



# **THE CEDAR FEDERATION IFIELD SCHOOL & KING'S FARM PRIMARY SCHOOL**

## **COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE POLICY**

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## Section 1

### The Cedar Federation Complaints Procedure

#### **Aims and Principles of the Policy**

When responding to complaints, we aim to:

- Be impartial and non-adversarial
- Encourage the resolution of concerns and complaints by informal means wherever possible
- Ensure that concerns are dealt with quickly, fully and fairly within defined time limits wherever possible
- Provide effective and appropriate responses to concerns and complaints
- Maintain good relationships between the school and all those involved
- Respect complainants desire for confidentiality
- Ensure any decisions made are lawful, rational, reasonable, fair and proportionate, in line with the principles of administrative law
- Consider how the complaint can influence the school's improvement and evaluation processes.

The Cedar Federation is committed to providing the very best education for our young people and pupils to be happy and safe and to achieve well. The Cedar Federation recognises the importance of establishing and maintaining good relationships with parents, carers and the wider community. Both schools are aware that there may be occasions where there will be concerns or complaints and therefore, the procedures set out in this policy, outline the steps that should be followed in order to resolve these as promptly, fairly and informally as possible.

Key principles of this policy are:

- **Accessibility** – the policy is available on the school's website and also can be requested from the school office. It will be in a useable format, free from jargon and will assume no specialist knowledge
- **Good communication** – the school will explain the process for dealing with concerns and complaints
- **Timescales**- the school will make every effort to adhere to the clear and agreed timescales. Where timescales are required to change, complainants will be advised of the delay and the reasons will be provided with clear, revised timescales

- **Clarity** – There will be clearly defined roles and responsibilities of those involved in the process and clarity around the desired outcome for the complainant
- **Confidentiality**- appropriate confidentiality will be maintained by all those involved (including school staff and Governors).

### **Guiding Legislation**

The Cedar Federation's Governing Body is required under Section 29 of the Education Act 2002 to ensure a procedure is in place to deal with complaints relating to either school. It is also based on [guidance for schools on complaints procedures](#) from the Department for Education (DfE), including the procedure for managing serial and unreasonable complaints.

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

Occasionally, when concerns are more specific, there are alternative and more appropriate policies for dealing with them. The following details specific policies to refer to should there be a concern or complaint.

These policies are available on both school's websites and from the schools' offices.

- Admissions Policy
- Suspensions and Exclusions Policy
- Special Educational Needs Information Report
- Staff Discipline and Conduct Policy
- Bullying and Harassment Policy
- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy
- Whistleblowing Policy
- GDPR & Data Protection Policy
- Equality and Diversity Policy

Complaints about services raised by other providers who use the school premises or facilities should be

directed to the provider concerned.

### **Who can make a Complaint?**

This complaints procedure policy is not limited to parents or carers of children who are registered at either school. Any person, including members of the public, may make a complaint to Ifield School or King's Farm Primary School regarding any provision of facilities or services that are provided. Unless complaints are dealt with under separate statutory procedures (such as appeals relating to exclusions or admissions), both schools will follow this Complaints Policy.

### **The Difference between a Concern and a Complaint**

A concern may be defined as 'an expression of worry or doubt regarding a matter considered to be important for which reassurances are sought'.

A complaint may be defined as 'an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action'.

It is in everyone's interest that concerns and complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. Many matters can be resolved informally, without the need to use the formal stages of the complaint's procedure. Ifield School and King's Farm Primary School take concerns seriously and will make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.

If a person has a difficulty discussing a concern with a particular member of staff, their views will be respected. In these cases, the person will be referred to another staff member. Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels unable to deal with a concern, they will be referred to another staff member. The member of staff may be more senior, but this is not essential. The ability to consider the concern objectively and impartially is more important.

The Cedar Federation understands that there are occasions when people would like to raise their concerns formally. In this case, Ifield School and King's Farm Primary School will attempt to resolve the matter internally, through the stages outlined within this complaint's procedure policy.

