TUDOR PARK EDUCATION TRUST	Complaints Policy
Person(s) responsible for updating the policy:	Chief Executive Officer
Date Approved:	Board of Directors on 7 July 2016
Period of Review:	One year
Status:	Statutory

Tudor Park Education Trust oversees this policy but the local governing body of each academy or school within the Trust is responsible for the implementation of the policy.

Introduction

The governors of each academy / school are committed to ensuring that the highest standards are maintained at the school both in the provision of education to pupils and in every other aspect of the running of the school. A complaints procedure is an important part of the management of a well-run school allowing parents and others the opportunity to voice any concerns they may have through appropriate channels. This policy explains the procedure which has been adopted by the governing body to ensure a timely, systematic and fair approach to the resolution of such concerns.

We recognise the need to be clear about the difference between a concern and a complaint. Taking informal concerns seriously at the earliest stage reduces the numbers that develop into formal complaints. We aim to ensure that concerns are handled, if at all possible, without the need for formal procedures. Our formal complaints procedure is only necessary if efforts to resolve the concern informally are unsuccessful. In most cases, a class teacher or an individual delivering the service will receive the first approach. Our staff development process includes training to help staff resolve issues on the spot, including apologising where necessary.

Our formal procedures are invoked when initial attempts to resolve the issue are unsuccessful and the person raising the concern remains dissatisfied and wishes to take the matter further. (See appendix A and appendix B.)

This policy does not cover certain types of complaints, which are dealt with under separate procedures. These are:

- Curriculum complaints – addressed under the curriculum complaints procedure.
- SEN complaints – addressed under the SEN procedures.
- Complaints by staff – addressed under the school's grievance procedure or other personnel policies.

- Admissions – addressed under the admissions and admissions appeals procedure.
- Whistle-blowing – (matters of impropriety eg a breach of law, school procedures or ethics) – addressed under the whistle blowing procedure.

A complaint may result in disciplinary action by the school against a member of staff and this would be confidential between that member of staff and the school, but otherwise complainants will be kept fully informed of the handling of any complaint. Any complaint will be kept confidential unless it is necessary to involve other parties and will be dealt with as quickly as possible.

Objectives and targets

To be effective our complaints procedure will:

- Encourage resolution of problems by informal means wherever possible.
- Be easily accessible and publicised, including to third parties who hire school premises.
- 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.
- Ensure a full and fair investigation by an independent person where necessary.
- Respect people's desire for confidentiality.
- Address all the points at issue and provide an effective response and appropriate redress, where necessary.
- Provide information to the school's senior management team so that services can be improved.

Action plan

At the school, the Principal has overall responsibility for the operation and management of the school complaints procedure. In practical terms, the Principal will nominate a senior member of staff as complaints co-ordinator to deal with matters on a day-by-day basis and hold records relating to any complaints received. The name of this member of staff is readily available from the school office or from any member of staff.

In general, any written complaint should be addressed to the Principal, although it is expected that attempts will be made to resolve difficulties informally with the class teacher/form teacher/head of year/tutor before being referred to the Principal. The informal stage of the procedure should be exhausted before the matter is referred to the formal stage and a complaint form issued (see appendix B). If any substantial complaint is made to a member of staff by a parent it should be referred to the line manager or Principal, as appropriate, if it cannot be resolved immediately by the member of staff to the satisfaction of the parent.

Whenever a formal complaint is received it will be investigated. At each stage, the person investigating the complaint (the complaints co-ordinator), makes sure that they:

- Establish what has happened so far and who has been involved.
- 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.
- Interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish.
- Conduct the interview with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning.
- Keep notes of the interview.

Stages in the procedure

There are three stages in the school's complaints procedure. See appendix A for a flow chart. At each stage in the procedure, we will remain mindful of ways in which a complaint can be resolved. It might be sufficient to acknowledge that the complaint is valid in whole or in part. In addition, it may be appropriate to 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 school policies in light of the complaint.

We encourage complainants to state what actions they feel might resolve the problem at any stage. An admission that the school could have handled the situation better is not the same as an admission of negligence.

At all times we will seek to identify areas of agreement between the parties and clarify any misunderstandings that might have occurred because this can create a positive atmosphere in which to discuss any outstanding issues.

Stage 1 – informal – complaint heard by staff member

In this stage, the class teacher/form teacher/head of year/tutor (but not the subject of the complaint or a governor) will deal with the complaint. Most parents' concerns can be adequately resolved by discussion with the class teacher/form teacher/head of year/tutor or with other members of staff. There may be no need for the complaint to be put in writing, which would formalise matters and may lead parents to feel less prepared to articulate concerns, perhaps because of a fear that such action may prejudice the interests of their child. The complaint should be resolved within five school days. However, if the complainant wishes to take the matter further, they are requested to complete the complaints form (appendix B) and return it to the school within five school days. The Principal is informed and stage 2 is implemented.

