



Complaints Policy

ADOPTION AND AMENDMENTS TO COMPLAINTS POLICY

Section	Board of Directors Meeting or Committee
Whole Document	Board, March 2017
<i>Editorial update – p3 – first sub-title</i>	<i>Governor Services Nov 2017</i>
Whole Document	Board, May 2018
Whole Document	Board, May 2019
Whole document	Board, September 2020
Interim update – clarification of scope of policy – page 3	Board, May 2021
Whole Document	Board, October 2021
Interim update – clarification of stage 1 timeline (page 4, point 4); inspection scope (page 8, point 26) and complaint timescales amendment (page 3)	Board, June 2022
Whole Document	Board, October 2022
Interim update – section B updated (page 10)	Board, November 2022
Whole document	Board, December 2023
Next review: 2024/2025	

Section A - Parent/Carer Complaints

(please see section B on page 10 for complaints procedure for non-parent/carers)

This policy applies to any matter which has been raised with a Trust school by a parent/carers as a matter of concern, but which has not been capable of resolution and which the complainant or the school considers should be dealt with on a formal basis. However, it does not apply to complaints that have their own statutory procedures, such as admissions, exclusions, statutory SEN assessments, data protection / freedom of information issues, or matters involving child protection involvement. Should a complaint be received which falls outside the scope of this policy, the complainant will be informed and redirected to the relevant guidance. Whistleblowing and staff grievances and disciplinary procedures will not be considered under this policy.

It is a pre-condition of the operation of this policy that the complainant shall have made reasonable attempts, as set out below, to seek a resolution and shall have acted in relation to the matter in a reasonable, measured and proportionate way. Although Trust schools are committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, and to providing a high-quality service to those who complain, we do not expect our staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour and will take action to protect staff from that behaviour, including that which is abusive, offensive or threatening.

This policy meets the requirements set out in part 7 of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014¹, as required by the Department for Education, which states that we must have and make available a written procedure to deal with complaints from parents/carers of pupils at the school.

What is a complaint?

In any community, misunderstandings arise or actions are taken which might be felt to militate against the spirits of fairness and common sense established in the school. A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction about policies or procedures, the conduct, actions or omissions of members of staff or governors at the school, or directors of the Trust, and the standards of teaching and learning. This is different to a 'concern' which may be defined as 'an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought'.

It is important to move swiftly to prevent the escalation of a minor problem into a major incident.

Timescales

The complainant must raise the complaint within 3 months of the incident. If the complaint is about a series of related incidents, the complainant must raise the complaint within 3 months of the last incident.

We will consider exceptions to this time frame only in circumstances where there were valid reasons for not making a complaint at the 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.

¹ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2014/3283/schedule/made>

Kingsbridge Educational Trust, a charitable company limited by guarantee and registered in England and Wales with company number 09144847. The registered office is at Oakgrove School, Venturer Gate, Middleton, Milton Keynes, MK10 9JQ

Stage 1 - Early and informal resolution of your complaint

1. Do not hesitate to contact the school if you are uneasy or dissatisfied about something. It is important not to let concerns build up into serious mistrust or irritation. We are as keen to see things run smoothly as you are - after all, we all want the best for the children.
2. When you contact the school, say what concerns you have and try to find out the facts. You will be in a much better position to know if you have grounds for a complaint when you are in possession of all the facts. We may be able to give an explanation or fill in details which answer your concerns. Do not rely solely on your child's account or on information from other parents/carers.
3. We welcome telephone calls from individuals who wish to talk about a problem before it becomes a complaint. A telephone call is better than a letter or email, and a temperate letter or email is better than an ultimatum or threat of action.
4. If you approach a member of the Local Governing Body directly, the Governor will direct that person to raise their complaint with the relevant person at the school. In circumstances where the complaint is about the Headteacher, you should follow the guidance set out in section 13 of this policy.