### **How to Raise a Concern or make a Complaint**

A concern or complaint can be made in person by parents, carers (including parents or carers of children no longer at the school) and members of the public, in writing or by telephone. They may also be made by a third party acting on behalf on a complainant, as long as they have appropriate consent.

Concerns should be raised with the Class Teacher or a member of the Extended Leadership Team in the first instance. At this stage, informal mediation may be offered. While this can be useful in helping the school and complainants reach an agreement and a way forward, there are times when it may not be the most appropriate course of action.

It is expected that all complaints will be referred to the school where the complaint arises from in the first instance and that all stages will be pursued before considering a referral to the Secretary of State for Education (DfE Complaints Unit) if a complainant feels that their complaint has not been dealt with appropriately or remains unresolved.

Complainants are encouraged to follow through each stage of the procedure, as appropriate, in order to resolve their concerns. Complainants should not approach individual Governors to raise concerns or complaints. Governors cannot act on an individual basis and it may also prevent them from considering complaints at Stage 2 of the procedure.

### **Anonymous Complaints**

Anonymous complaints are not usually investigated. However, the Headteacher or Chair of Governors, if appropriate, will determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation.

## **Roles and Responsibilities**

### **The Complainant**

The complainant will receive 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 required
- Treat all those involved with respect

- Do not approach individual Governors regarding the complaint
- Do not publish details related to the complaint on social media

### **The Investigator**

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

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

### **The Complaints Co-ordinator**

The Complaints Co-ordinator can be:

- The Headteacher
- Any other staff member providing administrative support

The Complaints Co-ordinator will:

- Keep the complainant up to date at each stage in the procedure
- Ensure the process progresses smoothly by liaising with staff members, Headteacher, Chair of Governors, Governance Professional and Local Authority (LA).

Be aware of matters relating to:

- Sharing third-party information
- Additional support required by complainants; for example, interpretation support or where the complainant is a child or young person
- Maintain records

### **Governance Professional**

The Governance Professional will:

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

## **Committee Chair of the Complaints Panel of Governors**

The Committee Chair will:

- Chair the meeting, ensuring that everyone is treated with respect throughout
- Make sure all parties receive the relevant information, understand the purpose of the committee, and are allowed to present their case

### **Timescales**

Complaints must be raised within three months of the incident or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within three months of the last of these incidents. Both schools will consider complaints made outside of this time frame, if exceptional circumstances apply.

If at any point the timescales cannot be met that have been set out in this policy, the following apply:

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

### **Complaints received during the school holidays or when a timescale is within the school holidays.**

Complaints received during the school holidays will be dealt with upon return to school. If the timescale runs over a school holiday, this will be taken into consideration when the timescale is set.

### **Complaints regarding our fulfilment of Early Years requirements**

Both schools will investigate all written complaints relating to the school's fulfilment of the Early Years Foundation Stage requirements, and notify the complainant of the outcome within 28 days of receiving the complaint. The school will keep a record of the complaint and make this available to Ofsted on request.

Parents and carers can notify Ofsted if they believe that the school is not meeting Early Years Foundation Stage requirements, by calling 0300 123 4666, or by emailing [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk). An online contact form is also available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted#org-contacts>.

The school will notify parents and carers if they become aware that the school is to be inspected by Ofsted. Both schools will also share a copy of the inspection report with parents and carers once published.

### **Our partnership with Kent Special Educational Needs Trust (KsENT)**

The Governing Body have a reciprocal agreement with KsENT so that in certain circumstances a complaint

reaching Stage 2 of the process may be dealt with by a panel consisting of, or including, Governors from the KsENT board. In following best practice, the Local Authority has an expectation that Governing Bodies will make arrangements to ensure a Joint Panel Agreement is in place.

### Scope of this Complaints Procedure

This procedure covers all complaints regarding any provision of community facilities or services available at Ifield School and/or King’s Farm Primary School other than complaints that are dealt with under other statutory procedures, including those listed below.

Exceptions	Contact Details
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Admissions to schools</li> <li>• Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs</li> <li>• School re-organisation proposals</li> </ul>	<p>For concerns about admissions please see the School’s Admissions Policy or contact Kent County Council Admissions team.</p> <p>Special Educational Needs: The Complainant can use this policy to complain unless the Complainants child has an Education, Health and Care Plan and the Complainant wishes to appeal against a decision that the Local Authority has taken. If this is the case, the Complainant should contact the Local Authority.</p> <p>School re-organisation proposals should be raised with the <a href="#">KCC Contact Centre</a> 01622 671411</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation</li> </ul>	<p>Complaints regarding child protection matters are managed in line with The Cedar Federation’s Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy and in accordance with relevant statutory guidance.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Freedom of Information</li> </ul>	<p>Subject Access Requests and Freedom of Information Requests: Please refer to The Cedar Federation’s GDPR and Data Protection Policy.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exclusion of children from school*</li> </ul>	<p>Further information regarding raising concerns about exclusion can be found at: <a href="http://www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions">www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions</a>.</p> <p><i>*complaints about the application of the behaviour policy can be made through the school’s complaints procedure.</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Whistleblowing</li> </ul>	<p>The Cedar Federation has an internal whistleblowing procedure for all employees, including temporary staff and contractors.</p>

	<p>The Secretary of State for Education is the prescribed person for matters relating to education for whistleblowers in education who do not want to raise matters direct with their employer. Referrals can be made at: <a href="http://www.education.gov.uk/contactus">www.education.gov.uk/contactus</a>.</p> <p>Volunteer staff who have concerns regarding either school should follow The Cedar Federation’s Complaints Policy, but may also be able to complain direct to the LA or the DfE (see link above), depending on the substance of the complaint.</p> <p>Anonymous complaints: Please refer to The Cedar Federation’s Whistleblowing Policy.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff grievances</li> </ul>	<p>Staff grievance, capability or disciplinary, these are covered by separate School Policies and Procedures.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff conduct</li> </ul>	<p>Complaints about staff will be dealt with under The Cedar Federation’s Staff Discipline and Conduct Policy, if appropriate.</p> <p>Complainants will not be informed of any disciplinary action taken against a staff member as a result of a complaint. However, the complainant will be notified that the matter is being addressed.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complaints about services provided by other providers who may use school premises or facilities</li> </ul>	<p>Providers should have their own complaints procedure to deal with complaints about service. Please contact them directly.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National Curriculum - content</li> </ul>	<p>Please contact the DfE at: <a href="http://www.education.gov.uk/contactus">www.education.gov.uk/contactus</a></p>

If other bodies are investigating aspects of the complaint, for example the police, Local Authority (LA), safeguarding teams or tribunals, this may impact on the school’s ability to adhere to the timescales within this procedure or result in the procedure being suspended until those public bodies have completed their investigations.

If a complainant commences legal action against Ifield School or King’s Farm Primary School in relation to their complaint, the school will suspend the complaints procedure in relation to their complaint until those legal proceedings have concluded.

The Governing Body will appropriately monitor the nature of the complaints received throughout each academic year to inform practice and potential improvements to procedures and policies within the school.

## Recording Complaints

Schools must ensure that they comply with their obligations under the Equality Act 2010. It is common practice to ask for complaints to be made by using a complaint form or in writing, however the complainant may have communication preferences due to disability or learning difficulties and schools must allow alternative methods of contact:

- A complaint may be made in person, by telephone, or in writing

In order to prevent any later challenge or disagreement related to the information shared, brief notes of meetings and telephone calls should be kept and a copy of any written response added to the record. Where there are communication difficulties, schools may wish to use recording devices to ensure the complainant is able to access and review the discussions at a later point.

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 telephone calls.

The records 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 (SAR) under the terms of the Data Protection Act 2018, or where the material must be made available during a school inspection or audit.

Records of complaints will be kept securely, only for as long as necessary and in line with data protection law, the schools' privacy notices and records management policy/record retention schedule.

The details of the complaint, including the names of individuals involved, will not be shared with the whole Governing Body in case a complaints panel is required at a later stage.

Where the Governing Body is aware of the substance of the complaint before Stage 2, 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 Body, who will not unreasonably withhold consent.

### **Safeguarding**

Wherever a complaint indicates that a pupil's safety or wellbeing is at risk, the school is under a duty to report this immediately to the Local Authority. Any action taken will be in accordance with The Cedar Federation's Safeguarding and Child Protection policy.

### **Social Media**

In order for complaints to be resolved as quickly and fairly as possible, both schools ask that complainants do not raise concerns or discuss them publicly via social media. Complaints will be dealt with confidentially by the school and the schools expect complainants to observe confidentiality.

The Cedar Federation follows current KCC guidance in establishing the required procedure for managing complaints on Social Networking Sites.

[http://www.kelsi.org.uk/data/assets/word\\_doc/0016/60820/Dealing-with-complaints-against-schools-by-parents-or-carers-on-social-networking-sites.docx](http://www.kelsi.org.uk/data/assets/word_doc/0016/60820/Dealing-with-complaints-against-schools-by-parents-or-carers-on-social-networking-sites.docx)

### **Complaints that result in Staff Capability or Disciplinary**

If at any formal stage of a complaint it is determined that staff disciplinary or capability proceedings are necessary, the details of any action will remain confidential to the Headteacher. The complainant is not entitled to participate in the process or receive any detail about the proceedings.

### **Complaints regarding the Headteacher or the Governors**

Where a complaint concerns the actions of the Headteacher, the complainant should first approach the Headteacher in an attempt to resolve the issue informally. If the complainant is not satisfied with this outcome, they should notify the Chair of Governors care of the Governance Professional that they wish to take a complaint forward. The Stage 2 process will then commence and the Chair of Governors will take the process forward.

Where a complaint concerns a Governor, the complainant should notify in writing the Chair of Governors care of the Governance Professional. Where a complaint concerns the Chair of Governors this should be

made in writing to the Governance Professional.

All correspondence should be marked as private and confidential.

## **Unreasonable and Persistent Complaints**

### **Policy for Managing Serial and Unreasonable Complainants**

The Cedar Federation is committed to managing all complaints fairly and impartially, and to providing a high-quality service to those who complain. The contact complainants have within either school will not be limited, however, both schools do not expect staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour and will take action to protect staff from such behaviour, including abusive, offensive or threatening conduct.

The Cedar Federation defines unreasonable complainants as *'those who, because of the frequency or nature of their contacts with the school, hinder our consideration of their or other people's complaints'*.

### **Examples: A complaint may be regarded as unreasonable when the person making the complaint:**

- 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 while still wishing their complaint to be resolved
- refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of a Complaints' Procedure
- insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the adopted complaints procedure or with good practice
- introduces trivial or irrelevant information which the complainant expects to be taken into account and commented on, or raises large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions, and insists they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales
- 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, complicated and stressful contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the complaint is being managed.

**A complaint may also be considered unreasonable if the person making the complaint does so either face-to-face, by telephone or in writing or electronically:**

- maliciously
- aggressively
- using threats, intimidation or violence
- using abusive, offensive or discriminatory language
- knowing it to be false
- using falsified information
- publishing unacceptable information in a variety of media such as in social media websites and newspapers.

Complainants should limit the numbers of communications with a school while a 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.

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 their behaviour is unreasonable. For complainants who excessively contact the school causing a significant level of disruption, specific methods of communication and the number of contacts will be detailed within a communication plan. This will usually be reviewed after 6 months.

In response to any serious incident involving hostile behaviour, the concerns and actions taken will be recorded in writing immediately and the Police will be informed. This may include banning an individual from school premises.

### **Serial and Persistent Complaints**

If the complainant contacts the school again on the same matter, the correspondence may then be viewed as 'serial' or 'persistent'. All correspondence may cease when the following conditions are met:

- The Cedar Federation has 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 forceful.
- 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

If The Cedar Federation decide to stop responding, the individual will be informed. An explanation will be provided and any new concerns or complaints made will be considered, providing the concerns or complaints raised are materially different to those raised previously and/or are unconnected to the previous concern or complaint.

### **Barring from the School Premises**

Although fulfilling a public function, schools are private places. The public has no automatic right of entry. Schools will therefore act to ensure they remain a safe place for pupils, staff and other members of their community.

If an individual's behaviour is a cause for concern, a school can ask the person to leave school premises. In serious cases, the Headteacher or the Local Authority can notify them in writing that their implied licence to visit the school premises has been temporarily revoked subject to any representations that the parent may wish to make. Schools should always give the individual the opportunity to formally express their views on the decision to bar in writing. The decision to bar should then be reviewed, taking into account any representations made by the individual, and either confirmed or lifted. If the decision is confirmed the parent should be notified in writing, explaining how long the bar will be in place.

Anyone wishing to complain about being barred can do so, by letter or email, to the Headteacher or Chair of Governors. However, complaints about barring cannot be escalated to the DfE. Once the school's own complaints procedure has been completed, the only remaining avenue of appeal is through the Courts; independent legal advice must therefore be sought.

### **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 procedures within this policy will apply.

### **Learning lessons**

The Leadership, Strategy and Quality of Education Committee will review any underlying matters 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 Leadership, Strategy and Quality of Education Committee will monitor the effectiveness of the Complaints Procedure ensuring that the complaints are managed in line with the Complaints Policy.

The complaints records are logged and managed by the Governance Professional.

The Complaints Policy will be reviewed by the Headteachers and the Governing Body at least every 3 years.

At each review the policy will be approved by The Governing Body, either by the Full Governing Body or the Leadership, Strategy and Quality of Education Committee.

## Section 2

### The Stages of the Complaints Process

#### Raising Concerns

The complainant should start by sharing their concern with the Class Teacher. In some cases, the Class Teacher may feel it more appropriate to refer the complainant to a member of the Leadership Team who will attempt to resolve the concern informally. This may include a member of the school's Extended Leadership Team.

- *It is recommended that the complainant makes an appointment to speak to the Class Teacher as soon as possible as this will give both parties the opportunity to discuss their views.*
- *It is important to recognise that schools are busy organisations and may not be able to offer an appointment immediately.*
- *The purpose of the meeting should be to establish the nature of the concern and to seek a resolution to the concern or complaint.*
- *It is good practice for the Class Teacher to maintain a written record of the concerns raised and any actions agreed.*
- *The Class Teacher may be required to meet with others before an informed response can be made.*
- *The Complainant should be given a timescale for a response, e.g. five working days.*

The majority of concerns can be dealt with without resorting to the complaints' procedure. Where the complainant has a concern or query regarding any aspect of the school or their child's education or wellbeing, the parent/carers should share with their child's Class Teacher in the first instance. Ideally, they will be able to address the complainants concerns immediately or can arrange a meeting with them to discuss the matter. The Middle Leaders at Ifield School or Assistant Headteachers at King's Farm Primary School, can also support at this stage.

At this stage informal mediation may be offered. While this can be useful in helping the school and complainants reach an agreement and move forward, there are times when it may not be the most appropriate course of action.

Mediation can:

- provide a helpful mechanism for discussion when a concern is raised
- help to rebuild the relationship between all parties

This is not used as a substitute for an investigation during the formal stages of the complaints' procedure.

If neither the complainant nor the school considers that mediation will serve any practical purpose at this stage, the complainant will not be prevented from moving to the next investigative stage outlined in the Complaints Policy.

If the matters remain unresolved, the next step is to make a formal complaint.

All concerns will be dealt with confidentially, although it may be necessary to take notes if the matter may need to be taken further or may arise again in the future.

### **Resolving Complaints**

At each stage in the procedure, The Cedar Federation wishes to resolve the complaint. If appropriate, the school will acknowledge that the complaint is upheld in whole or in part. In addition, one or more of the following may be offered:

- an explanation
- an admission that the situation could have been handled differently
- an assurance that the school will try to ensure the event complained of will not recur
- an explanation of the steps that have been or will be taken to help ensure that it will not happen again and an indication of the timescales within which any changes will be made
- an undertaking to review school policies in light of the complaint
- an apology.

### **Withdrawal of a Complaint**

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

### **Stages of Complaint (not complaints against the Headteacher or Governors)**

The Cedar Federation has adopted a 2-stage process for dealing with complaints:

Stage 1 – Formal Investigation

Stage 2 – Review Panel

### **Stage 1: Formal Investigation**

If the complainant feels dissatisfied with the outcome of discussions with the Class Teacher, they should then contact the Headteacher or member of the Leadership Team either by arranging an appointment or by reporting the complaint in writing. *The complainant may use the form attached in Appendix 2.*

If the complainant is not using the form, their letter should set out clearly the concern and why they feel the matter has not been resolved through informal channels. It is also helpful if the complainant can set out what resolution they are seeking.

The complainant should provide details such as relevant dates, times, and the names of witnesses of events, alongside copies of any relevant documents, and what they feel would resolve the complaint.

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

Ifield School: 01474 365485 or via email [office@ifield.kent.sch.uk](mailto:office@ifield.kent.sch.uk)

King's Farm Primary School: 01474 566979 or via email [office@kings-farm.kent.sch.uk](mailto:office@kings-farm.kent.sch.uk)

The Headteacher or leader will consider the complaint and in doing so will:

- Establish what has happened so far, and who has been involved
- Meet or contact the complainant if they need further information
- Clarify how the complainant may wish for the matter to be resolved, if this has not been set out in their letter or included on the complaints form
- Interview those involved in the matter and those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish
- Conduct any interviews with an open mind
- Keep notes of any interview for the record.

The Headteacher or leader will endeavour to find ways in which the complaint can be resolved. It may 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 (please note this is not an admission of negligence)
- 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 policies and practice in light of the complaint.

It may also be the case that the complaint may not have any substance and is therefore considered to be unfounded or unsubstantiated.

The Headteacher will send a detailed written response within a maximum of 20 school days. Where this proves to be unrealistic, the complainant will be informed in writing and given an estimate of how long it will take to provide a detailed response.

### **How to Escalate a Complaint**

If the complainant wishes to proceed to the next stage of the procedure, they should inform the Governance Professional to the Governing Body within 5 school days. Requests received outside of this timeframe will be considered in exceptional circumstances.

Complaints can be escalated by contacting the Governance Professional to the Governing Body:

By email: [clerk@ifield.kent.sch.uk](mailto:clerk@ifield.kent.sch.uk) or by letter addressed to:

The Governance Professional

Ifield School

Cedar Avenue

Gravesend

Kent DA12 5JT

The Governance Professional will require 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.

The Governance Professional will acknowledge receipt of the request within 5 school days.

## Stage 2: Submit the Complaint to the Complaints Panel

If the complainant is not satisfied with the response of the Headteacher, or Chair of Governors, (for a complaint specifically about the Headteacher) which has not been resolved in Stage 1 they must email the Governance Professional, within 5 school days of receipt of the Stage 2 response. The complainant must briefly outline the complaint and requesting that a Governor Complaints Panel is convened and marking any envelope or email “urgent, private and confidential”. The name of the Governance Professional can be found on both schools’ websites.

The Governance Professional will acknowledge receipt of the letter within 5 school days. The acknowledgement will inform the complainant that two or three members of the school’s Governing Body (which may include a comprise of Governors from the KsENT Board with whom the school has a reciprocal agreement in place) will hear the complaint within 20 working days of receiving the complaint. The letter will invite the complainant to attend and also explain that the complainant has the right to submit any further documentation relevant to the complaint.

- The complainant may invite a friend or someone else for support with prior notification.
- The DfE recommend that neither the complainant nor the school bring legal representation. These committees are not a form of legal proceedings. The aim of the Governors’ committee should be:
  - reconciliation
  - to find a resolution
- Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.
- For complaints specifically about the Headteacher, the Chair of Governors will arrange for the complaint to be investigated, either by them or by an appropriate independent investigator.
- A meeting of the Governors Complaints Panel will be convened. No Governors with prior involvement in the matters raised as part of the complaint, will be selected to be part of the complaints panel and it may be necessary to use reserves (previously agreed by the Governing Body) to ensure the Panel can meet within the set time. An experienced Governor will chair the panel meeting. The Governance Professional will contact the complainant with the arrangements.
- At least 10 school days before the meeting, the Governance Professional will:
  - confirm and notify the complainant of the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that, if the complainant is invited, the dates are convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible. If the complainant rejects the offer of three

proposed dates, without good reason, the meeting will be undertaken with the complainants being absent using written submissions from both parties.

- request copies of any further written material to be submitted to the committee at least 5 school days prior to the meeting.
- Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least 5 school days before the date of the meeting. The committee will not usually accept, as evidence, recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.
- The committee will also not review any new complaints at this stage or consider evidence unrelated to the initial complaint to be included. New complaints must be dealt with from Stage 1 of the procedure.
- For accuracy of the minutes the school may request that the meeting is recorded. Prior knowledge and consent from all parties will be sought before any conversations take place. No covert recordings are permitted in any circumstances.
- The committee will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented. The committee can:
  - uphold the complaint in whole or in part
  - dismiss the complaint in whole or in part.
- If the complaint is upheld in whole or in part, the committee will:
  - decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint
  - where appropriate, recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to prevent similar matters in the future.
- The Chair of the Committee will provide the complainant and Ifield School or King's Farm Primary School with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s), in writing, within 20 school days.
- The letter to the complainant will include details of how to contact the DfE if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled by The Cedar Federation along with copies of the minutes.

## **Complaints against the Headteacher, a Governor or the Governing Body**

### **Stage 1: Formal**

Where a complaint concerns the actions of the Headteacher, the complainant should first approach the Headteacher in an attempt to resolve the issue informally. If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of this discussion they should follow the steps outlined below:

Complaints that involve or are regarding the Headteacher should be addressed to the Chair of Governors, via the Governance Professional, and marked as private and confidential.

Complaints about the Chair of Governors, any individual Governor or the Full Governing Body should be addressed to the Governance Professional via the school office, marked as private and confidential.

If the complaint is about the Headteacher or 1 member of the Governing Body (including the Chair or Vice-Chair), a suitably skilled and impartial Governor will carry out the steps at Stage 1.

If the complaint is:

Jointly regarding the Chair of Governors and Vice-Chair of Governors

The Full Governing Body

The majority of the Governing Body

An independent investigator will carry out the steps in Stage 1. They will be appointed by the Governing Body or diocese and will write a formal response at the end of their investigation.

### **How to Escalate a Complaint**

If the complainant wishes to proceed to the next stage of the procedure, they should inform the Governance Professional to the Governing Body within 5 school days. Requests received outside of this timeframe will be considered in exceptional circumstances.

Complaints can be escalated by contacting the Governance Professional to the Governing Body:

By email – [clerk@ifield.kent.sch.uk](mailto:clerk@ifield.kent.sch.uk) or by letter addressed to:

The Governance Professional

Ifield School

Cedar Avenue

Gravesend

Kent

DA12 5JT

The Governance Professional will require 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.

The Governance Professional will acknowledge receipt of the request within 5 school days.

## **Stage 2: Review Panel**

If the complaint is about the Headteacher or 1 member of the Governing Body (including the Chair or Vice-Chair), a committee of members of the Governing Body will hear the complaint. They will carry out the steps at Stage 2, as set out on page 22.

If the complaint is:

Jointly regarding the Chair of Governors and Vice-Chair of Governors

The Full Governing Body

The majority of the Governing Body

A committee of independent Governors will hear the complaint. They will be sourced from local schools, the Local Authority or diocese and will carry out the steps at Stage 2 as set out on page 22.

The Chair of the Independent Committee will provide the complainant and Ifield School or King's Farm Primary School with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s), in writing, within 20 school days.

