The Golden Thread Alliance

Complaints Procedure

Date Reviewed	*Autumn 2026*
Next Review Date	*Autumn 2028*

This policy has been adopted by all schools within The Golden Thread Alliance

The Golden Thread Alliance

As united as we are different.

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The Board of Trustees has approved this policy and, as such, it applies to all schools in The Golden Thread Alliance.

1. Aims

Schools in The Golden Thread Alliance are committed to providing the best education for their pupils as well as wanting them to be healthy, happy, safe and to do well. The Trust and schools recognise the importance of establishing and maintaining good relationships with parents, carers, and the wider community. However there may be occasions where people have concerns or complaints. The following procedure sets out the steps that should be followed to resolve these as quickly and informally as possible.

Schools aim to meet their statutory obligations when responding to complaints from parents of pupils at the school, and others.

Anyone can make a complaint about any provision of facilities or services that a school provides unless separate statutory procedures apply. This includes parents or carers of pupils at the school, parents or carers of pupils no longer at the school and members of the public. This policy is not intended to apply to concerns or complaints related to certain aspects of the school's work which are covered under separate statutory procedures (please see section 3.2)

When responding to complaints, the Trust/school aims to:

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

The Trust tries to resolve concerns or complaints by informal means wherever possible. Where this is not possible, formal procedures will be followed.

Schools aim to give the complainant the opportunity to complete the complaints procedure in full. To support this the existence of this policy is publicised and made available on individual school websites. Throughout the process, staff will be sensitive to the needs of all parties involved and will make any reasonable adjustments needed to accommodate individuals.

2. Legislation and Guidance

This document meets the requirements set out in part 7 of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) regulations 2014 which states that the Trust must have and make available a written procedure to deal with complaints from parents of pupils at their schools.

It is also based on guidance published by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) on creating a complaints procedure that complies with the above regulations and refers to good practice guidance on

setting up complaints procedures from the Department for Education (DfE). This policy complies with the Trust's Funding Agreement and Articles of Association.

In addition, it addresses duties set out in the Early Years Foundation Framework regarding dealing with complaints about the school's fulfilment of Early Years Foundation Stage requirements.

The Trust will deal with concerns, difficulties, and complaints in accordance with its duty under the Equality Act 2010 to have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimization, and other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act 2010.
- Advance equality of opportunity between those who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not, by having regard to the need to:
    - remove or minimise disadvantages connected to a relevant protected characteristic;
    - take steps to meet the different needs of those sharing a relevant protected characteristic; and
    - encourage those who share a relevant protected characteristic to participate in school life and activities in which participation is disproportionately low,

- Foster good relations between those who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not, by having regard to the need to:
    - tackle prejudice, and
    - promote understanding.

"Relevant protected characteristics" includes sex, race, disability, religion or belief, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, pregnancy, and maternity and (in the case of persons who are not pupils) age.

In addition, the Trust will comply with its duty to make the following reasonable adjustments for persons with a disability:

- Where a provision, criterion or practice places a disabled person at a substantial disadvantage compared to person who is not disabled, reasonable steps must be taken to avoid that disadvantage,
- Where a disabled person would, but for the provision of an auxiliary aid, be placed at a substantial disadvantage compared with a person who is not disabled, reasonable steps must be taken to provide the auxiliary aid.

An auxiliary aid can be a piece of equipment or a service.

If a complainant or other person involved in the complaint's procedure requires an interpreter, a signer, or any other assistance at meetings or at a Complaint Panel Hearing, they should let the school know immediately. Further details can be found in the Trust's Equality and Community Cohesion Policy.

3. Definitions and Scope

3.1 Definitions

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

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

3.2 Scope

Schools intend to resolve complaints informally where possible, at the earliest possible stage. There may be occasions when complainants would like to raise their concerns formally. This policy outlines the procedure relating to handling such complaints. This policy does **not** cover complaints relating to the following, where there are separate statutory procedures:

- Admissions
- Data Protection
- Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND)
- Matters likely to require a child protection investigation
- Suspensions and Exclusion
- Whistleblowing
- Staff Grievances
- Staff Discipline/Conduct

Please see separate policies for procedures relating to these types of complaint.
Arrangements for handling complaints from parents of children with Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) about the school's support are within the scope of this policy.

Such complaints should first be made to the Special Educational Needs and Disability Co-ordinator (SENDCo) and they will then be referred to this complaints policy. The SEND policy includes information about the rights of parents of pupils with disabilities who believe that the school has discriminated against their child. Complaints about services provided by other providers who use the school premises or facilities should be directed to the provider concerned.

Withdrawal from the curriculum

Parents can withdraw their child from any aspect of Religious Education (RE), including the Daily Act of Collective Worship (DACW). They do not have to explain why. If parents are not satisfied with the handling of a request to withdraw their child from RE or the DACW, they should follow this complaints procedure. The right of withdrawal does not apply to other areas of the curriculum where religious matters may be spontaneously raised by pupils or arise in other subjects such as history or citizenship.

4. Roles and Responsibilities

4.1 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.
- Not publish details about the complaint on social media.

Complainants should not approach individual Trustees or Governors to raise concerns or complaints. They have no power to act on an individual basis and it may also prevent them from considering complaints at Stage 4 of the procedure.

4.2 The Investigator

An individual will be appointed to investigate 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 which includes the facts and potential solutions.

4.3 Governance Professional to the Governing Committee

The Governance Professional will:

- Be the contact point for the complainant and the Complaints Panel, including circulating the relevant papers and evidence before a Complaints Panel Hearing.
- Arrange the complaints hearing.
- Record and circulate the minutes and outcome of the hearing.

4.4 Panel Chair

The Panel Chair will:

- Chair the meeting, ensuring that everyone is treated with respect throughout.
- Make sure all parties see the relevant information, understand the purpose of the Complaints Panel, and can present their case.

4.5 Panel Members

Panel Members should be aware that:

- The meeting must be independent and impartial and should be seen to be so.
- No Trustee or Governor may sit on the Panel if they have had a prior involvement in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it.
- The aim of the meeting should be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant
- It is recognised that the complainant might not be satisfied with the outcome if the meeting does not find in their favour. It may only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations.

5. Principles for Investigation

When investigating a complaint, clarification will be sought on:

- What has happened?
- Who was involved?
- What the complainant feels would put things right.

At each stage, the individuals investigating the complaint should ensure 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.
- Collect information pertinent to the complaint raised.
- When appropriate, interview those involved in the matter and/or those who are the subject of the complaint, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish.
- Conduct any interview with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning.
- Keep a written record of all meetings in relation to the incident.

5.1 Timescales

The complainant must raise the complaint within 3 months of the incident. If the complaint is about a series of related incidents, they must raise the complaint within 3 months of the last incident. In circumstances where there is a valid reason for not making a complaint at the time, exceptions to this timeframe will be considered and the complaint can still be investigated in a fair manner for all involved.

When complaints are made out of term time, they will be considered to have been received on the first school day after the holiday period. If at any point we cannot meet the timescales we have set out in this policy, we will:

- Set new time limits with the complainant.
- Send the complainant details of the new deadline and explain the delay.

5.2 Complaints about the fulfilment of early years requirements

All written complaints relating to the school's fulfilment of the Early Years Foundation Stage requirements will be investigated and the complainant notified of the outcome within 28 days of receiving the complaint.

The school will keep a record of the complaint (see section 12) and make this available to Ofsted on request. Parents and carers can notify Ofsted if they believe that the school is not meeting Early Years Foundation Stage requirements, by calling 0300 123 4666, or by emailing enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk. An online contact form is also available at Ofsted-GOV.UK (www.gov.uk). Parents and carers will be notified if the school is to be inspected by Ofsted because of their complaint. A copy of the inspection report will be supplied to parents and carers of children attending the setting on a regular basis.

