



School Complaints Policy

Policy drawn up by the Head Teacher, agreed by Staff and Governors

Version	Date	Change/Review
V1.0	October 2004	Policy Adopted
V.1.2	January 2008	Policy Reviewed
V1.3	Spring 2010	Policy Reviewed
V1.4	June 2013	Policy Reviewed
V1.5	January 2014	Policy Reviewed
V1.6	October 2015	Policy Revised
V1.7	November 2016	Reviewed
V1.8	November 2017	Policy Updated
V1.9	November 2018	Reviewed
V1.10	November 2019	Policy updated and ratified
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V1.13	May 2022	Policy updated and ratified
V2.0	January 2025	Policy reviewed and revised
V2.1	January 2026	Policy reviewed and ratified

Policy Document Version Control Log

Policy: Complaints Policy		
Version	Date	Description of changes and person/organisation responsible
V2.0	November 2024	HT revision in line with policy guidance from the Forbes Solicitors
V2.1	January 2026	No changes except p15 – KS1 Phase Leader – Jen Blake

Introduction

Definitions and aims

Definitions

The DfE guidance explains the difference between a concern and a complaint:

- o A **concern** is defined as “an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought”
- o A **complaint** is defined as “an expression or statement of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action”

In most cases, a concern can be resolved through informal means. A complaint will follow formal procedures.

Aims

Our school aims to meet its statutory obligations when responding to complaints from parents/carers of pupils at the school, and others.

When responding to complaints, we aim to:

- o Be impartial and non-adversarial
- o Facilitate a full and fair investigation by an independent person or panel, where necessary
- o Address all the points at issue and provide an effective and prompt response
- o Respect complainants’ desire for confidentiality
- o Treat complainants with respect and courtesy
- o Make sure that any decisions we make are lawful, rational, reasonable, fair and proportionate, in line with the principles of administrative law
- o Keep complainants informed of the progress of the complaints process
- o Consider how the complaint can feed into school improvement evaluation processes

We try to resolve concerns by informal means wherever possible. Where this is not possible, the formal complaints procedures will be followed.

The school will aim to give the complainant the opportunity to complete the complaints procedure in full.

To support this, we will make sure we publicise the existence of this policy and make it available on the school website.

Throughout the process, we will be sensitive to the needs of all parties involved, and make any reasonable adjustments needed to accommodate individuals.

St Francis Church of England Primary School takes seriously its accountability to parents; both staff and Governors endeavour to listen to what parents are saying. However, it is inevitable in any institution, including schools, there may occasionally be a cause of dissatisfaction with some aspect of the service provided. This policy sets out the procedures that the school follows should such an occasion arise.

Many worries and concerns can be handled without the need for formal procedures, so long as the concern is taken seriously and addressed at an early stage. We therefore encourage parents to raise any worries or concerns with the child's class teacher immediately. In many cases the issue can be resolved 'there and then'. However, formal procedures will be needed when initial attempts to resolve the issue are unsuccessful.

If you want to make a complaint, you must do so within three months of the incident or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within three months of the last of these incidents. We will consider complaints made outside of this time frame if exceptional circumstances apply.

Please note that **complaints must never be raised in public or via a social networking site such as Facebook or Twitter**, as this is not an effective channel for resolving issues and may cause damage to the school's reputation without allowing a fair right of response. Any complaints raised through such channels may be dealt with under the school's policy for persistent, harassing and abusive complaints, which can be found in the policy section of the school's website.

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

This document meets the requirements of section 29 of the [Education Act 2002](#), which states that schools must have and make available a procedure to deal with all complaints relating to their school and to any community facilities or services that the school provides.

It is also based on [guidance for schools on complaints procedures](#) from the Department for Education (DfE), including the model procedures for complaints and for managing serial and unreasonable complaints.

In addition, it addresses duties set out in the [Early Years Foundation Stage statutory framework](#) with regards to dealing with complaints about the school's fulfilment of Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) requirements.

Aims and objectives

Our school aims to be fair, open and honest when dealing with any complaint. We give careful consideration to all complaints, and deal with them as swiftly as possible. We aim to resolve any complaint through dialogue and mutual understanding. In all cases, we put the interests of the child above all else. We provide sufficient opportunity for any complaint to be fully discussed, then resolved.

