



## Longmeadow Primary School Complaints Procedure

APPROVED	November 2017
TO BE REVIEWED BY	November 2020

This complaints procedure meets the standards set out in the [Education Act 2002: Section 29](#) and reflects current DfE advice as outlined in '[Best Practice Advice for School Complaints Procedures](#)' (2016). It is intended for use by anyone who has a concern or complaint, who may or may not have a formal connection to the School.

This policy does not cover complaints procedures relating to:

- Admissions
- Statutory assessments of special educational needs (SEN)
- Safeguarding matters
- Exclusion
- Whistle-blowing
- Staff grievances
- Staff discipline

Please see our separate policies for procedures relating to these types of complaint.

## **1. General principles & aims**

At Longmeadow, each day, staff have to make many decisions and try hard to do the best for all the children and stakeholders at the school.

We care about what you think. Your comments - either positive or negative - are helpful for future planning of the school. You may want to talk to us about a particular aspect of our work, though not actually make a complaint - you just want to get something 'off your chest'. However, it may be that you want to make a complaint about a specific issue and this policy tells you how to do both of these things; share a concern, or raise a specific complaint.

We aim that:

- your complaint will be dealt with honestly, politely and in confidence
- your complaint will be considered thoroughly and fairly
- if your complaint is urgent, we will deal with it more quickly
- we will keep you up to date with progress at each stage
- you will get an apology if we have made a mistake
- you will be told what we are going to do to put things right
- you will get a full and clear written reply to formal complaints within 28 working days (5½ weeks)

We reserve the right not to consider complaints that:

- are malicious (that is, they are instituted without sufficient grounds and serving only to cause annoyance or be disruptive)
- use obscenities, racist or homophobic language or are abusive to staff in any way
- contain personally offensive remarks about members of our staff

- are repeatedly submitted with only minor differences after we have fully addressed the complaint

## 2. Raising a concern – Informal stage

A concern is different to a complaint. The following definition (taken from the government’s Best Practice Advice for School Complaints Procedures 2016) may be helpful:

*A ‘concern’ may be defined as ‘an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought’*

*A complaint may be generally defined as an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action’.*

### a) Stage 1

We know that it can feel uncomfortable to question or challenge something, but if you don’t tell us what is worrying you we cannot explain what we are doing or try to put it right.

If you have a concern about anything we do, you can tell us by telephone, in person or in writing (by letter or email). The best way to do this is directly with the relevant member of staff your concern is about or the school office (01438 351087), who will arrange a meeting for you.

We hope that most concerns can be settled quickly and informally, either by putting matters right or by giving you an explanation. If there is something you are not happy about, or you don’t understand why we are doing something in a certain way, please come in and discuss it informally with the appropriate member of staff who is immediately involved with your child, such as the class teacher, or the special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCo) if it is about special needs.

### b) Stage 2

If the member of staff you speak to in the first instance is unable to resolve the matter, you should make an appointment with your child’s phase leader. They are a member of the school leadership team who will discuss the matter further on an informal basis. The deputy headteacher is also be available, along with the SENCo, if you feel these roles would be more appropriate.

<u>Name</u>	<u>Phase</u>	<u>Email Address</u>
Mrs Holly Kimble	Early Years Leader	<a href="mailto:hkimble@longmeadow.herts.sch.uk">hkimble@longmeadow.herts.sch.uk</a>
Miss Martina Flanagan	KS1 Leader / Deputy Headteacher	<a href="mailto:mflanagan@longmeadow.herts.sch.uk">mflanagan@longmeadow.herts.sch.uk</a>
Mr Giles Hetherington	KS2 Leader	<a href="mailto:ghetherington@longmeadow.herts.sch.uk">ghetherington@longmeadow.herts.sch.uk</a>
Mrs Katy Alexander	SENCo	<a href="mailto:senco@longmeadow.herts.sch.uk">senco@longmeadow.herts.sch.uk</a>

### c) Stage 3

If after speaking with senior staff your concern is still not resolved, but you do not wish to make an official complaint, the headteacher will be happy to discuss your concerns with you. Please contact the headteacher directly or the headteacher’s PA to make an appointment.