If it is clear that a complaint (as opposed to a concern) has been raised, the School will aim to address the matter immediately. For example, during the course of an informal conversation in which the complaint is raised. At other times the School will respond within 10 school days. Where this is not possible we will set new time limits and provide the complainant with details of this and an explanation for the delay.

Contacting the school

5. Talk to the right person. It may be tempting to "go straight to the top" but putting the problem to the Headteacher often escalates something that could have been better resolved at a lower level.
6. Where the matter involves an issue relating to a child at the school, your first line of approach is the child's Form Tutor/Class Teacher. These are the people who have immediate responsibility for the child's studies, pastoral care, discipline and involvement in school life. In most cases, it is they who will be best informed about the child and will be best placed to resolve problems.
7. For issues relating to provision of facilities or services that the school provides, your first line of approach is the Headteacher.

The school's expectation

8. The school seeks to build a partnership with parents/carers in the education of their children. This Parent/Carer Complaints Policy sets out how the school will deal with your concerns.

We would ask that, for your part...

- do not believe everything you hear - things are often not entirely the way they are reported (by children or by other parents/carers); children very

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much see things from their own point of view and important elements, circumstances and nuances of the story are often omitted in the version told to the parent/carer;

- find out what your child is like in school - you may be surprised; children in school can be very different people from the way they are at home - sometimes for better and sometimes for worse;
- trust the school to resolve matters according to the aims and methods stated in this policy;
- seek information from the school where you need it;
- consider what the school has to say;
- disclose full and frank information which would help the school to resolve situations with integrity and justice;
- take seriously, and report without delay, any concerns or suspicions of bullying;
- do not involve your child inappropriately in your complaint - it is important that the child sees parent/carers and school working together to resolve differences or difficulties; the child should not be placed in a position where s/he appears impertinent, insolent, disobedient or acts inappropriately; remember that directly countermanding a teacher's instruction or requirement is likely to make matters worse and bring confrontation rather than resolution.

What you can expect of the school

9. You can expect your complaint to be recorded, to be taken seriously and to be investigated.
10. You can expect staff to be professional. This may sometimes mean they do not agree with you and must put forward a view or make a decision that you may not like - but they will always explain their reasons.
11. Your child will be involved only if the complaint directly and personally concerns them. Parents/carers are sometimes worried that if they complain there will be adverse consequences for their child. The school is committed to ensuring that this is never the case.
12. You can expect members of staff to treat the complaint with appropriate confidentiality.

Where you feel the matter has not been resolved at the informal stage, you may elevate your complaint to the formal stages set out below.

Stage 2 – Formal

13. The complaint should be made formally in writing to the Headteacher of each school. If the complaint regards the Headteacher, it should be referred to the Chair of the Local Governing Body.

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Complaints against the Chair, a governor, the entire governing body or complaints involving both the Chair and the Vice-Chair should be sent to the Clerk to the Local Governing Body who will determine the most appropriate course of action.

Complaints against staff working centrally within the multi-academy trust should be referred to the CEO who will determine the most appropriate course of action.

Complaints against the CEO should be referred to the Chair of the Board of Directors.

Complaints against the Chair, a director, the entire Board of Directors or complaints involving both the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Board of Directors should be sent to the Clerk to the Board of Directors who will determine the most appropriate course of action.

The appropriate recipient of the formal written complaint will then follow the steps set out below.

14. The Headteacher (or appropriate person) will document the complaint, acknowledge it in writing within 5 school days of receipt, and will consult with those directly involved, and aim to deal with the complaint within 15 school days of the receipt of the formal letter of complaint. Where this is not possible we will set new time limits and provide the complainant with details of this and an explanation for the delay. Senior staff will be involved as appropriate at this level and this may form part of a wider investigation.
15. The Headteacher (or appropriate person) or a senior member of staff may also meet with the complainant and, following any necessary investigation or actions, provide a written response to the complaint.
16. If the complaint cannot be resolved and/or you remain dissatisfied, you will be advised of the next stage which is to have the complaint heard before a panel.

Stage 3 – Panel Hearing

17. If you are not satisfied with the response to the complaint as dealt with at Stage 2 you are invited to complete and return the Trust's Stage 3 Complaint Form (at Appendix A) and submit to the Headteacher (or appropriate person) (at each school address) requesting a panel hearing. If you require help in completing the form, please contact the School Office or the Trust Governor Services Office, contact details for which are shown on the form. Alternatively, third party organisations such as Citizens Advice may be able to help you.
18. The request for a panel hearing must be submitted as soon as possible and, in any event, within 10 school days of the decision in Stage 2 of the complaint being notified to the complainant.
19. The Headteacher (or appropriate person) will request the Clerk to the Local Governing Body/Board of Directors to appoint a panel and will endeavour to arrange a hearing within 20 school days of receipt of the notification but in any case at a convenient time for all participants.
20. The panel will consist of at least three people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint, including one person who is independent of the management and the running of the school. The independent person may be a governor from a local governing body at a different school within the Kingsbridge

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Educational Trust who has no conflicts of interest or prior knowledge of the complaint.

21. The panel meeting is not a court case, it will be held in private, and will be as informal as circumstances allow. The panel reserves the right to set the agenda and procedure for the panel meeting but broadly the complainant will have the opportunity to put his/her reasons for dissatisfaction to the panel but may not introduce matters not previously put in writing. The school will have the opportunity to give its account of the situation and each side, as well as the panel, will be able to ask questions. The complainant will have the opportunity to make final comments to the panel.
22. The committee will not normally accept, as evidence, recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded. Electronic recordings of meetings or conversations are not normally permitted unless a complainant's own disability or special needs require it. Prior knowledge and consent of all parties attending must be sought before meetings or conversations take place. Consent will be recorded in any minutes taken.
23. The panel has the discretion to proceed irrespective of whether or not the complainant and/or their representative attend.
24. The panel will also consider the school's response and carry out further investigations and/or interviews as appropriate.
25. The panel will aim to reach a final decision on the complaint and recommend any appropriate action as quickly as possible, normally within 5 school days after the panel hearing.
26. The panel will record in writing its findings and recommendations and these will be sent to the complainant, and, where relevant, the person complained about. This will normally be sent out within 10 school days of the hearing. The record of the panel meeting will be available upon request.
27. Where the school is not able to meet any of the above timescales we will set new time limits and provide the complainant with details of this and an explanation for the delay.
28. The record of findings and recommendations will be available for inspection on the school premises by the proprietor and the head teacher.
29. A written record of all formal complaints received at Stage 2 will be kept indicating:
 - Whether they are resolved at Stage 2 or proceed to a panel hearing; and
 - Action taken by the school as a result of those complaints (regardless of whether they are upheld)
30. Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints are to be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under the relevant statutory framework requests access to them.

Support

31. At any stage of the complaints procedure, the complainant is welcome to bring with them a friend or relative.

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32. Within the complaints procedure it is usually not appropriate for either party to bring legal representatives to any meeting forming part of the complaints procedure.
33. The school will not generally enter into correspondence with solicitors or others in place of direct communication with parents/carers.

Anonymous complaints

34. Anonymous complaints are unhelpful and will not usually be acted upon.

Withdrawal of a complaint

35. If a complainant wants to withdraw their complaint, the school will request this to be confirmed in writing.

Duplicate complaints

36. If we have resolved a complaint under this procedure and receive a duplicate complaint on the same subject from your 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.
37. 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 seek your permission to share the outcome of the investigation with that complainant (insofar as this does not breach any other data protection obligations)
 - If the original complaint was resolved at Stage 1 or Stage 2, then the complainant has the right to request that it be dealt with at the next stage of the Complaints policy
 - If the original complaint was resolved at Stage 3 of the Complaints policy, then if they remain dissatisfied with the outcome, they may contact the Education and Skills Funding Agency (as set out below);
38. If there are new aspects not previously considered, the complaints procedure as outlined in this policy will be followed again with regard to those aspects.