Stage 2 – formal– complaint heard by Principal or senior staff member

If the concern is not met to the complainants' satisfaction by discussion, then:

- The complainant puts the complaint in writing using the complaints form (appendix B).
- The initial recipient of the complaint should refer the matter to the Principal or to a designated member of the senior management team.
- The Principal, or a designated member of the senior management team, will investigate the circumstances of the complaint and may find it appropriate to ask for written statements from staff or pupils and to call for any relevant documentation.

- If a complaint concerns the conduct of the Principal or a governor, or where the Principal or governor has been involved in the issue previously, then the matter will be referred to a senior member of staff or member of the governing body not previously involved. In some circumstances, the school reserves the right to refer the matter to an external body.
- If the complaint is against a member of staff, that member of staff has a right to be given details of the complaint and the opportunity to make representation about it. The person investigating the incident will take these details into account.
- The Principal or designated member of staff will consider the complaint but it will be the Principal who will decide what action is required and respond to the complainant with the outcome of the investigation, normally within ten school working days of receipt of the substance of the complaint. The response may be in writing or at a meeting with the complainant followed by written confirmation of the outcome.

The complainant will be informed of his or her right to have the matter referred to the governors' complaints panel if the outcome of stage 2 is not considered satisfactory. The time frame in which any appeal must be lodged in writing is five school days. Any such request by a complainant should be addressed to the clerk to the governors and the governors' complaints panel will be convened.

Stage 3 – formal – governors' complaints panel meeting

When the clerk to the governors receives the request for the governors' complaints panel to meet:

- The complainant/parent will be informed by the clerk of the new timescale for the investigation and written report to be provided – within 14 working days. (However, the length of the investigation will depend on the nature of the complaint and other variable factors. If the investigation is likely to exceed 14 days, the school will set realistic time limits for each action within the stage. Where such further investigations are necessary, new time limits may need to be set and the complainant will be sent details of the new deadline and an explanation for the delay.)
- A governors' complaints panel will be assembled comprising three or five members, none of whom have any previous connection to the complaint, and one of whom will act as chair for the meeting. The meeting will additionally have a clerk in attendance. One of the members of the panel must be independent of the school.
- The clerk will write to the complainant, the Principal, the chair of governors and panel members giving details of the meeting, requesting copies of any documents to be put before the meeting and the names of any witnesses that either party may wish to attend.
- The clerk will inform the complainant of the right to be accompanied by a friend.

The hearing will be on reasonable notice and be held as soon as practicable after receipt of the referral. The procedure at the hearing (see appendix C) will be sensitive and appropriate for the circumstances and is at the discretion of the chair of the governors' complaints panel.

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 procedures to ensure that similar problems do not recur.

The panel's decision is final.

A copy of the findings and recommendations of the panel will be sent by letter (electronic mail is acceptable for academies and free schools) to the complainant and, where relevant, to the person complained about, and will be available for inspection on the school premises by the Principal.

If, despite following appropriate procedures, the complainant remains dissatisfied, or tries to reopen the same issue, the chair of governors will inform them in writing that the procedure has been exhausted and that the matter is now closed, and if they wish to take the complaint further they must complete the form available at: www.education.gov.uk/schools/leadership/schoolperformance/school-complaints-form and the Education Funding Agency will deal with the complaint.

Recording complaints

The progress of any complaint and the final outcome will be recorded by the complaints co-ordinator. These findings will be made available to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about, and will be available for inspection by the Principal. Initially a complaint may be made in person or by telephone and if unresolved needs to be put in writing (see appendix B). At the end of a meeting or telephone call, the member of staff will ensure that the complainant and the school have the same understanding of what was discussed and agreed. A brief note of meetings and telephone calls will be kept and a copy of any written response added to the record.

Publicising the policy and procedure

Details of the academy or school's complaints policy and procedures are included, as appropriate, in:

- The school prospectus.
- The information given to new parents when their children join the school.
- The information given to the children themselves.
- The home-school agreement.
- Home-school bulletins or newsletters.
- Documents supplied to community users, including course information or letting agreements.
- A specific complaints leaflet which includes a form on which a complaint can be made (see appendix B).
- Posters displayed in areas of the school that will be used by the public, for example, reception or the main entrance.
- The school website.

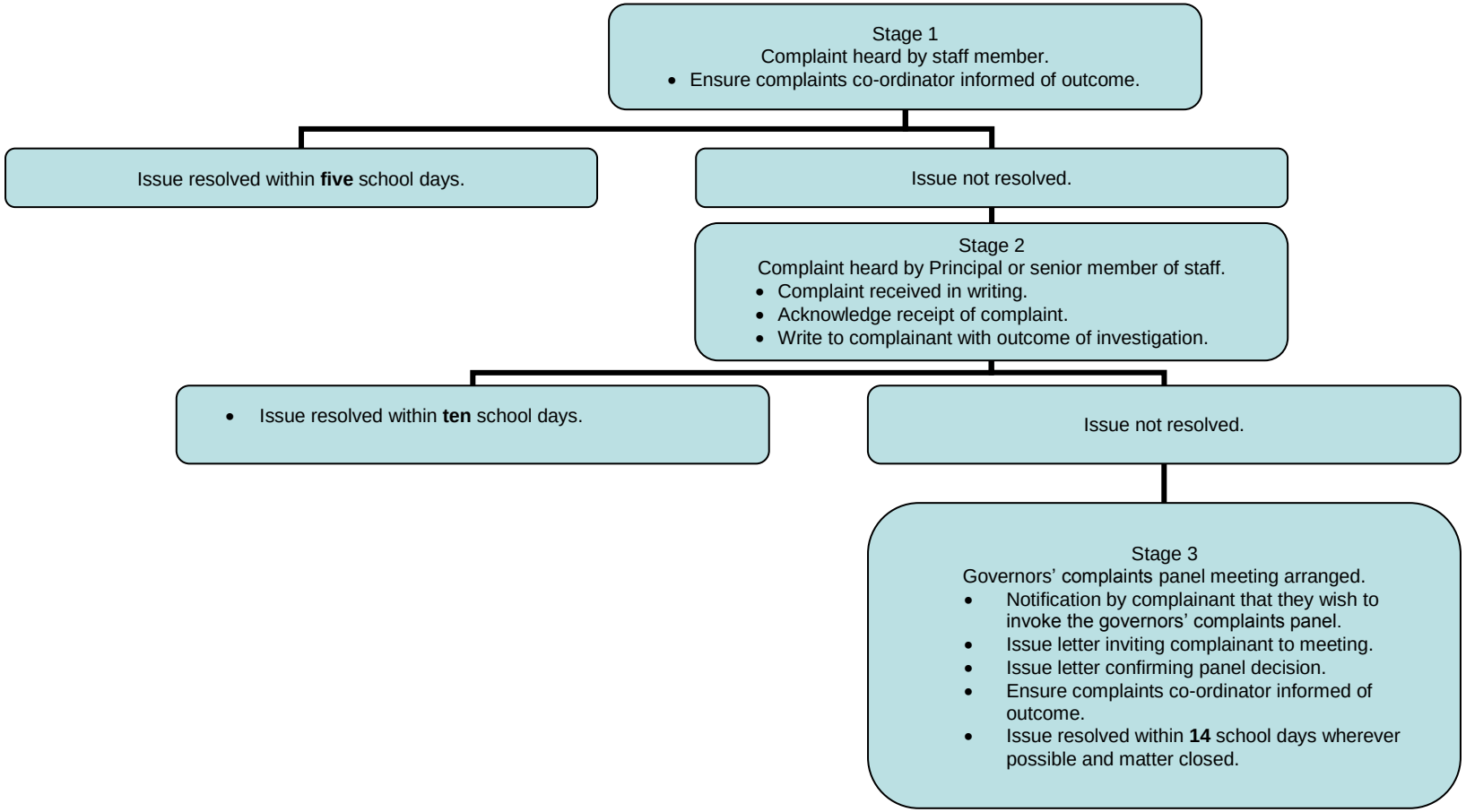
Monitoring and evaluation

The governing body will monitor the level and nature of complaints using the records kept by the complaints co-ordinator. Wherever possible, complaints information shared with the whole governing body will not name individuals. The policy will be evaluated in the light of complaints made and their resolution and changes made to the policy where necessary.

Reviewing

The governing body will review the outcomes of the monitoring exercise on a termly basis to ensure the effectiveness of the procedure and make changes where necessary.

APPENDIX A: FLOWCHART FOR THE COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE



If there is no resolution after stage 3, the complainant will be advised of how to take their complaint further if they so wish.

APPENDIX B: COMPLAINTS FORM

Please complete and return to the Principal (complaints co-ordinator) who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

Your name:

Pupil's name:

Your relationship to the pupil:

Address:

Postcode:

Daytime telephone number: Evening telephone number:

Please give details of your complaint:

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

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

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

Signature:

Date:

Official use

Date acknowledgement sent:

By whom:

Complaint referred to:

Date:

APPENDIX C: CHECKLIST FOR A PANEL HEARING

The governors' complaints panel needs to take the following points into account:

- The hearing is as informal as possible.
- Witnesses are only required to attend for the part of the hearing in which they give their evidence.
- After introductions, the complainant is invited to explain their complaint, and be followed by their witnesses.
- The Principal may question both the complainant and the witnesses after each has spoken.
- The Principal is then invited to explain the school's actions and be followed by the school's witnesses.
- The complainant may question both the Principal and the witnesses after each has spoken.
- The panel may ask questions at any point.
- The complainant is then invited to sum up their complaint.
- The Principal is then invited to sum up the school's actions and response to the complaint.
- Both parties leave together while the panel decides on the issues.
- The chair explains that both parties will hear from the panel within a set time scale.