

St. Margaret Mary's Catholic Junior School



School Complaints Policy

November 2017

Review Date: November 2018

Signed by:

Signature:

Date:

Complaints Policy/Procedure for St Margaret Mary's Catholic Junior School

It is the responsibility of individual schools to respond to complaints about the school. Complaints about St Margaret Mary's Catholic Junior School that are received by the Directorate of Children and Family Services will be referred immediately to our school to deal with under this school complaints procedure. This policy and procedure enables our school to manage complaints effectively.

Since September 2003 governing bodies of all maintained schools and maintained nursery schools in England were required under section 29 of the Education Act 2002 to have in place a procedure to deal with complaints. Such complaints may be relating to the school and/or any community facilities or services that the school provides; schools are required to publicise the procedure.

At St Margaret Mary's Catholic Junior School we take our responsibility for children seriously and value the support and partnership of parents and carers. We try very hard to get things right, however, despite everyone's best efforts, situations may arise which require further attention.

A complaint is defined as:

“An expression of dissatisfaction about a school or teacher, which requires a response.”

Pupils, parents or carers can make a complaint to the school about most aspects of its function including:

- Staff conduct
- Teaching and learning
- Application of behaviour management systems
- Bullying
- Provision of extra-curricular activities
- The school environment

This complaints procedure does not cover issues relating to; Admissions, SEND, School Reorganisation, Child Protection Investigations, Exclusions, Whistle Blowing, Grievances/Disciplinary & external providers. These specific complaints have their own separate policies and procedures.

The Local Authority retains responsibility for:

- The National Curriculum
- Collective Worship in schools (in the case of denominational schools, concerns relating to worship and spiritual matters may be referred to the relevant Diocese or Archdiocese).
- Provision of support services such as SEND, school attendance or Educational Psychology.

Complaints about these matters will be referred to the Directorate of Children and Family Services via the Complaints Manager for progression through the council's complaints procedure.

Members of the general public may make complaints to the school if the school is directly responsible for the issue being complained about.

For example:

- Behaviour of pupils during break-times
- Disturbance to neighbours during school hours
- Health and Safety issues regarding school premises
- Behaviour of staff

St Margaret Mary's Catholic Junior School staff **are not responsible** for the action and behaviour of pupils **outside school hours**.

Legal, child protection or disciplinary proceedings take precedence over complaints procedures and timescales.

Prevention

In order to minimise the likelihood of a complaint we have the following policies and procedures that are current, understood by all staff and are fully complied with at all times:

- Behaviour Policy
- Anti-Bullying Policy
- Equality and Diversity Policy
- School Complaints Policy

The following training is delivered to key staff in respect of preventing and managing complaints:

- Equality and Diversity
- Safeguarding
- Managing Complaints

Complaint or Concern

It is important to be clear about the difference between a concern and a complaint. Taking informal concerns seriously at the earliest stage will reduce the number that develop into formal complaints.

The underlying principle is that concerns ought to be handled, if at all possible, without the need for formal procedures. The requirement to have a complaints procedure need not in any way undermine efforts to resolve the concern informally. In most cases the class teacher or the individual delivering the service (in the case of extended school provision) will co-ordinate and manage the first approach. It would be helpful if staff were able to resolve issues on the spot, including apologising where necessary.

Our school nominated member of staff with responsibility for the operation and management of the school complaints procedure. This role is also could be termed the school's 'Complaints Co-ordinator'.

Our Complaints Procedure will:

- encourage resolution of problems by informal means wherever possible;
- be easily accessible and publicised;
- be simple to understand and use;
- be impartial;
- be non-adversarial;
- allow swift handling with established time-limits for action and keeping people informed of the progress;
- ensure a full and fair investigation by an independent person where necessary;
- respect people's desire for confidentiality;
- address all the points at issue and provide an effective response and appropriate redress, where necessary;
- provide information to the school's senior management team so that services can be improved.

Investigating Complaints

At each stage, the person investigating the complaint makes sure that they:

- establish what has happened so far, and who has been involved;
- clarify the nature of the complaint and what remains unresolved;
- meet with the complainant or contact them (if unsure or further information is necessary);
- clarify what the complainant feels would put things right;
- interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish;
- conduct the interview with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning;
- keep notes of the interview.

Resolving Complaints

At each stage in the procedure our school will keep in mind 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 that the event complained of will not recur;
- an explanation of the steps that have been taken to ensure that it will not happen again;
- an undertaking to review school policies in light of the complaint.

It would be useful if complainants stated what actions they feel might resolve the problem at any stage. The policy is clear in that an admission that our school could have handled the situation better is not the same as an admission of negligence.

The procedure will identify areas of agreement between the parties. It is also of equal importance to clarify any misunderstandings that might have occurred as this can create a positive atmosphere in which to discuss any outstanding issues.

Linked Documents

This document brings together guidance, policies and procedures relating to school complaints building on national guidance and best practice. This forms part of DCFS wider policy and procedures for complaints covering school complaints, corporate complaints and Children's Act complaints (Children's social care).

Variations to the procedure

If the complaint involves the Headteacher/Principal or a governor, the complainant should submit their complaint to the Chair of Governors, c/o the Clerk to Governors at the school.

If the complaint involves the Chair of Governors, the complainant should submit the complaint to the Vice-Chair of Governors, c/o the Clerk to Governors at the school.

Anonymous Complaints

Anonymous complaints will **be recorded and referred to the Headteacher in the same way as other complaints.**

The Headteacher will discuss anonymous complaints with the DCFS Complaints Manager. If there is sufficient information contained in the complaint **it will be investigated in the same way as other complaints.**

If there is insufficient information to support an investigation, the complaint will be recorded for service improvement purposes and closed.

Publication

There is a legal requirement for the Complaints Procedures to be publicised. Considering this the policy and procedure will publicise in the following locations:

School Website / School Staffroom & School Reception.

Withdrawing a complaint

Our school accepts that complaints may be withdrawn in writing at any time. The Headteacher and Chair of Governors will review the issue of concern and consider whether further investigation is required through other internal management systems.

Dealing with unreasonable and unreasonably persistent complaints

A good complaints procedure can limit the number of complaints that become protracted. However, there may be occasions when despite all stages of the procedure being followed, the complainant remains dissatisfied. For further information see stages 2 and 3 of the complaints process.

Unreasonable or unreasonably persistent complainants may have reasonable grounds for complaint but pursue them in unreasonable ways. Or they may pursue complaints which have no substance or have previously been investigated. Contact by such complainants with the school or authority may be amicable whilst placing significant demands on resources, or may be emotional and distressing for those involved.

Things to Consider

In these circumstances, the Headteacher and / or Chair of Governors will liaise with Legal Services and the appropriate Children and Family Services Manager / Service Director before deciding what action to take. They may also seek advice from the Complaints Manager and Governor Support Service.

In order to manage unreasonable or unreasonably persistent complaints our school will ensure that:

- the complaint is being or has been investigated properly;
- any decision reached on it is the right one;
- communications with the complainant have been adequate; and
- the complainant is not now providing any significant new information that might affect our view on the complaint.

In addition the Governors may consider:

- Warnings / contract regarding future conduct
- Suspension of the persons access to school premises
- Placing time limits on telephone conversations and personal contacts.
- Restricting the number of telephone calls that will be taken (for example, one call on one specified morning/afternoon of any week).
- Limiting the complainant to one medium of contact (telephone, letter, email etc) and/or requiring the complainant to communicate only with one named member of staff.
- Requiring any personal contacts to take place in the presence of a witness.
- Refusing to register and process further complaints about the same matter.
- Where a decision on the complaint has been made, providing the complainant with acknowledgements only of letters, faxes, or emails, or ultimately informing the complainant that future correspondence will be read and placed on the file but not acknowledged. A designated officer should be identified who will read future correspondence.

The complainant must be written to informing them of:

- the decision that has been taken;
- what it means for his or her contacts with the school;
- how long any restrictions will last; and
- how to contact the Local Government Ombudsman and Secretary of State.

A copy of the Complaints Policy must be enclosed with the letter.

Dealing with abusive, threatening or violent adult visitors

As a general rule, our school is an orderly, safe place, where relationships between staff and visitors, especially parents, demonstrate mutual respect and recognition of a shared responsibility for pupils' welfare and educational progress. However, in a minority of instances, the behaviour of a few parents can cause severe disruption or worse, resulting in abusive or aggressive behaviour towards staff. Violence, threatening behaviour and abuse against school staff or other members of the school community will not be tolerated. All members of the school community have a right to expect that their school is a safe place in which to work and learn. There is no place for violence, threatening behaviour or abuse in our school.

Where such behaviour does occur, the Directorate of Children and Family Services will play a proactive role in taking all possible action to deal with it, in response to the wishes of our school

Barring from School Premises

Although fulfilling a public function, our school is a private place. The public has no automatic right of entry.

Our school will therefore act to ensure it remain a safe place for pupils, staff and other members of their community.

If a parent's behaviour is a cause for concern, we can ask him/her to leave school premises. In serious cases, the Headteacher or the local authority can notify them in writing that their implied licence to be on school premises has been temporarily revoked subject to any representations that the parent may wish to make. Our school will always give the parent 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 parent and either confirmed or lifted. If the decision is confirmed the parent will 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 Department for Education. 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.

Third Party Providers

Our school facilities are hired to third party providers; however, these providers are responsible for implementing their own procedure.

Complaints Procedure

Informal Stage

The vast majority of concerns can be resolved informally. There are many occasions where concerns are resolved straight away by the class teacher, office staff, Head of Year or the Headteacher, depending on whom the complainant first approaches. **It is in everyone's best interests that complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage.**

We want to ensure that potential complainants feel able to raise concerns with members of staff without any formality, either in person, by telephone or in writing. This allows staff to establish whether a person is asking a question, expressing an opinion or making a complaint.

The member of staff who deals with the initial contact will:

- Clarify the nature of the concern and re-assure the complainant that we want to hear about it.
- Resolve the concern immediately if the member of staff can do so.
- Record the enquiry and any agreements made, and notify the Headteacher.

We will respect the wish of a complainant who indicates they would have difficulty discussing their concerns with a particular member of staff, as far as is practically possible. Similarly, if a member of staff feels too compromised to deal with a complaint, they can pass the concern to another member of staff.

Where the first approach is made to a governor, the next step will be to refer the complainant to the **appropriate person** and advise them about the procedure. Governors will not act on an individual complaint outside the formal procedure or be involved at the early stages as they may be required to sit on a review panel at a later stage of the procedure.

If the member of staff can't resolve the concern, they will:

- Make a clear note of the date, name, contact address and phone number and a brief note of the nature of the concern.
- If possible, record the nature of the outcome the complainant is looking for.
- Refer the complaint to the Headteacher, or designated Deputy. The Headteacher, or designated Deputy will decide if the concern is covered by the complaints procedure or should be dealt with under other procedures e.g. child protection or personnel.

If the concern involves an **allegation of assault or abuse of a child** by a member of staff, the Headteacher/Principal **must inform the Lead Safeguarding Officer**.

If the concern is about the Headteacher, the member of staff will provide the complainant with details of how to contact the Chair of the Governing Body.

The staff member dealing with the concern will ensure that the complainant is kept informed of any action taken. The emphasis at this stage is on resolving the issue quickly and informally for the benefit of staff, pupils and parents / carers.

We will respond to the complainant as soon as possible, and **within a maximum of 15 school working days**. At this stage the response may be given verbally or in writing. A record will be kept to inform service improvement.

The complainant will be given information on how to proceed to more formal stages if they are not satisfied and where to get independent advice.

Formal Procedures - Stage One:

Formal complaints should be made in writing to the Headteacher. **If the complaint is about the Headteacher it should be sent in writing to the Chair of the Governing body c/o Clerk to Governors at school address who should carry out this stage one procedure.** If the complaint involves the Chair of Governors, the complainant should submit the complaint to the Vice Chair of Governors, c/o Clerk to Governors at school address.

If the complainant has difficulty expressing themselves in writing, they will be informed where they can get independent assistance. Template letters for making a complaint are available on request through the Parents / Carers Toolkit.

The Headteacher will **acknowledge the complaint within five school working days.** The acknowledgement will include a summary of the complaints procedure and a target date for providing a response. This should be within **15 school** working days. If this date cannot be met, the complainant will be contacted and given a reason for the delay and a revised target date.

The Headteacher will provide an opportunity for the complainant to meet him/her to discuss their concerns and find solutions. It should be made clear that the complainant may bring a friend, family member or advocate (an advocate is not allowed to be a legal representative) to the meeting if they wish. Interpreting services should also be made available where necessary. The Headteacher may wish to have another member of staff present to observe and record the meeting and promote staff safety.

We will take care to ensure we do not create an intimidating atmosphere for the complainant. Under no circumstances will audio recording equipment be used.

The Headteacher will make whatever enquiries s/he considers necessary to ascertain the facts and the legitimacy of decisions taken (the Headteacher may delegate the task of collating the information to another staff member but not the decision on the action taken). This may include:

- Interviewing staff / pupils
- Reviewing minutes of meetings
- Reviewing school records

Pupils will be interviewed in the presence of another member of staff or learning mentor, or in the case of serious complaints (e.g. where the possibility of criminal investigation exists) in the presence of their parents. Again, **care will be taken in these circumstances not to create an intimidating atmosphere.**

It is important that the Headteacher (or nominated officer) investigates complaints thoroughly and objectively. If s/he feels unable to do this (e.g. if s/he has been directly involved in the decision making process that led to the complaint) s/he will delegate responsibility for investigating the complaint to another member of the management team or the Chair of Governors. It is strongly advised that the Headteacher will keep a record of interviews, telephone conversations and other documentation.

Once all the relevant facts have been established, the Headteacher will provide a written response to the complainant. This will include:

- A full explanation of decisions taken and the reasons for them.
- Details of actions the school will take to resolve the complaint if appropriate.

If the Headteacher feels it is necessary and useful, s/he will offer the complainant a meeting to discuss the response and seek reconciliation.

The complainant will be provided with details of how to contact the Governing Body if they are not satisfied with the response.

In exceptional circumstances only, it may be appropriate for the Headteacher or Chair of Governors to commission another person to undertake the role of investigating officer on their behalf. This person could be a member of the school's own governing body or an outside investigator. In either case, the investigating officer would be subject to the same rules of confidentiality and would be required to report back to the Headteacher or Chair of Governors as appropriate.

Formal Procedures - Stage Two

If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of Stage One and wishes to pursue matters to the next stage of the procedure, they should put this in writing no later than **28 school days** after the outcome of Stage One was made known to them. However, if there are good reasons why the complainant cannot request that their complaint be considered at Stage Two within 28 days, further consideration will be given to allow them to do so.

A letter received by the school notifying that a complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of a complaint at Stage One must be passed to the Chair of Governors within **five school working days**.

In the case of a written complaint received directly by the governing body, the Chair of Governors should first ensure that:

- The complaint has first been dealt with at Stage One.
- The complaint is covered by the school's complaints procedure, not other procedures e.g. personnel or child protection.

Upon receipt of a letter notifying that the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of a Stage One investigation, the Chair of Governors will arrange for a Complaints Appeal Panel to hear the complaint. ***However, in some circumstances, it may be possible and appropriate for the Chair of Governors to resolve the issue with the complainant without the need for a panel hearing.***

The Clerk to the Governors will write to the complainant, acknowledging that the complaint has been received. The letter will explain that the complainant has the right to submit any further documents or information relevant to the complaint. A deadline for submission of these documents will also be given.

The Headteacher will also be invited to submit a written report for the complaints panel. The Headteacher may also invite members of staff directly involved in matters raised by the complainant to respond personally or in writing.

The Clerk to the Governors will convene the Complaints Panel elected from the governing body. The panel will comprise of **three** Governors who have had no previous involvement with the complaint. The complaint **should not be heard by the entire governing body** as this could compromise the impartiality of any panel set up for a disciplinary hearing against a member of staff following a serious complaint. The local authority will provide an Education Change Partner to act as an observer / mediator for any stage two complaints. This role will ensure a fair and equitable process is followed.

The complaints panel will set a timetable for the investigation and will notify the complainant of this. The review **hearing should be heard within 20 school days** of receiving the letter.

The Clerk will write to inform the panel, Headteacher, complainant and any relevant witnesses of the date and time of the hearing, giving a minimum of **five school days** notice. All documents submitted will be

circulated to the panel, the Headteacher and the complainant. The complainant will be notified of their right to have a friend, family member, advocate (an advocate is not allowed to be a legal representative) or interpreter present if they wish. The Chair of Governors will ensure that minutes are recorded of the review panel meeting.

The panel will be open-minded and independent. The aim of the meeting is to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant. However, it may sometimes only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations that satisfy the complainant that their concern has been taken seriously.

The hearing will be held in private. Any witnesses (other than the complainant and the Headteacher) should only attend for the part of the hearing in which they give their evidence.

The Chair of the Panel will keep the proceedings as informal as possible as complainants may not be comfortable in formal meetings and may feel inhibited in addressing the panel. **This is particularly important if the complainant is a child.**

If either party wishes to introduce new information at the meeting, this will be allowed. The meeting will then be adjourned for a short period to allow other parties to review and respond to this information.

The meeting will allow for:

- The complainant to explain their complaint and the Headteacher to explain the school's response.
- Witnesses to be brought by the complainant or the Headteacher.
- The Headteacher and the complainant to ask questions of each other and any witnesses.
- The Panel to ask questions of the complainant, Headteacher and any witnesses.
- The complainant and the Headteacher to summarise their position

The Chair of the panel will explain to the complainant and the Headteacher that the panel will consider its decision and respond in writing as soon as possible, **but no later than within 15 school working days.** The complainant and the Headteacher/Principal will then be asked to leave.

The panel will then consider the complaint and all the evidence presented. They will then decide:

- Whether or not they uphold the complaint, in whole or in part
- What action can be taken to resolve the complaint
- Where appropriate, recommend what action can be taken to prevent similar difficulties on the future.

A written response detailing the decisions, recommendations and the basis on which these have been made will be sent to the complainant as soon as possible but within a maximum of **15 school working days.**

The school will retain a copy of all correspondence and records of meetings for **seven** years.

Formal Procedures - Stage Three

The Complainant will be notified of the right to appeal to the Secretary of State for Education or the Local Government Ombudsman if they are unhappy with the way in which procedures have been carried out.

Information for Parents and carers on school complaints procedure

Our school has developed guidance for parents and carers to outline the complaints process in a clear way.

The guidance refers to the detail contained in this document.

Informal Stage:

Many concerns can be resolved quickly with goodwill, often by making early contact with the class teacher or head of year. If this is not possible, or the teacher is unable to resolve the concern, the parent, carer or pupil should contact the assistant head teacher or head teacher.

The person who receives the complaint should attempt to work with the family to resolve the complaint informally. This may involve

- Mediation and conciliation
- Explaining policies or decisions
- Helping the pupil to express their views to another person
- Review of educational provision
- Review of support services

Stage 1:

If the pupil, parent or carer are not satisfied with the outcome of the informal investigation, they may wish to make a formal complaint. This should be done in writing to the Headteacher.

If the complaint is about the Headteacher, or if the problem is not resolved, the matter should be referred to the Chair of Governors of the school. The school and its Governors have a duty in law to act properly and investigate complaints impartially. Once investigations are complete the person making the complaint should receive a written response from the school.

Stage 2:

Pupils, parents and carers who are not satisfied with the outcome of the investigation and wish to pursue a complaint regarding a school issue can refer the complaint to a review committee of Governors, known as the complaints panel. This can be done by writing to the Clerk to the Governing Body. The aim of the panel is to establish any areas of agreement and identify actions that can be taken to resolve the complaint.

Stage 3:

If all other attempts to resolve the complaint have been unsuccessful the pupil, parent or carer may refer their complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman or Secretary of State for Education.

Strategies:

To meet our aim we will ensure that the following strategies are employed:

1. Ensure that all governors and staff understand the policy and procedure and that it is implemented in all instances.

Equal Opportunities and Inclusion

At St. Margaret Mary's Catholic Junior School we plan to provide for all pupils to achieve, including boys and girls, higher achieving pupils, gifted and talented pupils, those with SEN, pupils with disabilities, pupils

from all social and cultural backgrounds including those who are Pupil Premium, Looked After Children and those who are subject to safeguarding, pupils from vulnerable groups and pupils from different ethnic groups and those from diverse linguistic backgrounds.

Appendix A – Definitions of Roles and Responsibilities

The Complainant

The complainant or person who makes the complaint will receive a more effective response to the complaint if he/she:-

- co-operates with the school in seeking a solution to the complaint;
- expresses the complaint in full as early as possible;
- responds promptly to requests for information or meetings or in agreeing the details of the complaint;
- asks for assistance as needed;
- treats all those involved in the complaint with respect.

The Complaints Co-ordinator (or Headteacher)

The complaints co-ordinator should:-

- ensure that the complainant is fully updated at each stage of the procedure;
- ensure that all people involved in the complaint procedure will be aware of the legislation around complaints including the Equality Act 2010, Data Protection Act 1998 and Freedom of Information Act 2000;
- liaise with staff members, Headteacher, Chair of Governors and Clerk to ensure the smooth running of the complaints procedure;
- keep records;
- be aware of issues regarding:-
 - o sharing third party information;
- additional support - this may be needed by complainants when making a complaint including interpretation support.

The Investigator

The Investigator is the person involved in Stages 1 and 2 of the procedure. The Investigator's role can include:-

- providing a comprehensive, open, transparent and fair consideration of the complaint through sensitive and thorough interviewing of the complainant to establish what has happened and who has been involved;
- consideration of records and other relevant information;
- interviewing staff and children/young people and other people relevant to the complaint;
- analysing information;
- effectively liaising with the complainant and the complaints co-ordinator as appropriate to clarify what the complainant feels would put things right;
- identifying solutions and recommending courses of action to resolve problems;
- being mindful of the timescales to respond; and
- responding to the complainant in plain and clear language.

The person investigating the complaint should make sure that they:

- conduct interviews with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning;
- keep notes of interviews or arrange for an independent note taker to record minutes of the meeting.

The Panel Clerk (this could be Clerk to the Governors or the Complaints Coordinator)

The Clerk is the contact point for the complainant for the panel meeting and is expected to:-

- set the date, time and venue of the hearing, ensuring that the dates are convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible;
- collate any written material and send it to the parties in advance of the hearing;
- meet and welcome the parties as they arrive at the hearing;
- record the proceedings;
- circulate the minutes of the panel hearing;
- notify all parties of the panel's decision;
- liaise with the complaints co-ordinator.

The Panel Chair

The Panel Chair has a key role in ensuring that:-

- minutes are taken for meetings;
- the remit of the panel is explained to the complainant and both they and the school have the opportunity of putting their case without undue interruption;
- the issues are addressed;
- key findings of fact are made;
- parents/carers and others who may not be used to speaking at such a hearing are put at ease – this is particularly important if the complainant is a child/young person;
- the hearing is conducted in an informal manner with everyone treated with respect and courtesy;
- the layout of the room will set the tone – care is needed to ensure the setting is informal and not adversarial;
- the panel is open-minded and acts independently;
- no member of the panel has an external interest in the outcome of the proceedings or any involvement in an earlier stage of the procedure;
- both the complainant and the school are given the opportunity to state their case and seek clarity;
- written material is seen by everyone in attendance – if a new issue arises it would be useful to give everyone the opportunity to consider and comment upon it; this may require a short adjournment of the hearing;
- liaise with the Clerk and complaints co-ordinator.

Panel Member

Panellists will need to be aware that:-

- it is important that the review panel hearing is independent and impartial, and that it is seen to be so;
- no governor may sit on the panel if they have had a prior involvement in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it.

- the aim of the hearing, which will be held in private, will always be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant;
- however, it must be recognised that the complainant might not be satisfied with the outcome if the hearing does not find in their favour. It may only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations which will satisfy the complainant that his or her complaint has been taken seriously.
- many complainants will feel nervous and inhibited in a formal setting;
- Parents/carers often feel emotional when discussing an issue that affects their child. The panel chair will ensure that the proceedings are as welcoming as possible.
- extra care needs to be taken when the complainant is a child/young person and present during all or part of the hearing;
- careful consideration of the atmosphere and proceedings will ensure that the child/young person does not feel intimidated. The panel should respect the views of the child/young person and give them equal consideration to those of adults.

If the child/young person is the complainant, the panel should ask in advance if any support is needed to help them present their complaint. Where the child/young person's parent is the complainant, the panel should give the parent the opportunity to say which parts of the hearing, if any, the child/young person needs to attend. The parent should be advised however that agreement might not always be possible if the parent wishes the child/young person to attend a part of the meeting which the panel considers not to be in the child/young person's best interests.

The welfare of the child/young person is paramount.