Serial and Persistent Complaints

39. If at any level a complainant attempts to reopen the issue or a closely related issue that has already been dealt with under this complaints procedure, the Chair of the Kingsbridge Educational Trust Board of Directors may write to the complainant to inform him/her that the procedure has been exhausted and the matter closed, that the academy trust will not respond to any continued correspondence on this issue or a closely related issue because it has already been dealt with.

Campaigns

40. Where the Academy / Trust receives a number of complaints all based on the same subject which in its reasonable opinion may be deemed a 'complaint campaign' it will deal with the complaints in the following way: Individual responses will not be sent to complainants in such cases. Instead, either a template response will be sent

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to all complainants or a single response will be published on the Academy/Trust's website at the discretion of the Headteacher / Chair of Trustees.

41. Where the complaint campaign involves complainants who are parents they will be entitled to escalate the complaint to a panel hearing if they are dissatisfied with the Academy/Trust's response. For reasons of practicability, only one panel hearing will be convened. The parents involved in the complaint campaign will be given the opportunity to make written submissions and receive a copy of the panel findings. Attendance at the panel hearing will be at the Trust's discretion due to reasons of practicability but generally the group will be given the opportunity to nominate one parent representative (who may be accompanied) to attend.

Record-keeping

42. A written record will be kept of all complaints that were resolved at the formal stage of the complaints procedure. Records will contain details of when the complaint was resolved. The action taken by the academy or the academy trust, including any Stage 3 panel findings and recommendations as a result of a complaint (regardless of whether the complaint itself was upheld) will also be recorded.

Confidentiality

43. Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under the relevant statutory framework requests access to them or disclosure is otherwise required by law (including but not limited to subject access and freedom of information requests).

Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA)

44. Once the complaints process is concluded (or a complaint has been terminated due to undue delay or failure to progress the complaint within the time stated in the policy) the matter is closed. If the complainant is still not satisfied then they may contact the ESFA. There is an online procedure at <https://form.education.gov.uk> or you may write to the Ministerial and Public Communications Division Department for Education Piccadilly Gate Store Street Manchester M1 2WD.

Complaints Relating to Fulfilment of the EYFS Requirements

45. In order to comply with the statutory framework, written concerns or complaints relating to the fulfilment of the EYFS Requirements will be dealt with in accordance with the following process:
- The written concern/complaint will be acknowledged within 5 days;
 - The Headteacher will investigate the concern or complaint which may include meeting with the complainant and the Head of Early Years. A written response notifying the complainant of the outcome of the investigation will be sent within 28 days of the complaint being received.
 - Where the complainant remains dissatisfied, the Headteacher will ensure that a formal complaints panel will be convened in accordance with stage 3 of this policy.
46. A record of the written complaints and their outcome will be maintained and made available to Ofsted on request.

47. Where an individual has concerns regarding the school meeting EYFS requirements they may contact Ofsted on 0300 123 4666.

Links to other policies

Policies dealing with other forms of complaints include:

- Safeguarding and child protection
- Admissions
- Behaviour management/Exclusions
- Staff grievance
- Staff disciplinary
- SEND
- Whistleblowing

Section B – Complaints procedure for non parent/carers

The Kingsbridge Educational Trust and its schools hope that all contacts with the Trust and the schools are positive and problem free. In the event you do wish to register any dissatisfaction, we would ask you to address your complaint with the member of staff involved at the school or Trust (as appropriate) or to the Headteacher (if the complaint is about the school) or to the CEO (if the complaint is about a Headteacher of a school within the Trust or the Trust generally). You will receive an acknowledgement of receipt of the complaint. The member of staff will aim to respond to your complaint on behalf of the school or Trust within 15 school days of receipt. This will conclude the process and the school or Trust (as the case may be) will not enter in to further discussion with you about your complaint.