Organisations who hire facilities from St Francis School:

External organisations hiring/letting rooms from St Francis are responsible for having their own Complaints Policy in place. St Francis school is responsible for checking that this is the case before allowing lettings to proceed.

Scope

This policy does **not** cover complaints procedures relating to:

- Admissions
- Statutory assessments of special educational needs (SEN)
- Safeguarding matters
- Suspension and permanent exclusion
- Whistle-blowing
- Staff grievances
- Staff discipline
- School re-organisation proposals
- Curriculum
- Collective worship

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

Complaints about services provided by other providers who use school premises or facilities should be directed to the provider concerned.

Who to approach

Educational Matters: Classroom Teacher and or Mrs Millsop

SEND: Mrs Fullarton

Disciplinary Matters: Classroom Teacher

Financial/Admin: Mrs Wilding

Kitchen: Mrs Wilding

Teaching Assistants: Mrs Millsop

Teachers: Mrs Millsop

Headteacher: Chair of Governors

5.2 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 requirements (EYFS) and notify the complainant of the outcome within 28 days of receiving the complaint. The school will keep a record of the complaint and make this available to Ofsted on request.

Parents and carers can notify Ofsted if they believe that our school is not meeting the Early Years Foundation Stage requirements, by:

- Calling 0300 123 4666
- Emailing enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
- Using the online contact form available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted#org-contacts>
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We will notify parents and carers if we become aware that our school is to be inspected by Ofsted. We will also supply a copy of the inspection report to parents and carers of children attending the setting on a regular basis.

The complaints process

- Stage 1 If you are concerned about anything to do with the education that we are providing at our school, you should, in the first instance, **discuss the matter with your child's class teacher**. In our experience, most matters of concern can be resolved positively in this way. All teachers work very hard to ensure that each child is happy at school, and is making good progress; they naturally want to know if there is a problem, so that they can take action before it seriously affects the child's wellbeing or performance.

The class teacher will inform the Key Stage Leader of the nature of the concern and strategies discussed with the parent to resolve the concerns. If necessary, after speaking to the class teacher, you can also **discuss the matter with the Key Stage Leader**.

- Stage 2 If you feel that a situation has not been resolved through contact with the class teacher and Key Stage Leader, or that your concern is of a sufficiently serious nature, you should **make an appointment to discuss it with the Head Teacher**. Where possible, you should complete the complaint form in Appendix 3 of this policy, to aid clarity and record keeping. The Head Teacher will consider any complaint that is escalated in this way very seriously, in discussion with the parents, class teacher, and/or other members of staff involved.

The Head Teacher will carry out an investigation and provide a response, either in writing or verbally (followed by a written summary if needed), within 10 working days of the complaint. If the Head Teacher is unable to meet this deadline, they will provide the complainant with an update and revised response date. (Complaints received in school holidays will be investigated once school has reopened and therefore 10 days after the start of the new term) The response will explain any actions taken to investigate the complaint, the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions the school will take to resolve the complaint.

Most complaints are normally resolved by this stage.

- Stage 3 Only if the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 2 should a **formal complaint be made to the Governing Body**. This complaint must be made in writing, stating the nature of the complaint, and how the school has handled it so far. Again Appendix 3 should be completed to explain clearly and concisely the scope of the complaint. The complainant is also encouraged to state what actions s/he believes might resolve the issue. S/he should send this written complaint to the Chair of Governors and the Clerk to the Governors.

The Governing Body will acknowledge the complaint within **5 working days**¹. It will then convene a complaints panel of 3 Governors. The complaints panel will **arrange a meeting to discuss the complaint**, and if appropriate will invite the complainant to attend the meeting, so that s/he can explain the complaint in more detail. The school gives the complainant at least **three days' notice** of the meeting and s/he has the right to be accompanied by a friend or family member at the meeting. If the complainant

¹ A working day is defined as Monday – Friday during the school term. If a formal complaint is received during the school holidays, governors will endeavour to consider it as quickly as possible, but this is likely to take longer than during term-time.

rejects the offer of three proposed dates, without good reason, the Clerk will decide when to hold the meeting. It will then proceed in the complainant's absence on the basis of written submissions from both parties. Appendix 1 gives further information about the complaints panel process.

