



School Complaints Policy

STATUS: STATUTORY

Review Cycle: Annual
Governors Committee Responsible: Resources

Date of Last Review: 5/5/2026
Date of Next Review: Summer 2027



1. 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:

- 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
- Make sure that any decisions we make 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

We try to resolve complaints by informal means wherever possible. Where this is not possible, formal 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.

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 we must have and make available a written procedure to deal with complaints from parents/carers of pupils at the school.

It is also based on [best practice guidance for academies complaints procedures](#) published by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA).

This policy complies with our funding agreement and articles of association.

3. Scope

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

- Admissions – addressed under the Admissions Policy and Admissions Appeals Procedure
- Statutory assessments of special educational needs
- Safeguarding matters - addressed under the Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy
- Suspension and permanent exclusion - addressed under the School Suspensions and Permanent Exclusions policy

- Whistleblowing –addressed under the Whistleblowing Policy
- Complaints by staff – addressed under the School’s Staff Behaviour and Grievance Procedure or other personnel policies.
- Complaints against services provided by third party hirers/users of the school premises – the School will direct the complainant to the external provider’s own complaints procedures.
- Withdrawal from the curriculum (parents and carers can withdraw their child from any aspect of religious education, including the daily act of collective worship. They do not have to explain why)

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
- Do not approach individual governors about the complaint
- Do not publish details about the complaint on social media

4.2 The investigator

In formal complaints, an individual who may be the headteacher or other member of senior staff 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

4.3 The complaints co-ordinator

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, and clerk
- 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

4.4 Clerk to the Governing Board

If complaints are referred to the Governing Board, the clerk will:

- Be the contact point for the complainant and the complaints committee, including circulating the relevant papers and evidence before complaints committee meetings
- Arrange the complaints hearing
- Record and circulate the minutes and outcome of the hearing

4.5 Committee chair

The committee 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 committee, and are allowed to present their case

5. 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

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.

We will consider exceptions to this timeframe in circumstances where there were valid reasons for not making a complaint at that time and the complaint can still be investigated in a fair manner for all involved.

When complaints are made out of term time, we will consider them 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

6. Stages of complaint (not complaints against the headteacher or governors)

We have adopted a 3-stage process for dealing with complaints (see Appendix A for a flow chart):

- Stage 1 – informal resolution
- Stage 2 – formal investigation
- Stage 3 – review panel

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 of the steps that have been or will be taken to try to ensure that it will not happen again
- An undertaking to review School policies and procedures 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.

6.1 Stage 1 – informal – complaint heard by staff member

In this stage, the class teacher/ form teacher/ head of year (but not normally the subject of the complaint) will deal with the complaint. Most parents' concerns can be adequately resolved by discussion with the class teacher/ form teacher/ head of year or with other members of staff. If it is a specific complaint concerning the curriculum, the complaint should be first addressed to the subject teacher and head of the relevant department to be resolved informally.

There may be no need for the complaint to be put in writing. Many complaints can be dealt with informally by email or phonecall.

The complaint should be resolved within ten 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 ten school days. The Headteacher is informed and Stage 2 is implemented.

6.2 Stage 2 – formal – complaint heard by Headteacher or senior staff member

If the concern is not met to the complainant's 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 Headteacher or to a designated member of the Senior Leadership Team
- The Headteacher, or a designated member of the Senior Leadership 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 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 Headteacher or designated member of staff will consider the complaint and decide what action is required. They will respond to the complainant with the outcome of the investigation, normally within 25 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 member of staff designated to investigate the complaint will endeavour to provide a comprehensive, open, transparent and fair consideration of the complaint through:

- sensitive and thorough interviewing to establish what has happened and who has been involved
- clarification of the nature of the complaint and what remains unresolved
- consideration of records and other relevant information
- interviewing staff and pupils and other people relevant to the complaint, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish
- analysing information
- identifying solutions and recommending courses of action to resolve problems
- being mindful of the timeframes to respond
- responding to the complainant in plain and clear language

The member of staff designated to investigate ensures that they:

- meet with the complainant or contact them (if unsure or further information is necessary)
- effectively liaise with the complainant to clarify what the complainant feels would put things right
- conduct meetings with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning
- keep notes of the meetings themselves or arrange for a note taker to do this on their behalf (such notes being to assist the Investigator and not recorded as minutes)

Once the member of staff designated to investigate is satisfied that, so far as is practicable, all of the relevant information relating to the complaint has been reviewed, they will make a decision.