Where the Academy / Trust receives a number of complaints all based on the same subject which in its reasonable opinion may be deemed a 'complaint campaign' it will deal with the complaints in the following way : Individual responses will not be sent to complainants in such cases. Instead, either a template response will be sent to all complainants or a single response will be published on the Academy/Trust's website at the discretion of the Headteacher / Chair of Trustees.

Contact details:

- Kingsbridge Educational Trust: <https://www.ket.education/contact/>
- Oakgrove School: <https://www.oakgrove.school/contact/>
- Middleton Primary School: <https://www.middletonschool.org/contact/>
- Monkston Primary School: <https://www.monkston.org/contact-details/>
- Kents Hill Park School: <https://www.kentshillpark.school/contact-us/>
- (wef: 1st January 2024) Hockliffe Lower School: <https://hockliffelowerschool.co.uk/contact/>

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

This policy will be reviewed annually by the Board of Directors.

Adopted by the Board of Directors, December 2023

Appendix A – Stage 3 Parent/Carer Complaint Form

Please complete and return to the Headteacher (or appropriate person) who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken. If you have any queries regarding this form or who it should be returned to, please contact Governor Services at the Trust at enquiries@ket.education or telephone 01908 533710 for further assistance.

Your name:
Pupil's name:
Your relationship to the pupil:
Address:
Postcode:
Day time telephone number:
Evening telephone number:
Email address:
Details of complaint

**Why was the Headteacher's (or appropriate person) response not satisfactory?
What further actions would the Panel need to agree in order to resolve this complaint?**

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

Signature:

Date:

Official use

Date acknowledgement sent and by who:

Complaint referred to:

Action taken:

Date:

Appendix B – Contact Details

Oakgrove School

To contact the Headteacher, please email oakgrove@oakgrove.school and include F.A.O Mr Tett in the subject line.

To contact the Chair of Governors, please email the Clerk to the Governing Body, Mrs Gale, at julie.gale@ket.education

For any general public concerns or queries, please email oakgrove@oakgrove.school and include F.A.O Mr Boon in the subject line.

Middleton Primary School

To contact the Headteacher, please email office@middletonschool.org and include F.A.O Mrs Roberts in the subject line.

To contact the Chair of Governors, please email the Clerk to the Governing Body, Mrs Mason, at julie.mason@ket.education

For any general public concerns or queries, please email office@middletonschool.org and include F.A.O Office Manager in the subject line.

Monkston Primary School

To contact the Headteacher, please email office@monkston.org and include F.A.O Mrs Williams in the subject line.

To contact the Chair of Governors, please email the Clerk to the Governing Body, Mrs Mason, at julie.mason@ket.education

For any general public concerns or queries, please email office@monkston.org

Kents Hill Park School

To contact the Headteacher, please email office@kentshillpark.school and include F.A.O Mr Pilgrim in the subject line.

To contact the Chair of Governors, please email the Clerk to the Governing Body, Mrs Gale, at julie.gale@ket.education

For any general public concerns or queries, please email office@kentshillpark.school and include F.A.O. Strategic Operations Lead in the subject line.

Hockliffe Lower School

To contact the Headteacher, please email office@hockliffelowerschool.co.uk and include F.A.O Headteacher in the subject line.

To contact the Chair of Governors, please email office@hockliffelowerschool.co.uk and include F.A.O Chair of Governors in the subject line.

For any general public concerns or queries, please email office@hockliffelowerschool.co.uk