After hearing all the evidence, the Governors will consider their decision and inform the complainant about it, in writing, **within 10 working days** of the complaint panel hearing. The Governors do all they can at this stage to resolve the complaint to the complainant's satisfaction.

If the complainant is not satisfied, the complaint will be referred to a panel of three headteachers from the Swindon Maintained Schools Collaborative, who will ensure that the school's policy and procedures have been followed correctly.

Stage 4 If the complainant believes the school did not handle their complaint in accordance with the published complaints procedure or they acted unlawfully or unreasonably in the exercise of their duties under education law, they can contact the Department for Education after they have completed Stage 3.

The Department for Education will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by the school. They will consider whether the school has adhered to education legislation and any statutory policies connected with the complaint.

The complainant can refer their complaint to the Department for Education online at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus, by telephone on: 0370 000 2288 or by writing to:
Department for Education
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester, M1 2WD.

There will be occasions when, despite relevant stages of the procedures having been followed, the complainant remains dissatisfied. If the complainant tries to reopen the same issue, the Chair of Governors is able to inform them in writing that the procedure has been exhausted and that the matter is now closed.

Principles for investigation

When investigating a complaint, we will try to clarify:

- What has happened
- Who was involved
- What the complainant feels would put things right
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Record keeping

Any paperwork associated with the complaint will be filed securely. Where appropriate, information should also be recorded on CPOMS, with any paperwork scanned in. 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 on the review panel.

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 the Data Protection Act, or where the material must be made available during a school inspection.

Records of complaints will be kept securely, only for as long as necessary and in line with data protection law, our privacy notices and our record 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 review panel needs to be organised at a later point.

Where the governing board is aware of the substance of the complaint before the review panel 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.

Closure of complaints

If no appeal has been made **one month** after the decision of the complaints panel has been communicated to the complainant, the complaint will be considered to be closed.

Complaints about the Head Teacher

Should any complainant have a complaint about the Head Teacher, they should write to the Chair of Governors and the Clerk to the Governors. The Chair of Governors will investigate and respond to the complainant in writing, addressing the concerns that have been raised.

If the complainant is unhappy with the response, or if the Chair of Governors is personally involved in the complaint, the matter will be handled as outlined in Stage 3 above.

Monitoring and review

The Governors monitor the complaints procedure, in order to ensure that all complaints are handled properly. A record of formal complaints is kept in the school office, and this is monitored by the Governing Body. This policy will be reviewed by the FGB every 2 years. At each review, the policy will be approved by the full governing board

Governors consider any local or national decisions that affect the complaints process and make any modifications necessary to this policy. This policy is made available to all parents, so that they can be properly informed about the complaints process.

Unreasonable complaints

Most complaints raised will be valid, and therefore we will treat them seriously. However, a complaint may become unreasonable if the person:

- 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 co-operate with the complaints investigation process
- Refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of the complaints procedure
- Insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the complaints procedure or with good practice
- Introduces trivial or irrelevant information that they expect to be taken into account and commented on
- 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 complaint procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed, including referral to the Department for Education
- Seeks an unrealistic outcome
- Makes excessive demands on school time by frequent, lengthy and complicated 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

Please note: the above list is not intended to be exhaustive and is for guidance purposes only. It is at the discretion of the school what is deemed to be unreasonable.

Complainants should try to limit their communication with the school while the complaint is being progressed. It is not helpful if repeated correspondence is sent (either by letter, phone, email or text), as it could delay the outcome being reached.

Steps we will take

We will take every reasonable step to address the complainant's comments and give them a clear statement of our position and their options. We will maintain our role as an objective arbiter throughout the process, including when we meet with individuals. We will follow our complaints procedure as normal (as outlined above) wherever possible.

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, refer them to

this policy and remind them to act in accordance with it. For complainants who excessively contact the school causing a significant level of disruption, we may:

- Give the complainant a single point of contact via an email address
- Limit the number of times the complainant can make contact, such as a fixed number per term
- Ask the complainant to engage a third party to act on their behalf, such as [Citizens Advice](#)
- Put any other strategy in place as necessary

In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, we will immediately inform the police and communicate our actions in writing. This may include barring an individual from school premises and ensuring appropriate measures of support are provided to staff where they are the subject of aggression and/or violence.

Serial/persistent complaints

If the complainant contacts the school again on the same issue, the correspondence may then be viewed as 'serial' or 'persistent'. We may stop responding to the complainant when the following conditions are met:

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

The case to stop responding is stronger if:

- The complainant's communications are often or always abusive or aggressive
- The complainant makes insulting personal comments about or threats towards staff
- We have reason to believe the individual is contacting the school with the intention of causing disruption or inconvenience

Where we decide to stop responding, we will inform the individual that we intend to do so. We will also explain that we will consider any new complaints they make provided the concerns raised are materially different to those raised previously and/or are unconnected to the previous concern

Duplicate complaints

If we have resolved a complaint under this procedure and receive a duplicate complaint on the same subject from a partner, family member or other individual, we will assess whether there are aspects that we hadn't previously considered, or any new information we need to take into account.

If we are satisfied that there are no new aspects, we will:

- Tell the new complainant that we have already investigated and responded to this issue, and that the local process is complete
- Direct them to the DfE if they are dissatisfied with our original handling of the complaint

If a duplicate complaint is raised, which in the view of the school, warrants further consideration, the procedure outlined in section 6 or 7 (as appropriate) will be repeated.

Complaint campaigns

Where the school receives a large volume of complaints about the same topic or subject, especially if these come from complainants unconnected with the school, the school may respond to these complaints by:

- Publishing a single response on the school website
- Sending a template response to all of the complainants

If complainants are not satisfied with the school's response, or wish to pursue the complaint further, the normal procedures will apply.

Learning lessons

The governing board 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.

Links with other policies

Policies dealing with other forms of complaints include:

- Child protection and safeguarding policy and procedures
- Admissions policy
- Suspension and permanent exclusion policy
- Staff grievance procedures
- Staff disciplinary procedures
- Special educational needs policy and information report
- Privacy notices
- Vexatious, persistent and harassing complaints

Appendix 1 – Further information about the Complaints Panel

Who will sit on the complaints panel?

The complaints panel will consist of 3 Governors. 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. When selecting Governors for the complaints panel, a representation of the various categories of Governor will be selected; all of whom must be sensitive to race, gender and religious affiliation.

What is the aim of the complaints panel hearing?

The aim of the hearing will always be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant. However, it has to be recognised that the complainant might not be satisfied with the outcome. It may only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations which will satisfy the complainant that his or her complaint has been taken seriously.

Who will attend the hearing?

The hearing will always be held in private. It will be attended by the Governors on the complaint panel. Depending on the nature of the complaint, it may also be attended by the Clerk to the Governors, the Head Teacher, the complainant and any witnesses. Witnesses are only required to attend for the part of the hearing in which they give their evidence. (Where the complaint is against the Head Teacher, their role at the hearing may be taken by another senior member of staff or the Chair of Governors.)

If the complainant attends the hearing, they have the right to be accompanied by a friend or family member, should they choose to do so. Similarly, any staff required to attend the hearing, including the Head Teacher, may choose to be accompanied by a representative from their union.

If the complainant has difficulty discussing a complaint with a particular member of staff, or the member of staff directly involved feels too compromised to deal with a complaint, the Head Teacher may consider referring the complainant to another staff member.

Will the hearing take place in a formal setting?

The meeting will be held in private. Electronic recordings of meetings or conversations are not normally permitted unless required as part of reasonable adjustments. Prior knowledge and consent of all parties attending will be sought before meetings or conversations take place. Consent will be recorded in any minutes taken.

At the review panel meeting, the complainant and representatives from the school, as appropriate, will be present. Each will have an opportunity to set out written or oral submissions prior to the meeting.