The letter to the complainant will include details of how to contact the DfE if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been managed by The Cedar Federation along with copies of the minutes.

## **Stage 3 – Escalation to the Department of Education (DfE)**

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 matter of the complaint. It will look at whether the school's complaints policy and any other relevant statutory policies that the school holds were adhered to. The DfE also looks at whether the school's statutory policies adhere to education legislation.

The DfE will intervene where a school has:

- Failed to act in line with its duties under education law
- Acted (or is proposing to act) unreasonably when exercising its functions

If the complaints procedure is found to not meet regulations, the school will be asked to correct its procedure accordingly.

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

<https://www.gov.uk/complain-about-school>

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

**Single Equalities Scheme Impact Assessment (Equalities Act 2010)**

This policy has been developed to ensure that there is no negative or adverse impact on any individual or group in terms of disability, race, belief, gender, sexual orientation or age. All opportunities for potential positive impact on individuals, groups and the community are embedded within the ethos, vision and values of the school.

*The Cedar Federation is committed to achieving Best Value in all decisions made. We use the principles of Best Value as they apply to securing continuous improvement in these schools.*

**Date:** Summer 2025  
**Review Date:** Summer 2028

**Signed by Headteacher (Ifield School):** .....

**Signed by Headteacher (King’s Farm Primary School)** .....

**Signed by Chair of Governors:** .....

**Appendix 1**  
**Complaints Form 1**

Please complete and return to *either Class Teacher/Middle Leader* who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

Your name:
Pupil's name (if relevant):
Your relationship to the pupil (if relevant):
Address:  Postcode: Day time telephone number: Evening telephone number:
Please provide details of your concern or complaint, including discussions already held with the school:
What actions do you feel might resolve the concern or complaint at this stage?
Signature:  Date:
Official use
Date acknowledgement sent:
By whom:
Concern referred to:
Date:

**Complaints Form**  
**Appendix 2**

Please complete and return to a member of the Extended Leadership Team, who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken. The Headteacher will be notified immediately.	
Your Name	
Pupil's Name (if relevant)	
Your relationship to the pupil (if relevant)	
Address	
Postcode	
Daytime Telephone Number	
Evening Telephone Number	
Please give details of your complaint here, including whether you have spoken with anyone at the school about it. Also state the date of the matter your complaint is regarding.	
What actions, if any have you taken to try and resolve your concern or complaint?	
What actions do you feel might resolve the concern or complaint?	
Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details	
Signature	
Date	
<b>For Office Use only</b>	
Date acknowledgement sent:	By Whom:
Complaint referred to:	Date:

## Appendix 3

### Governor Complaints Panel Procedure

- At the panel hearing:
  - The complainant will have the opportunity to present their complaint.
  - Those present will have the opportunity to ask questions.
  - The complainant will be given the opportunity to make a final statement to the panel.
  - The chair will ask the complainant if they feel they have had the opportunity to say everything they wish to say.
- The Headteacher (or investigating Officer will explain the School's Position) this may be done separately. The Panel will have the opportunity to ask questions.
- The Chair of the Panel has responsibility to ensure that detailed minutes are taken. A recording may be made for accuracy of the minutes, this will be arranged by the school. Consent will be sought beforehand and it will also be declared at the meeting. Covert recording is not permitted. The minutes will be shared after the meeting.
- The Chair of the Panel will explain to the complainant and Headteacher that the Panel will consider its decision and that a written decision will be sent to both parties within 20 working days. The complainant, Headteacher, other members of staff and witnesses will then leave.
- The Panel will then consider the complaint and all the evidence presented and
  - Agree a decision on the complaint;
  - Decide upon the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint; and
  - Where appropriate, suggest recommended changes to the school's systems or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not recur.
- A written statement clearly setting out the decision of the Panel must be sent to the complainant and Headteacher or investigating Governor. The letter to the complainant should also advise how to take the complaint further.
- The school should ensure that a copy of all correspondence and notes are kept on file in the school's records. These records should be kept separately from the pupil's personal records.