authority. The Local Authority cannot investigate academy matters on a parent's behalf nor can it review how the academy has dealt with your complaint.

However, if you feel that the academy has acted unreasonably or not followed the correct procedures, you can contact The Education Funding Secretary.

The complaint should be sent:

- Via the DfE's academy's complaints form,
www.education.gov.uk/form/academy-complaints-form

OR

- By post to Ministerial & Public Communications Division, Department for Education, Piccadilly Gate, Store Street, Manchester, M1 2WD.