The complainant must be allowed to attend the panel hearing and be accompanied by a suitable companion if they wish. We don't encourage either party to bring legal representation but will consider it on a case-by-case basis. For instance, if a school employee is called as a witness in a complaint meeting, they may wish to be supported by their union.

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

At the meeting, each individual will have the opportunity to give statements and present their evidence, and witnesses will be called as appropriate to present their evidence.

The panel, the complainant and the school representative will be given the chance to ask and reply to questions. Once the complainant and school representatives have completed presenting their cases, they will be asked to leave, and evidence will then be considered.

The panel will then put together its findings and recommendations from the case. The panel will also provide copies of the minutes of the hearing and the findings and recommendations to the complainant and, where relevant, the subject of the complaint, and make a copy of the findings and recommendations available for inspection by the headteacher.

Extra care needs to be taken when the complainant is a child. Careful consideration of the atmosphere and proceedings will ensure that the child does not feel intimidated. The panel needs to be aware of the views of the child and give them equal consideration to those of adults. Where the child's parent is the

complainant, it would be helpful to give the parent the opportunity to say which parts of the hearing, if any, the child needs to attend.

What decisions can the complaints panel take?

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.

Roles and Responsibilities

The complainant

The complainant will get a more effective and timely response to their complaint if they:

- Follow these procedures
- Co-operate with the school throughout the process, and respond to deadlines and communication promptly
- Ask for assistance as needed
- Treat all those involved with respect
- Do not approach individual governors about the complaint
- Do not publish details about the complaint on social media

The investigator

An individual will be appointed to look into the complaint and establish the facts. They will:

- Interview all relevant parties, keeping notes
- Consider records and any written evidence and keep these securely
- Prepare a comprehensive report to the headteacher or complaints committee, which includes the facts and potential solutions

The Clerk to the Governors will:

- Act as the main point of contact for the complainant;
- Set the date, time and venue of the hearing, ensuring that the dates are convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible;
- Collate any written material and send it to the parties in advance of the hearing;
- Ensure that the complainant is aware of their right to be accompanied by a friend or family member at the hearing, and that staff are aware of their right to union representation;
- Meet and welcome the parties as they arrive at the hearing;
- Record the proceedings;
- Notify all parties of the panel's decision.

The Chair of the Complaints Panel will ensure that:

- The remit of the panel is explained to the parties and each party has the opportunity of putting their case without undue interruption;
- The issues are addressed and key findings of fact are made;
- Parents and others who may not be used to speaking at such a hearing are put at ease;
- The hearing is conducted in an informal manner with each party treating the other with respect and courtesy;
- No member of the panel has a vested interest in the outcome of the proceedings or any involvement in an earlier stage of the procedure;
- Each side is given the opportunity to state their case and ask questions;
- Written material is seen by all parties. Where possible, if a new issue arises all parties will be given the opportunity to consider and comment on it.

The complaints co-ordinator can be:

- The headteacher
- The designated complaints governor
- Any other staff member providing administrative support