6. Resolution Principles

At each stage in the procedure, the school will consider ways to resolve a complaint. 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/Trust policies because of the complaint.

7. Outcome Principles

Examples of outcomes include:

- There was insufficient evidence to reach a conclusion, so the complaint cannot be upheld.
- The investigation did not substantiate the matters raised, so the complaint cannot be upheld.
- The complaint was substantiated in part or full. A description should be given of the remedial action being taken by the school because of the complaint.
- The matter has been fully investigated and, consequently, further confidential procedures are being pursued.

8. Withdrawal of a Complaint

If a complainant wants to withdraw their complaint, they will be asked to confirm this in writing.

9. Stages of Complaint

Please see the Complaints Procedure Flowchart at Appendix 2.

Complaints will normally begin at Stage 1 and progress through each stage of this procedure in order. The stage at which a complaint is considered will be determined by the school or Trust in accordance with this procedure. A complaint being submitted in writing, or being described by the complainant as a "formal complaint", does not in itself mean that it will be considered at Stage 2. There may be circumstances where it is appropriate to depart from the usual sequence, including those set out in section 10 of this procedure.

Stage 1:	Used to seek an informal resolution and move forward.
Formal Stage 2:	Review by the Headteacher (or designated individual); where the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of Stage 1,
Formal Stage 3:	Review by a Trust Senior Leader (or designated individual): where the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of Stages 1-2,
Formal Stage 4:	Complaint Panel Hearing: where the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of Stages 1-3.

9.1 Stage 1 – Informal Resolution

9.1.1 Stage 1 is the first stage of the Trust's Complaints Procedure and provides an opportunity for concerns and complaints to be considered and resolved informally and promptly wherever possible.

9.1.2 The complainant should raise their concern as soon as possible with the appropriate member of school staff. Depending on the nature of the concern, this may be the class teacher, Year Group Leader or another appropriate member of the Senior Leadership Team. If the complainant is

unsure who to contact, they should contact the school office, which will direct the concern appropriately.

9.1.3 The school will acknowledge informal complaints within 3 school days and investigate and provide a response within 5 school days.

9.1.4 Stage 1 may involve a discussion or meeting between the complainant and the appropriate member of staff, with the aim of resolving the matter informally.

9.1.5 The complainant will be advised of any escalation options (for example, escalation to Stage 2) and will be provided with details of this process.

9.1.6 Where the matter cannot be resolved at Stage 1, the complainant may request that the complaint progresses to Formal Stage 2 in accordance with section 9.2.

9.2 Formal Stage 2: Review by the Headteacher

9.2.1 The formal stage involves the complainant putting the complaint in writing, to the Headteacher unless the complainant has sufficient reason to request a reasonable adjustment be made to amend this.

9.2.2 The complainant may use the form attached as Appendix 1 to do this. If they are not using the form, their letter should set out clearly:

- The matters in dispute.
- Relevant dates, times and the full names of the people involved (including any witnesses to events).
- Copies of any relevant documents.
- Reasons for dissatisfaction with the outcome of Stage 1.
- Suggested resolutions for the complaint.

9.2.3 The resolution timeline cannot commence until the Headteacher receives in writing a complaint that includes all the details specified above.

9.2.4 If complainants need assistance raising a formal complaint, they can contact the school office.

9.2.5 The Headteacher will acknowledge a Stage 2 complaint within 3 school days.

9.2.6 The Headteacher (or other person appointed by the Headteacher for this purpose) will then conduct their own investigation.

9.2.7 The written conclusion of this investigation will be sent to the complainant within 20 school days of the complaint being received. The complainant will be advised of any escalation options (for example, escalation to Stage 3) and will be provided with details of this process.

9.2.8 If the complainant is not satisfied with the response and wishes to proceed to the next stage of this procedure, they should inform the Governance Professional to the governing body via email (governancelead@golden-thread.org) or by letter submitted to the school office within 10 school days of receiving the written conclusion from the Headteacher.

9.2.9 If the complaint is not escalated within 10 school days, the Headteacher will confirm in writing to the complainant that their complaint is acknowledged as resolved and has been closed.

9.3 Formal Stage 3: Review by a Trust Senior Leader

9.3.1 The Governance Professional will acknowledge a Stage 3 complaint within 3 school days.

9.3.2 The Trust Senior Leader (or another appointed individual) will be provided with all documentation relating to the complaint within 5 school days of receipt of the request for a review under Stage 3, including the record of the Stage 1 mediation (if applicable), the original letter of complaint (or

Complaint Form), any documentation provided by the complainant with their complaint, all investigation records under Stage 2 and the outcome under Stage 2.

9.3.3 The Trust Senior Leader, as the Investigating Officer, will review all the documentation received and consider the matters raised in the complaint and investigation carried out under Stage 2. The Trust Senior Leader will only speak to the people involved in the matters raised to clarify matters which were not confirmed during the Stage 2 investigation if this is deemed necessary.

9.3.4 Where the Trust Senior Leader does speak to a member of staff whose conduct is in issue, they will be accompanied as set out in the safeguarding and HR policies.

9.3.5 The complainant will be offered a meeting with the Trust Senior Leader to discuss the issues raised and the outcome of the review. Meetings will usually take place after the review is completed to reach a mutually acceptable resolution.

9.3.6 All meetings held at Stage 3, will be minuted.

9.3.7 The complainant and the Headteacher will be informed of the outcome within 20 school days of the Stage 3 complaint being acknowledged. The complainant will be advised of any escalation options (for example, escalation to Stage 4) and will be provided with details of this process.

9.3.8 Complaints will be escalated to the panel hearing stage if the complainant is not satisfied with the response to the complaint at this second formal stage. If the complainant wishes to proceed to the next stage of this procedure, they should inform the Governance Professional to the governing body via email (governancelead@golden-thread.org) or by letter submitted to the school office within 10 school days of receiving the written conclusion from the Trust Senior Leader.

9.3.9 If the complaint is not escalated within 10 school days, the Governance Professional will confirm in writing to the complainant that their complaint has been acknowledged as resolved and has been closed.

9.4 Formal Stage 4: Complaint Panel Hearing

9.4.1 The administration for Stage 4 Complaint Panel Hearings will be handled by the Governance Professional, who will acknowledge receipt of a request to escalate to Stage 4 within 5 school days.

9.4.2 The complainant should not repeat matters raised in their original complaint letter, or attach documentation already provided. Furthermore, the complainant should not introduce any new complaint or include evidence unrelated to the initial complaint.

9.4.3 The Governance Professional will inform the complainant of the names of the Complaint Panel members as soon as this has been arranged.

The Complaint Panel

The Complaint Panel will consist of at least 3 Governors who are not directly involved in the complaint's matters. At least 1 Panel Member must be independent of the management and running of the school (but may be a Governor of another school within the Trust).

The panel cannot be made up solely of Governors of the school to which the complaint relates, as they are not independent of the management and running of the school. This ensures that the panel has the benefit of an external source of scrutiny and challenge in its consideration of the complaint.

If the complainant objects to any of the named persons being appointed to the Complaint Panel, they should notify the Governance Professional within 5 school days of receipt of the letter advising them of

the date of the Panel Hearing and the Panel Members. Fair consideration will be given to any bona fide objection to a particular member of the Complaint Panel.

The complainant will be given reasonable notice of the date of the Complaint Panel hearing. However, the Complaint Panel reserves the right to convene at their convenience rather than that of the complainant. The Panel Hearing will usually take place within 30 days of receipt of the request for a Stage 4 Panel Hearing, but this may be delayed if the complainant objects to named Panel Members.

The complaints panel will meet in person, unless there are extenuating circumstances. Consideration will be given to requests for reasonable adjustments.

Attendees

At the review panel meeting, the complainant, and a representative from the school (who will usually be the person who dealt with the complaint under Stage 2 but may be an alternative school representative as appropriate), will be present.

The Complaint Panel hearing will be minuted.

The Chair of the Complaint Panel will decide, at his or her absolute discretion, which witnesses will be permitted to attend the Complaint Panel hearing to give a verbal statement rather than relying on a written statement or record of meeting which have been signed by the witness.

Members of staff will not usually be required to attend the Complaint Panel Hearing to give a verbal statement unless their conduct is relevant, or their account is contentious, and the rules of natural justice dictate that the complainant should be allowed to ask that member of staff questions.

If the complainant wishes to rely on the account of a witness, they should ask the witness to write down, sign and date their account and forward it to the Governance Professional at least 5 school days before the Complaint Panel Hearing, to enable the Governance Professional to forward it to the school representative and the Complaint Panel Members.
The complainant must be allowed to attend the Panel Hearing and be accompanied if they wish. For the avoidance of doubt, the complainant's companion will be present for moral support only and will not play any part in the proceedings, unless invited to do so by the Chair of the Complaint Panel, entirely at their own discretion. It is not appropriate for either the complainant or the school to be legally represented.

Members of staff called as witnesses may be supported by a union representative.

Representatives from the media are not permitted and recording of the Panel Hearing is not permitted unless required for the purposes of a reasonable adjustment.

The advice of the Data Protection Officer would be sought if the Panel allowed the recording for fair and reasonable purpose in relation to:

- how any decision to allow recordings may affect any third parties called to act as witnesses, and
- the impact and consequences on the individuals involved in the complaint in the event recordings are lost or leaked.

Information

The Governance Professional will forward a copy of all paperwork relating to the complaint (consisting of the record of the Stage 1 mediation procedure (if applicable), the original letter of complaint or Complaint Form, any documentation provided by the complainant with their complaint, all investigation records with the letter of outcome under Stages 2 and 3 with the complainant's letter requesting a Complaint Panel hearing and accompanying documents) to the complainant, the school representative and the Complaint Panel Members.

The complainant and the school will each have a chance to set out written submissions before the Complaint Panel hearing.

If the complainant wishes the Panel to consider any additional information, they should forward this documentation to the Governance Professional at least 5 days before the Complaint Panel Hearing, to enable the Governance Professional to forward it to the school's representative and the Complaint Panel Members.

Documentation may be submitted after this deadline with the permission of the Chair of the Complaint Panel acting in his or her sole discretion.

Procedure at the Complaint Panel Hearing

At the hearing, the complainant and the school will have the opportunity to give statements and present their evidence, and witnesses will be called if appropriate (and agreed in advance by the Chair of the Complaint Panel).

All parties must comply with the Trust's Visitors Policy and a breach of this policy during the hearing may result in the hearing being adjourned and rescheduled if necessary.

The Complaint Panel, the complainant and the school representative(s) will be given the chance to ask and reply to questions. Once the complainant and school representative(s) have summarised their cases, they will be asked to leave, and evidence will then be considered.

The Complaint Panel will then convene in private immediately after (or on a subsequent date if necessary) and will consider all the documentation and everything heard at the Complaint Panel hearing. The Complaint Panel must then put together its findings and will make recommendations based upon them where appropriate. It will decide which facts are established to be true, on a balance of probabilities. If a fact is not deemed relevant, the Panel will not consider it further.

Recommendations may be aimed at achieving reconciliation between the parties (for example, a written apology), improving procedures or preventing a recurrence in the future. The Complaint Panel will keep a written record of their recommendations, with reasons.

The Governance Professional will inform those involved of the decision in writing within 20 school days of the meeting and confirm the complainant's ability to make a referral to the Department for Education (see section 10).

The Governance Professional will send an outcome letter with a copy of the findings and recommendations to the complainant, minutes of the Panel Hearing and, where relevant, the individual who is the subject of the complaint and the school's representative. A copy will be made available at the school's premises for inspection by the Trust.

As stated previously, all written complaints relating to the school's fulfilment of the Early Years Foundation Stage requirements will be investigated and the complainant notified of the outcome within 28 school days of receiving the complaint. This may mean that the meeting of the Panel or the provision of the outcome letter are received on an expedited timeline to that described above.

10. Complaints against The Golden Thread Alliance, centrally employed members of staff, Headteacher, Governor, Trustee or Member

There may be occasions when it is necessary and/or appropriate to deviate from the published complaints procedure. Informal resolution should still be sought initially.

Where the complaint relates to The Golden Thread Alliance or any persons outlined below, Stages 1 and 2 may not be considered appropriate, instead Stage 3 should be followed with the below outlined persons assuming responsibility for the process:

Complaint Against	**Who assumes responsibility**
The Golden Thread Alliance	The Chief Executive Officer
The Chief Executive Officer, Trustee or Member	The Chair of the Board of Trustees
The Chair of the Board of Trustees	The Vice-Chair of the Board of Trustees
The Chair of the Local Governing Committee	The Chair of the Board of Trustees
The entire Local Governing Committee	The Chair of the Board of Trustees
A Governor	The Chair of the Local Governing Committee
The Headteacher	The Chair of the Local Governing Committee
Centrally employed members of staff	The Chief Executive Officer

For complaints addressed to the Chair of the Board of Trustees and the Chair of the Local Governing Committee, please contact the Governance Professional to The Golden Thread Alliance via:

- Email: governancelead@golden-thread.org
- Post: Governance Professional to The Golden Thread Alliance, West Hill Primary Academy, Dartford Road, Dartford, Kent, DA1 3DZ.

The complaint will be acknowledged within 5 school days.

The relevant investigating body (or person appointed by them for this purpose) will then conduct their own investigation.

Depending on the nature of the complaint, the relevant investigating body may invite the complainant to a meeting to discuss their concern further and obtain additional information or clarify the resolution they are seeking. All investigation meetings will be minuted.

The written conclusion of this Stage 3 investigation will be sent to the complainant within 20 school days of receipt of the complaint.

If the complainant is not satisfied with the Stage 3 response and wishes to proceed to the next stage of this procedure (Stage 4), they must inform the Governance Professional (governancelead@golden-thread.org) in writing within 10 school days of receipt of the Stage 3 outcome. The complainant must clearly set out how and why they do not accept the findings made under Stage 3.

The Stage 4 (Complaint Panel hearing) procedure will then be followed as set out above. The panel will consist of Trustees (or Members) and at least one person independent of The Golden Thread Alliance.

11. Referring complaints on completion of the school's procedure

If the complainant is unsatisfied with the outcome of the school's complaints procedure, they can refer their complaint to the Department for Education (DfE). The DfE will check whether the complaint has been dealt with properly by the school. The DfE will not overturn a school's decision about a complaint. However, it will consider:

- Whether there was undue delay, or the school did not comply with its own complaint's procedure.
- Whether the school was in breach of its funding agreement with the secretary of state
- Whether the school has failed to comply with any other legal obligation

If the school did not deal with the complaint properly, it will be asked to re-investigate the complaint. If the school's complaints procedure is found to not meet regulations, the school will be asked to correct its procedure accordingly.

You can refer your complaint to the DfE online at www.education.gov.yk/contactus, by telephone on 0370 000 2288 or by writing to: Department for Education, Schools Complaints Compliance Unit, 2nd Floor, Piccadilly Gate, Store Street, Manchester, M1 2WD. For more information please see the following webpage: https://www.gov.uk/complain-about-school

This information will be included in the outcome letter to complainants.

12. Persistent Complaints

12.1 Unreasonably Persistent Complaints

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

- Has made the same complaint before, and it has already been resolved by following the school's complaints procedure.

- Makes a complaint that is obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific, defamatory, or repetitive.
- Knowingly provides false information.
- Insists on pursuing a complaint that is unfounded, or out of scope of the complaint's procedure.
- Pursues a valid complaint, but in an unreasonable manner e.g., refuses to articulate the complaint, refuses to co-operate with this complaint's procedure, or insists that the complaint is dealt with in ways that are incompatible with this procedure and the time frames it sets out.
- Changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation goes on.
- Makes a complaint designed to cause disruption, annoyance, or excessive demands on school time.
- Seeks unrealistic outcomes, or a solution that lacks any serious purpose or value.

Steps we will take

Every reasonable step will be taken to address the complainant's concerns and give them a clear statement of the Trust 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.
If the complainant continues to contact the school in a disruptive way, communications strategies may be put in place. 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.

Stopping Responding

The Trust/school may stop responding to the complainant when all these factors are met:

- We have taken all reasonable steps to help address their concerns.
- We have provided a clear statement of our position and their options.
- The complainant contacts us repeatedly, and we believe their intention is to cause disruption or inconvenience.

Where we stop responding, the individual will be informed that we intend to do so. We will also explain that we will still consider any new complaints they make.

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 sites.

12.2 Duplicate Complaints

If a complaint has been resolved under this procedure or is under review under this policy and a duplicate complaint is received on the same subject from a partner, family member or other individual, it will be assessed as to whether there are aspects that we had not previously considered, or any new information we need to consider. If we are satisfied that there are no new aspects, we will:

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

If there are new aspects, we will follow this procedure again.

12.3 Complaint Campaigns

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

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

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

13. Record Keeping

Schools 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 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 held centrally 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.

Complaint records must be retained in the school's agreed central complaints record and not on the school's safeguarding recording system solely for the purpose of recording a complaint. Where a complaint also contains safeguarding information, the relevant safeguarding information must additionally be recorded in accordance with the Trust's safeguarding procedures. 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 records management policy and 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 body is aware of the substance of the complaint before the review panel stage, the Governance Professional 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.

14. Learning Lessons

The Local Governing Committee 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.

The Board of Trustees will review any underlying issues raised by complaints with the Chief Executive Officer, where appropriate, and respecting confidentiality, to determine whether there are any improvements that the Trust can make to its procedures or practice to help prevent similar events in the future.

15. Monitoring Arrangements

The Board of Trustees will monitor the effectiveness of the complaints procedure in ensuring that complaints are handled properly. The Board will track the number and nature of complaints, and consider any underlying issues referred to them by the Local Governing Committee.

The complaints records are logged and managed by:
Stages 1 and 2: The School Business Manager
Stages 3 and 4: The Governance Professional

This policy will be reviewed and approved at regular intervals by the Board of Trustees.

16. Links with other policies

Policies dealing with other forms of complaints include:

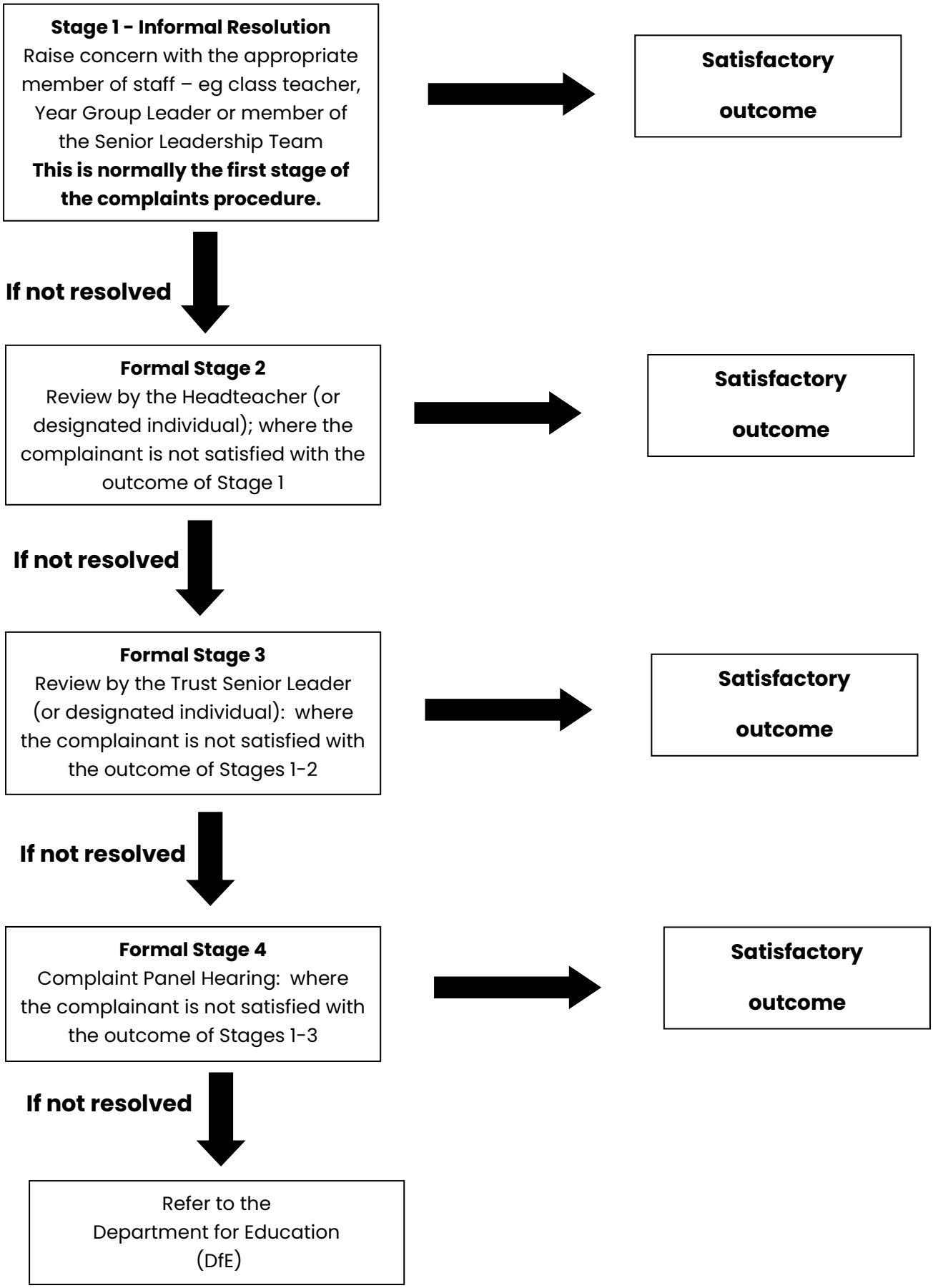
- Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy and Procedures
- Admissions Policy
- Suspensions and Exclusions Policy
- Staff Grievance procedures
- Staff Disciplinary procedures
- SEND Policy and information report
- Whistleblowing Policy
- Privacy Notices

Appendix 1 - Complaints Form

Please complete and return to ..... who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken	
Your Full Name	
Pupil's Name	
Your relationship to the Pupil	
Address	
Postcode	
Daytime Tel Number	
Evening Tel Number	
Please give details of your complaint/matter in dispute	
Please give relevant dates, times and the full names of persons involved (including any witnesses of events)	
Please provide copies of any relevant documents	
Please give the reasons for dissatisfaction with the outcome at Stage 1 of the Complaints Process	
What actions do you feel might resolve the problem?	

Signature	
Date	
For Office Use only	
Date acknowledgement sent	By Whom
Complaint referred to:	Date:

Appendix 2 - Complaints Procedure Flowchart



West Hill Primary Academy
Dartford Road,
Dartford, Kent,
DA1 3DZ

01322 296140

hello@golden-thread.org

The Golden Thread Alliance

As united as we are different.