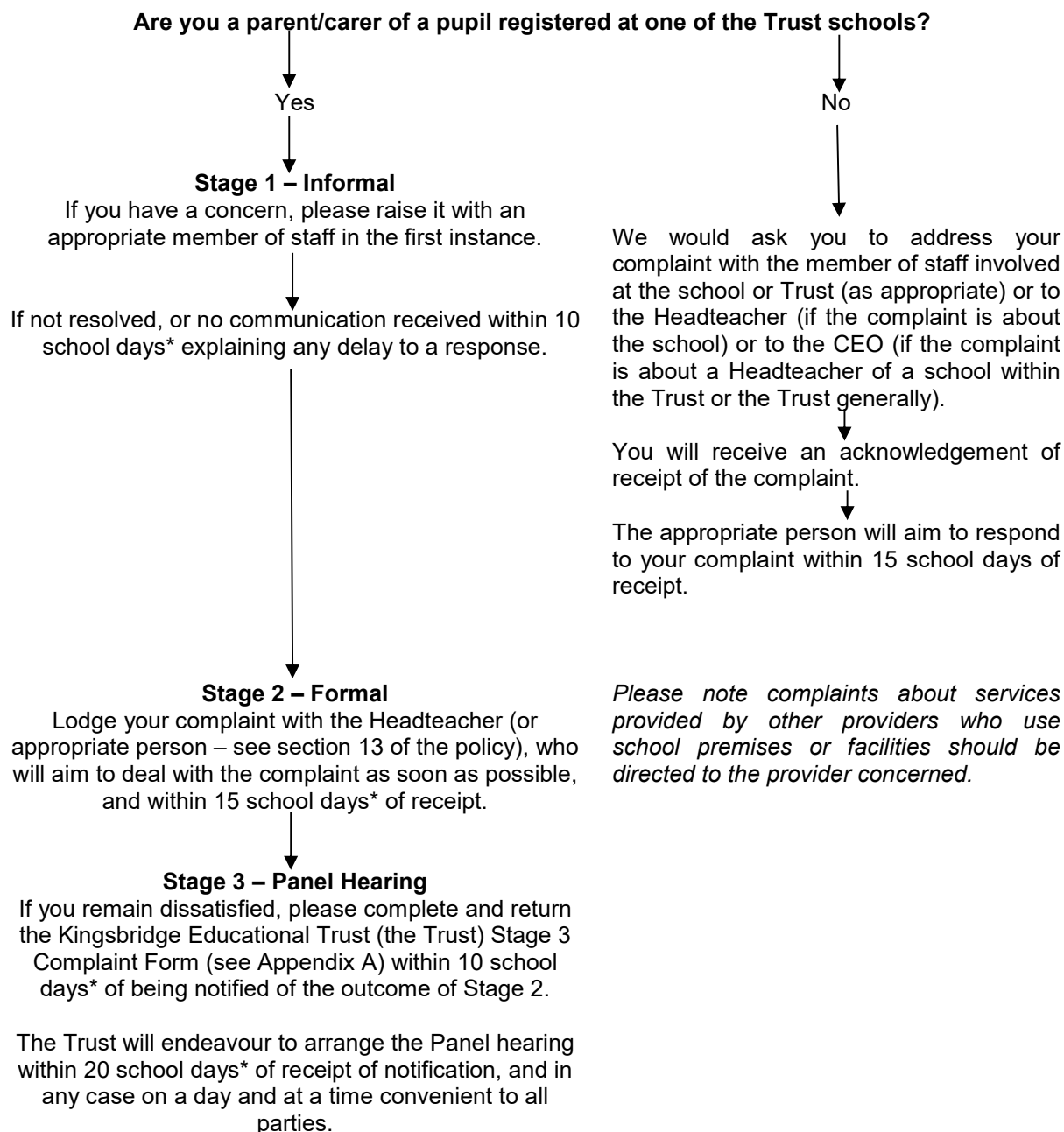
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Kingsbridge Educational Trust

To contact the CEO of the Kingsbridge Educational Trust, please email enquiries@ket.education and include F.A.O. Mr Barnes in the subject line.

To contact the Chair of the Kingsbridge Educational Trust Board of Directors, please email the Clerk to the Board of Directors, Mrs Mason, at julie.mason@ket.education

Appendix C – Flowchart summary of Complaints process



**Please note where it is necessary to extend any specified timelines, you will be kept informed and provided with an explanation why this is the case.*

If you have any queries about the complaints process, please contact the Trust's Governor Services team at enquiries@ket.education for further assistance.