They can:

- Uphold the complaint and direct that certain action be taken to resolve it
- Uphold the complaint in part: in other words, they may find one aspect of the complaint to be valid, but not another aspect. They may direct for certain action to be taken to resolve the aspect that they find in favour of the complainant.
- Reject the complaint

Complainants will be informed of this decision and the reasons for making it, in writing. The complainant will be informed of his or her right to have the matter reviewed by the Governors' Complaints Review Panel if the outcome of Stage 2 is not considered satisfactory. The time frame in which any appeal must be lodged in writing is ten school days. Any such request by a complainant should be addressed to the Clerk to the Governors and the Governors' Complaints Review Panel will be convened.

Stage 3 – formal – Governors' Complaints Review Panel meeting

Convening the panel

Complaints will be escalated to the panel hearing stage if the complainant is not satisfied with the response to the complaint at the second, formal stage.

The panel must consist of at least 3 people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint. At least 1 panel member must be independent of the management and running of the school. The panel cannot be made up solely of Governing Board members, as they are not independent of the management and running of the school.

The panel will have access to the existing record of the complaint's progress (see section 10).

The complainant must have reasonable notice of the date of the review panel. The clerk will aim to find a date within 10 school days of the request, where possible.

If the complainant rejects the offer of 3 proposed dates without good reason, the clerk will set a date. The hearing will go ahead using written submissions from both parties.

Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least 3 school days before the date of the meeting.

The board will ensure that the hearing is properly minuted.

At the meeting

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 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(s) will be given the chance to ask and reply to questions. Once the complainant and school representative(s) have presented 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 individual who is the subject of the complaint, and make a copy available for inspection by the proprietor and headteacher.

The outcome

The committee can:

- Uphold the complaint, in whole or in part
- Dismiss the complaint, in whole or in part

If the complaint is upheld, the committee will:

- Decide the appropriate action to resolve the complaint
- Where appropriate, recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future

The panel will inform those involved of the decision in writing within 5 school days.

7. Complaints against the headteacher, a governor or the Governing Board

7.1 Stage 1: informal

Complaints made against the headteacher or any individual member of the Governing Board (including the chair or vice-chair) should be directed to the clerk of the Governing Board in the first instance.

A suitably skilled and impartial governor (or a Member if the complaint is against the governors) will then carry out the steps at stage 1 set out in section 6 above.

If the complaint is not resolved informally, it will be escalated to a formal complaint.

Complaints about the whole Governing Board will be resolved at stage 2 below.

Complaints can be raised by contacting the clerk to the Governing Board:

- By email (clerktogovernors@tiffin.kingston.sch.uk)
- By letter via the Tiffin School address (please mark the envelope 'private and confidential')

- Through a third party acting on behalf of the complainant

The clerk will need the details of the complaint as set out above, as well as details from the complainant on how they feel the previous stage of the procedure has not addressed their complaint sufficiently, and what they feel would resolve the complaint.

7.2 Stage 2: formal

Complaints that involve or are about the headteacher should be addressed to the chair of governors, marked as private and confidential.

Complaints about the chair of governors, any individual governor or the whole governing body should be addressed to the clerk to the Governing Board, marked as private and confidential.

Formal complaints can be raised:

- By email (clerktogovernors@tiffin.kingston.sch.uk)
- By letter via the Tiffin School address (please mark the envelope 'private and confidential')
- Through a third party acting on behalf of the complainant

If the complaint is about the headteacher or an individual governor, a suitably skilled and impartial governor will then carry out the steps at stage 2 set out in section 6 above.

If the complaint is:

- Jointly about the chair and vice-chair or
- The entire Governing Board or
- The majority of the Governing Board

then an independent investigator will carry out the steps in stage 2 set out in section 6 above. They will be appointed by the Members of the trust, and will write a formal response at the end of their investigation.

The written conclusion of this investigation will be sent to the complainant within 30 school days.

If the complainant wishes to proceed to the next stage of the procedure, they should inform the clerk to the Governing Board in writing within 10 school days. Requests received outside of this timeframe will be considered in exceptional circumstances.

The clerk will acknowledge receipt of the request within 10 school days.

7.3 Stage 3: review panel

If the complaint is about the headteacher or an individual governor, the steps outlined in stage 3 of section 6 above will be followed.

If the complaint is:

- Jointly about the chair and vice-chair or
- The entire Governing Board or
- The majority of the Governing Board

then a committee of independent people will hear the complaint. They will be sourced from the Members of the trust, local schools or the local authority and will carry out the steps at stage 3 (set out in section 6 above).

8. 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 DfE. The DfE will not re-investigate the complaint but will look at whether:

- The school followed its complaints policy and any other relevant statutory policies
- The school's statutory policies comply with education legislation

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

www.gov.uk/complain-about-school

We will include this information in the outcome letter to complainants.

9. Unreasonable and persistent complaints

9.1 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 which 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 DfE
- 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.

9.2 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

9.3 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.

9.4 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.

10. Record keeping and confidentiality

The 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 and our privacy notices

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.