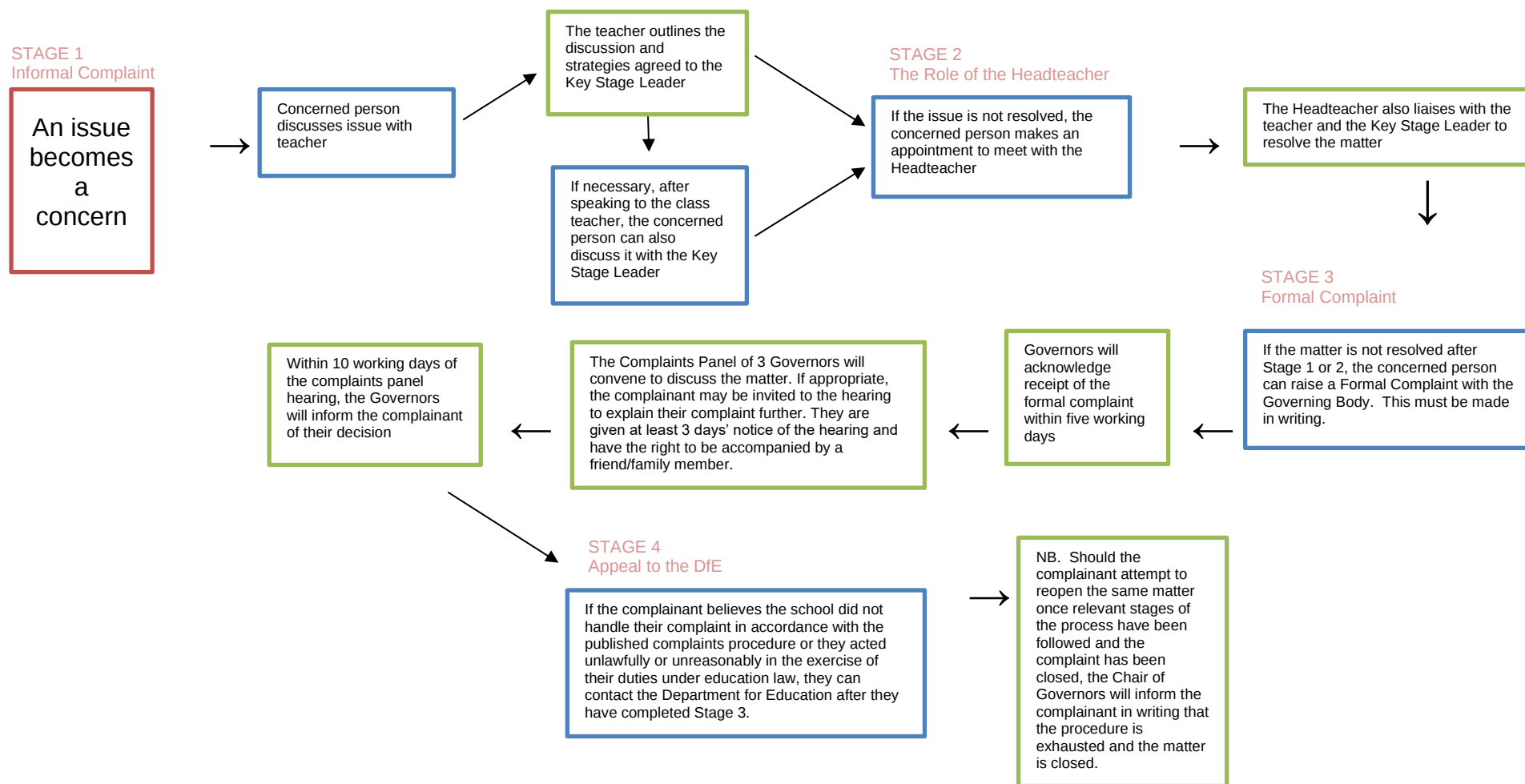
The complaints co-ordinator will:

- Keep the complainant up to date at each stage in the procedure
- Make sure the process runs smoothly by liaising with staff members, the headteacher, chair of governors, clerk and local authority (LA)
- Be aware of issues relating to:
 - Sharing third-party information
 - Additional support needed by complainants; for example, interpretation support or where the complainant is a child or young person
- Keep records

Appendix 2 – Flow Chart outlining St Francis Primary School Complaints Procedure

NB. A concerned person/complainant can be a parent, carer, child or another individual

- Action by the complainant
- School/Governor action



Any complaint about the Headteacher should be raised in writing to the Chair of Governors and to the Clerk to the Governors in the first instance. Governors will respond in writing. If the concerned person is still unhappy the issue will be treated as a formal complaint (see Stage 3).

Key Stage Leaders Foundation/EYFS: Lorraine Jeffery, KS1: Jen Blake, LKS2: Liz Thring, UKS2: Alex Dunsdon

APPENDIX 3

Please complete and return to Headteacher who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

Your name:
Pupil's name:
Your relationship to the pupil:
Address: Postcode: Day time telephone number: Evening telephone number: Contact email address
Please give details of your complaint.
What action, if any, have you already taken to try and resolve your complaint. What solutions have been offered? (Who did you speak to and what was the response)?
The reason that this was not a satisfactory resolution for you

What action would you like to be taken to resolve the problem
Signature: Date:
Official use Date acknowledgement sent: By whom: Complaint referred to: Date