Mrs Emily Howley	Headteacher	<a href="mailto:head@longmeadow.herts.sch.uk">head@longmeadow.herts.sch.uk</a>
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Staff will always respond to you politely and with courtesy and respect. However, it is reasonable for them to expect to be treated the same way in return. Shouting, swearing or threatening behaviour is not acceptable, and anyone demonstrating such behaviour will have the discussion terminated. Following unacceptable behaviour, it may be that the original complaint is reviewed and a decision made by Governors on whether to continue to investigate the complaint.

If your first contact is with individual governors, they will advise you to take up your concerns with the appropriate member of staff, as outlined above. A governor should not be made aware of a potential complaint as they may be required to sit on a panel in the event of a formal hearing (outlined in 3. Formal procedures) and should be impartial.

A written record is kept of all reported concerns made to the school using the schools CPOMs system. This is to inform school self-evaluation and planning.

***We should be able to sort out your worries using these informal measures, but sometimes this is not possible. In this case, there is a next step outlined below.***

### **3. Making complaints – formal procedures**

#### **a) Stage 1**

The next step is to **request a formal meeting with the headteacher** who will investigate your complaint and aim to inform you of the outcome within 10 working days (2 weeks). It is important that you specifically state that you are requesting a formal meeting so that we know you are initiating Stage 1 of our complaints procedure.

If your complaint is about the headteacher themselves, you should write to the chair governors.

If your complaint is about the chair of governors, you should inform the headteacher, or the clerk to the governing body.

If your child has an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) you might find it helpful to talk to the special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCo) or your child's named special needs officer at the local authority. The SEND Information Advice and Support Service (SENDIASS – formerly Parent Partnership) may also be able to help you.

#### **b) Stage 2**

##### **Inform the headteacher in writing**

If following your meeting with the headteacher you are still not happy, you should write a formal letter to the headteacher. This letter should:

- Make it clear why you are complaining
- Say who you have spoken to already
- Provide details such as relevant dates, times, and the names of witnesses to events
- Provide copies of any relevant documents
- State what has already happened in relation to your complaint, what has the school already done?
- State what you feel should happen to resolve the complaint

Mrs Emily Howley	Headteacher	<a href="mailto:head@longmeadow.herts.sch.uk">head@longmeadow.herts.sch.uk</a> Alternatively, you can send this to the school office marked for the attention of the headteacher.
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The headteacher (or designated member of the senior leadership team) will call a meeting to clarify concerns, and seek a resolution. You may be accompanied to this meeting, and you should inform the school of the identity of your companion in advance. In certain circumstances, the school may need to refuse a request for a particular individual to attend any such meeting – for example, if there is a conflict of interest. If this is the case, the school will notify the complainant as soon as they are aware, so that the complainant has the opportunity to arrange alternative accompaniment. The school may also arrange their own representation.

The headteacher (or other person appointed by the headteacher for this purpose) will then conduct their own investigation. The written conclusion of this investigation will be sent to the complainant within 10 working days.

If, following stage one, you wish to proceed to the next stage of the procedure, you should inform the chair of governors in writing within 10 working days.

**c) Stage 3**

**Inform the chair of governors in writing**

This letter should:

- Set out the details of the complaint, including evidence as set out above
- Specify what they feel would resolve the complaint, and how they feel the previous stage of the procedure has not addressed their complaint sufficiently
- Make clear what you think should be done to resolve the complaint

The chair of governors will then investigate the complaint. This may include meeting with you. Written conclusion of this investigation will be sent to the you within 10 working days.

If the complainant wishes to proceed to the next stage of the procedure, they should inform the chair of governors, in writing, within 10 working days.

Mrs Gill Pick	Chair of Governors	<a href="mailto:Gov.GPick@longmeadow.herts.sch.uk">Gov.GPick@longmeadow.herts.sch.uk</a> Alternatively, you can send this to the school office marked for the attention of the chair of governors.
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#### **d) Stage 4**

If, following an investigation by the chair of governors, you are still dissatisfied, the chair will arrange for your complaint to be considered and investigated by a complaints panel of governors. The chair will arrange for another governor to take charge of the investigation, as they have been involved in investigating the complaint previously. The governor in charge of investigating the complaint may ask to meet you to discuss your concerns. Your complaint will be responded to within 10 working days, however this may be to inform you of next steps.

You should make sure that the governors' complaints panel is provided with any written information or evidence you intend to use in a formal hearing. You may bring a friend, representative or interpreter to any meeting if you wish. The chair of the panel may invite any person who may help establish the facts of the complaint. The chair should tell you who this person / people is before the meeting. If the panel requires any employee to attend a meeting they will have the opportunity to be accompanied or represented as they wish. An employee named in a complaint may also choose to attend a meeting, even if not required to do so by the panel. They may be represented. If this happens, we will inform you in advance.

We will give you reasonable notice of the date of the review panel; however, the review panel reserves the right to convene at their convenience rather than your convenience. This is due to the difficulty of arranging a convenient time for a number of professionals to attend.

When the Panel has fully investigated your complaint, the chair of the panel or the governor in charge of the investigation will write to you to tell you the findings. These findings will be reported to the governing body and the headteacher. The chair of governors will then write to you confirming the outcome of your complaint and any agreed actions to be taken. The governing body will aim to deal with your complaint within 28 working days (5½ weeks).

#### **4. Referring complaints following completion of the school's procedures:**

If you remain unsatisfied with the outcome of the school's complaints procedure, you can refer their complaint to the School Complaints Unit (SCU), which investigates complaints relating to maintained schools on behalf of the secretary of state.

The SCU will not re-investigate the matter of the complaint. It will look at whether the school's complaints policy and any other relevant statutory policies that the school holds were adhered to. The SCU also looks at whether the school's statutory policies adhere to education legislation. It may direct the school to re-investigate the complaint where it is clear the school has acted unlawfully or unreasonably.

For more information or to refer a complaint, see the following webpage:

<https://www.gov.uk/complain-about-school>

#### **5. Persistent Complaints**

This is adapted from current DfE advice as outlined in ['Best Practice Advice for School Complaints Procedures' \(2016\)](#).

We will always do our best to be helpful when contacted with a concern, complaint or a request for information. However, in cases where the school is contacted repeatedly by an individual making the same points, or who asks us to reconsider our position, we will need to act appropriately.

There will be occasions when, despite all stages of our complaints procedure having been followed, the complainant remains dissatisfied. It is important that we, as a school, recognise when we really have done everything we can in response to a complaint. It is a poor use of the schools' time and resources to reply to repeated letters, emails or telephone calls, making substantially the same points. If a complainant tries to re-open the same issue, the Chair of Governors can inform them that the procedure has been completed and that the matter is now closed.

If the complainant contacts the school again on the same issue, then the correspondence may be viewed as 'serial' or 'persistent' and the school may choose not to respond.

The normal circumstance in which we will not respond is if:

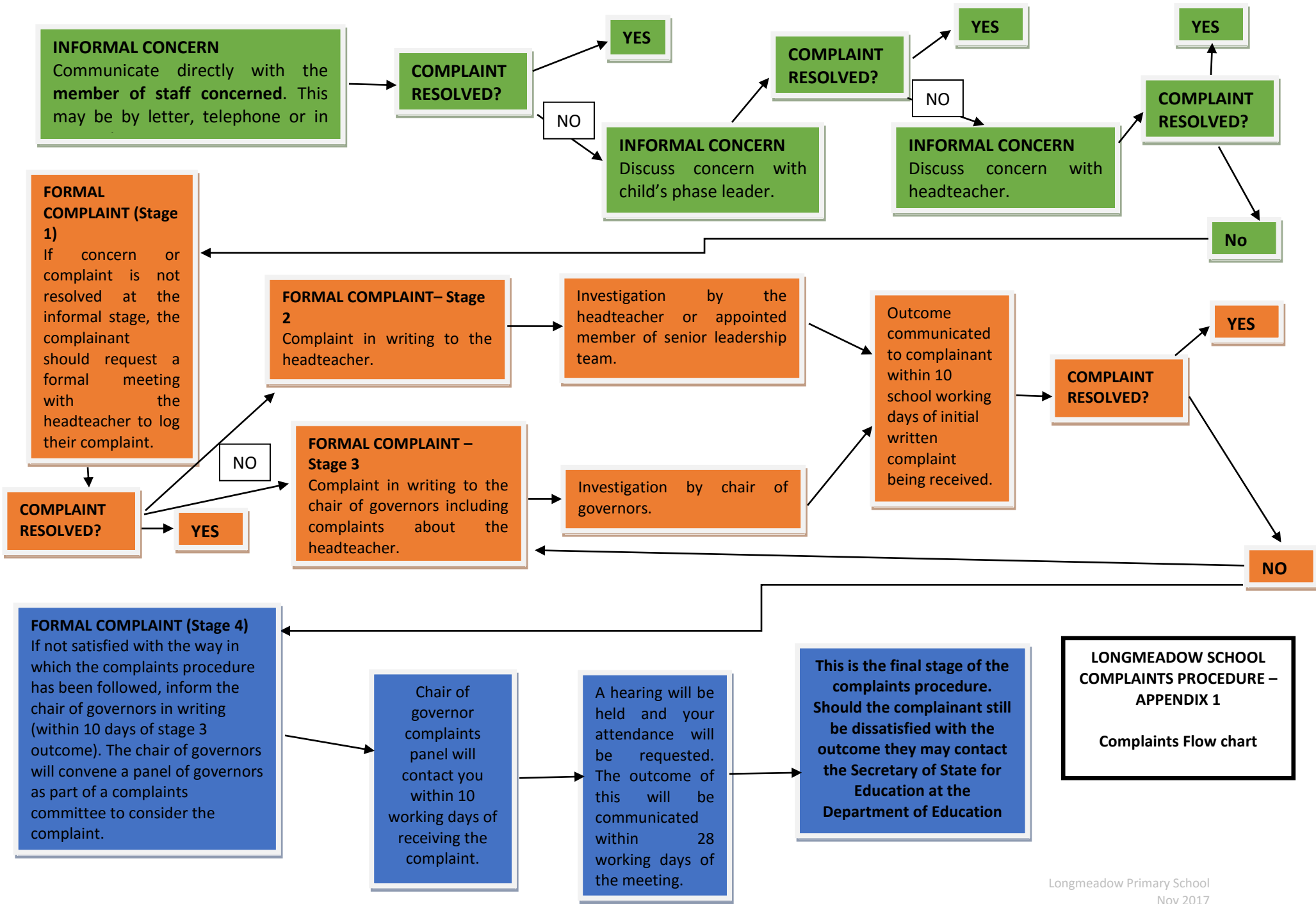
- The school has taken every reasonable step to address the complainant's needs, *and*
- The complainant has been given a clear statement of the school's position and their options (if any), *and*
- The complainant is contacting the school repeatedly but making substantially the same points each time

*However, this list is not intended to be exhaustive.*

The school will more likely to choose not to respond if:

- We have reason to believe the individual is contacting the school with the intention of causing disruption or inconvenience, and/or
- The individual's letters/emails/telephone calls are often or always abusive or aggressive, this includes the use of passive aggressive language and/or
- The individual makes insulting personal comments about, or threats towards, school staff

The decision to stop responding will never be taken lightly and we will let you know this in writing. However, where an individual's behaviour is causing a significant level of disruption, the headteacher may wish to implement a tailored communications strategy, such as restricting them to a single point of contact via an email address or by limiting the number of times they make contact; e.g. a fixed number of contacts per term by a fixed method. Alternatively, a representative from the local authority may be sought to conduct communication on the school's behalf. Complainants who may have been restricted in their communications with the school can also be advised to ask a third party to act on their behalf, such as the local Citizen's Advice Bureau. Ultimately, if a complainant persists to the point that the school considers it to constitute harassment, then legal advice will be sought as to the next steps. This includes the use of injunctions and other court orders to protect staff if necessary.



**LONGMEADOW SCHOOL COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE – APPENDIX 1**  
Complaints Flow chart