11. Learning lessons

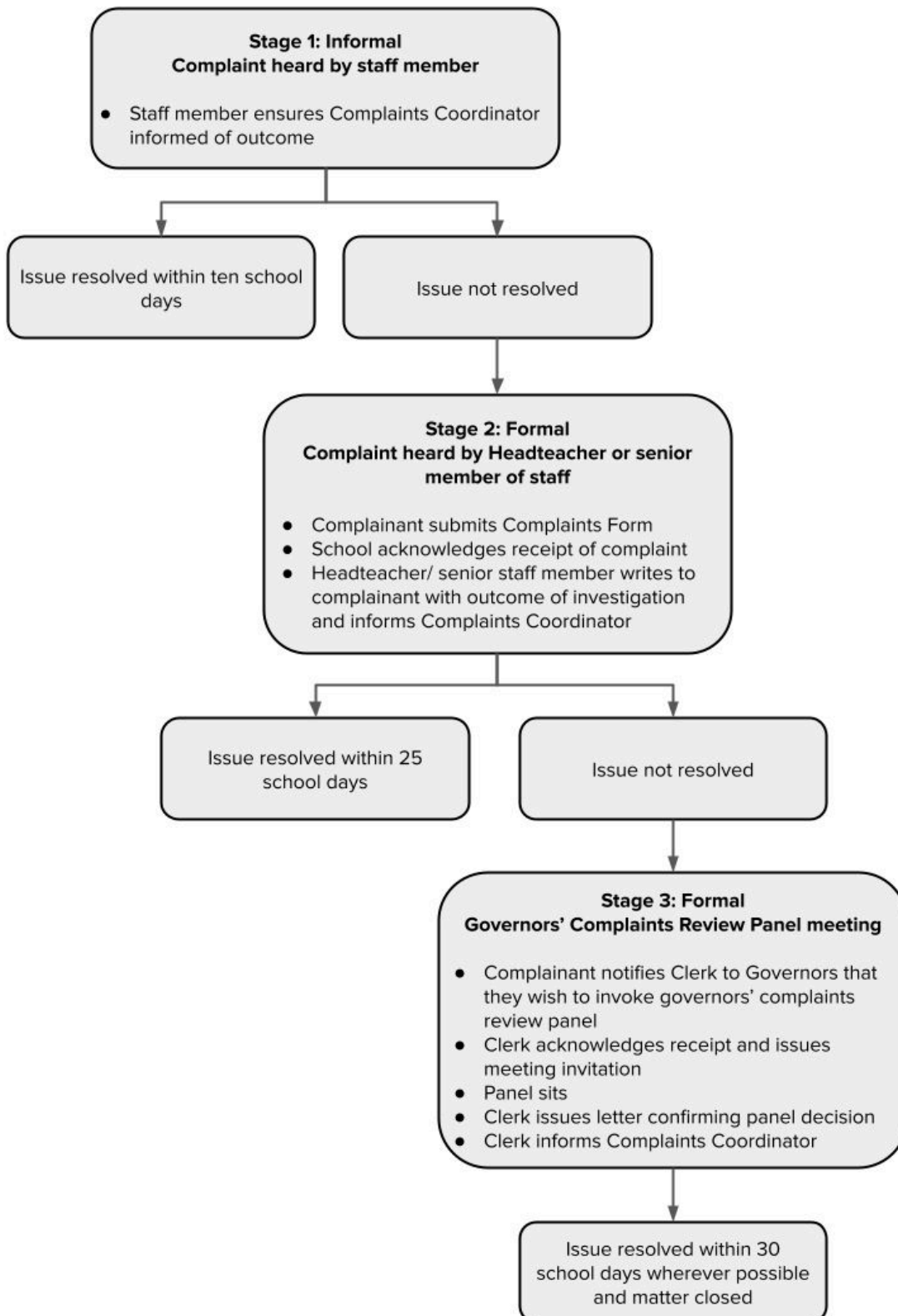
The Governing Board will review any underlying issues raised by complaints with the headteacher / senior leadership team / staff member, where appropriate, and respecting confidentiality, to determine whether there are any improvements that the school can make to its procedures or practice to help prevent similar events in the future.

12. Monitoring arrangements

The Resources Committee of the Governing Board will monitor the effectiveness of the complaints procedure in making sure that complaints are handled properly. The Resources Committee of the Governing Board will note the number and nature of complaints, and review underlying issues as stated in section 11.

The complaints records are logged and managed by the Complaints Co-ordinator (currently the Chief Operating Officer).

APPENDIX A: COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE FLOWCHART



APPENDIX B: COMPLAINTS FORM

Please complete and return to Samantha Joiner (Complaints Coordinator) sjoiner@tiffin.kingston.sch.uk who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken. Please request an editable version of this form if required.

Your name	
Pupil's name	
Your relationship to the pupil	
Address	
Email address	
Telephone	
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: