

 	<h1>Chilton Academy Trust</h1>	<p>Policy 006</p> <p>Statutory: Yes</p> <p>Last Review:</p> <p>Next Review: Aug 2016</p>
<h2>COMPLAINTS POLICY</h2>		

Chilton Academy Trust (hereafter referred to as the trust) consists of Chilton Primary School and Ramsgate Free School.

Introduction

All schools have a duty to have a complaints procedure and to publicise it to parents and pupils.

This document sets out the complaints procedure for Chilton Academy Trust.

Complaints procedures should not be used for appeals and referrals that fall under other procedures and legislation and which are covered by other guidance, including:

- Admissions
- Exclusions
- Special Educational Needs
- Staff Grievances
- Child Protection
- Whistleblowing

Complaints Procedure

In order to investigate complaints as fully as possible the trust has a staged process. Most issues are sorted out informally and we would recommend that this approach is tried first. However, if a complainant feels that there is nothing to be gained and they wish to make a formal complaint they must have the right to go straight to stage 1 of the complaints procedure.

Resolving concerns informally

Parents are always welcome to discuss any concerns with the appropriate member of staff, who will clarify with the parent the nature of the concern and

reassure them that the school wants to hear about it. Parents should be advised from the outset that there is a complaints procedure that they can use if the matter cannot be resolved. The member of staff may explain to the parent how the situation happened. It can be helpful at this point to identify what sort of outcome the parent is looking for.

If the member of staff first contacted cannot immediately deal with the matter, s/he will make a clear note of the date, name and contact address or phone number.

All members of staff will know how to refer, if necessary, to the person with responsibility for the particular issue raised by the parent. S/he will check later to make sure the referral has been dealt with.

If the matter is brought to the attention of the Executive Headteacher at Chilton Primary School or Head of School of Ramsgate Free School (hereafter referred to as the Headteacher) s/he may decide to deal with the complaint. If the complaint is against the Headteacher the parent will be advised to contact the Chair of the Local Governing Body.

The member of staff dealing with the concern will make sure the parent is clear what action (if any) or monitoring of the situation has been agreed, putting it in writing if appropriate.

While it is often a helpful way to resolve problems more quickly, a parent or pupil is not required to pursue informal ways to address complaints but has the right to make a formal complaint at any time.

Complaints Procedure Stage 1: investigation by the Headteacher

Complaints at this stage need to be recorded in writing. A complainant may wish to write in themselves. Complainants may also make their complaint verbally and can expect help to put their complaint in writing.

The Headteacher (or designated person) will acknowledge the complaint in writing within three working days of receiving the written complaint. The acknowledgement will give a brief explanation of the school's complaints procedure and a target date for providing a response to the complaint. This should normally be within ten working days. If this proves impossible, a letter will be sent explaining the reason for the delay and giving a revised target date. This will be within a maximum of 20 working days unless it is a particularly complex issue.

The Headteacher will provide an opportunity for the complainant to meet them to supplement any information provided previously or to record the complaint in writing if it has been made verbally. It will be made clear to the complainant that if s/he wishes s/he might be accompanied to any meeting by a friend, relative,

representative or advocate who can speak on his/her behalf or to provide support.

If necessary the Headteacher will interview other parties and take statements from those involved. If the complaint centres on a pupil, the pupil should also be interviewed unless this is judged not to be in the interests of the pupil's welfare. Pupils should normally be interviewed with parents/guardians present, but if this would seriously delay the investigation of a serious/urgent complaint or if the pupil has specifically said that s/he would prefer that parents/guardians were not involved, another member of staff with whom the pupil feels comfortable should be present. If a member of staff is complained against, they must have the opportunity to present their case.

The Headteacher will keep written records of meetings, telephone conversations and other documentation in a safe place .

Once all the relevant facts have been established as far as possible, the Headteacher will then produce a written response to the complainant, including a full explanation of the decision and the reasons for it. Where appropriate, this will include what action the school will take to resolve the complaint. The complainant will be advised that should s/he wish to take the complaint further s/he should notify the Chair of the Local Governing Body within 20 working days of receiving the letter.

If the complaint is against the Headteacher, or if the Headteacher has been closely involved in the issue, the Chair of the Local Governing Body will carry out all the Stage 1 procedures.

Stage 2: Review by the Local Governing Body

The Chair of the Local Governing Body will write to the complainant to acknowledge receipt of the written request for the Local Governing Body to review the complaint. The acknowledgement will inform the complainant that two members of the school's local governing body and an Independent person will hear the complaint within 20 working days of receiving the complaint. The letter will also explain that the complainant has the right to submit any further documents relevant to the complaint. These must be received in time for the documents to be sent to the three members.

A meeting of the Local Governors' Complaints Panel will be convened. No governors with prior involvement in the issues complained about will be included on the panel and it may be necessary to use reserves (previously agreed by the Local Governing Body) to ensure the Panel can meet within the set time. Governors should bear in mind the advantages of having a parent governor on the panel, and will also be sensitive to issues of race and gender. The Headteacher will not sit on the Panel. An experienced governor will chair the panel meeting.

The Chair of the panel will ensure the Panel hears the complaint within twenty working days of receiving the letter. All relevant correspondence relating to the complaint will be given to each Panel member as soon as the composition of the panel is confirmed. If the correspondence is extensive, the Chair may prepare a thorough summary for sending to Panel members.

The Chair or clerk will write and inform the complainant, Headteacher, any relevant witnesses and members of the Panel at least five working days in advance of the date, time and place of the meeting. The notification will also inform the complainant of his/her right to be accompanied to the meeting by a friend/advocate/interpreter and explain how the meeting will be conducted and the complainant's right to submit further written evidence to the Panel.

The Headteacher will be invited to attend the Panel meeting and will be asked to prepare a written report for the Panel in response to the complaint. All attendees including the complainant should receive a set of the relevant documents including the Headteacher's report and the agenda, at least five working days prior to the meeting.

Submission of additional documents or requests for additional attendees will be at the discretion of the Chair of the panel.

At the panel hearing:

- The complainant will have the opportunity to present their complaint.
- The Headteacher will explain the school's position.
- Those present will have the opportunity to ask questions.
- Panel members will have the opportunity to ask questions of the complainant and the Headteacher.
- The Headteacher will be given the opportunity to make a final statement to the panel.
- The complainant will be given the opportunity to make a final statement to the panel.
- The chair will ask the complainant if he or she feels they have had a fair hearing.

The Chair of the Panel has responsibility to ensure that the meeting is properly minuted.

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 15 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. The letter to the complainant should also advise that should s/he wish to take the complaint further s/he should notify the Chair of Trustees of Chilton Academy Trust within 20 working days of receiving the letter.

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.

There is no further right of appeal to the Local Governing Body or the Academy Trust. All complainants have the right, as a last resort, to contact the Education Funding Agency and Secretary of State for Education if they are not satisfied with the way in which their complaint has been considered. More information is available at www.education.gov.uk/schoolcomplaints.

Extended Services

The Board of Trustees ensures that third party providers offering community services or using school facilities for any purpose have their own complaints procedures in place.

Equality Impact Assessment

Under the Equality Act 2010 we have a duty not to discriminate against people on the basis of their age, disability, gender, gender identity, pregnancy or maternity, race, religion or belief and sexual orientation.

This policy has been equality impact assessed and we believe that it is in line with the Equality Act 2010 as it is fair, it does not prioritise or disadvantage any pupil and it helps to promote equality at this school.

Monitoring the Effectiveness of the Policy

The effectiveness of this policy will be reviewed annually by the Headteacher and members of the Board of Trustees in order to ensure that all complaints are handled properly. The Headteacher logs all formal complaints received at the school and records how they were resolved. Trustees examine this log on an annual basis.

Trustees take into account any local or national decisions that affect the complaints process, and make any modifications necessary to this policy.

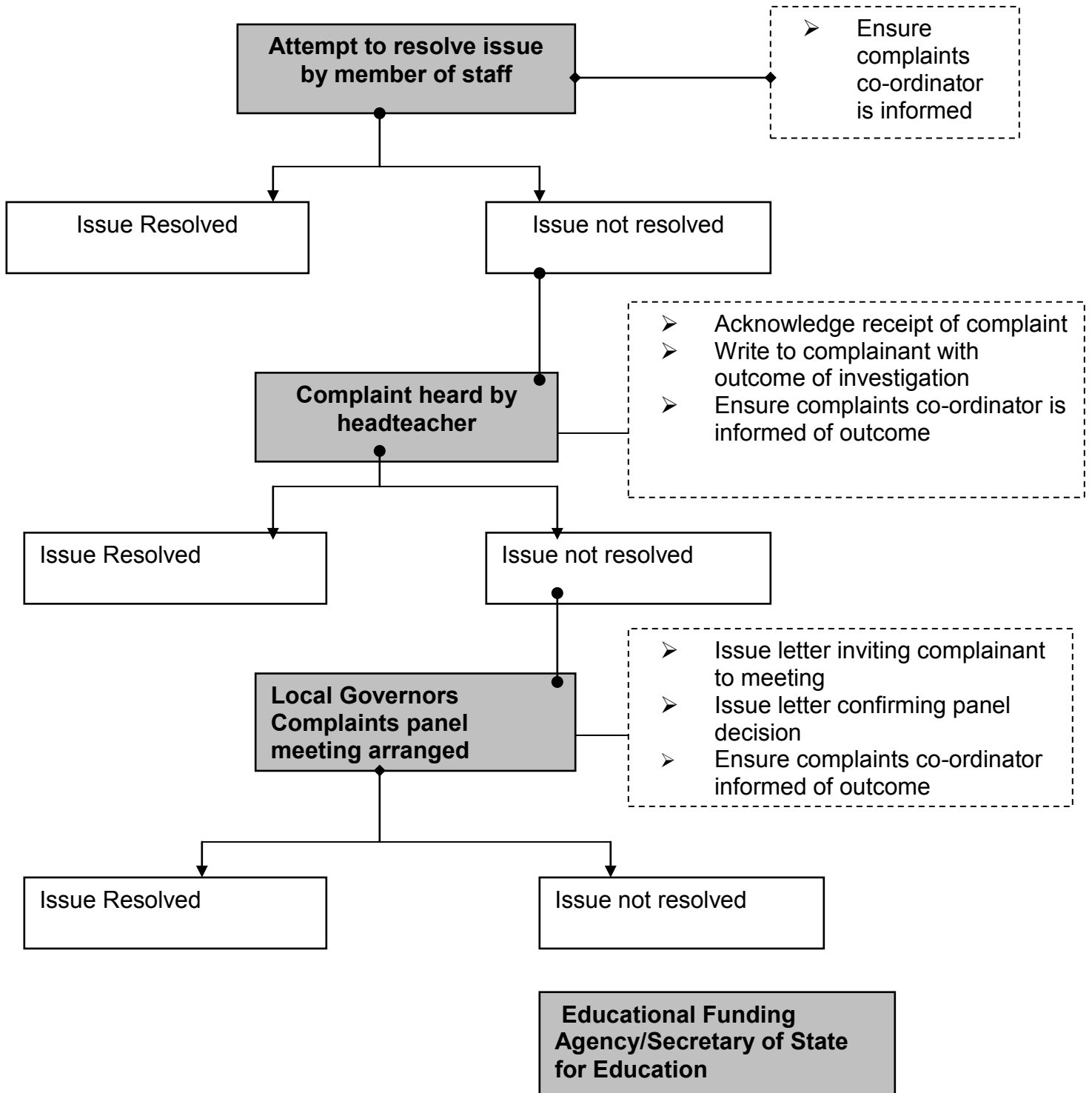
This policy is made available to all parents, so that they can be properly informed about the complaints process.

Agreed and signed by:

Headteacher Date:

Chair of Trustees Date:

Flowchart of the way complaints are managed at Chilton Academy Trust



Guidance on complaints handling

1. Publicity

Parents and pupils should always know how they can raise concerns or lodge a formal complaint. Complaints procedures should be easily accessible and well publicised.

A summary of how the Academy Trust deals with complaints is included in the information that is given to new parents when their children join the school. The Trust schools also have a letter that is sent home annually to parents explaining how problems are dealt with and how the complaints procedures work. (see Appendix B)

Should the need arise the school would make the procedures available in languages other than English and consider whether audio-cassette, Braille or large-print versions are necessary.

2. Procedures should be as speedy as possible - consistent and fair to all concerned

Each stage of the procedure should have known time limits. Where it is not possible to meet these, the complainant should be kept informed of progress.

3. Support for complainant

It is important that parents know that at any stage of the procedure they can be accompanied by a friend, relative or representative and to know where they can go for information, advice and advocacy, if required.

4. Support for staff

Staff complained about must be treated fairly. They should have the opportunity to put their case and receive appropriate support; a colleague may accompany them at any stage but it would not be appropriate to involve someone from outside the school from whom confidential pupil information should be withheld. There is a crucial balance to be maintained between supporting the individual so that his/her rights are maintained and reputation protected, and investigating a complaint thoroughly and impartially.

The complaints procedure is distinct from formal disciplinary proceedings for staff and this will need to be made clear to all concerned. However there may be occasions where a complaint leads to a disciplinary procedure which puts the complaints process on hold. If so, the complainant should be informed of this, without going into details, and updated regularly on likely further delay. After the disciplinary process is completed it will be necessary to decide what further response to the complainant is required.

5. Confidentiality

It is very important to treat all concerns and complaints with discretion. It is vital that parents feel confident that their complaint will not penalise their child.

However, a complainant will need to be aware that some information will have to be shared with those involved in order that the complaint can be investigated.

6. Anonymous complaints

Anonymous complaints should not be automatically disregarded. They may relate to a serious issue which may subsequently resurface. It should be at the Headteacher's or Local Governing Body's discretion as to whether the gravity of an anonymous complaint warrants an investigation. A copy of every anonymous complaint and note of the decision should be retained on file.

7. Remedy

If the outcome of the complaints procedure shows the school is at fault, it is often sufficient to provide redress in the form of an acknowledgement that the complaint is upheld together with an appropriate apology. It may be appropriate to offer one or more of: an explanation, a promise that the event complained of will not recur, an undertaking to review school policies or practices in the light of the complaint, or, in appropriate circumstances, financial redress. Fear of litigation should not prevent a school from admitting to parents when mistakes have been made, but it is recommended that advice be sought if the complainant threatens legal action.

8. Staff Awareness and Training

All staff should be aware of the procedures, as potentially many will be involved with handling complaints, especially at the informal level. To be confident in doing so depends on them having clear information about the procedures; reassurances that senior staff are committed to the procedures and some basic training in dealing with people who are upset or angry (see Appendix A). All staff should also have clear information about individual staff roles and responsibilities so that parents do not get continually passed from one to another.

9. Record Keeping

Complaints should be recorded and monitored regularly by staff and governors. It is recommended that recording should begin at the point when an initial concern or complaint cannot be resolved immediately but needs some investigation and/or consultation with others in school and a subsequent report back to the parent.

Recording at the earliest stage need only be a very basic record of the complaint, giving the date, name of parent and general nature of the complaint. A pro-forma or a "comments and complaints" book could be used. Whatever system is used, it should be consistent and understood by the staff and records retained with due regard for confidentiality.

A copy of the findings and recommendations will be available for Inspections of the school by the Headteacher and the Trust

A Staged Approach

There should be two stages to the complaints procedure. While it is good practice to encourage an open culture where parents feel able to raise concerns informally with a teacher, you should not introduce this as a third stage into the process.

The First Contact

There needs to be clarity as to the difference between a concern and a complaint. Taking informal concerns seriously at an early stage and addressing them promptly will reduce the numbers that develop into formal complaints. There are many occasions where concerns are resolved straight away through the class teacher, headteacher or administrative staff, depending on who is approached first. Parents must feel able to raise concerns with members of staff without formality, either in person, over the telephone or in writing. On occasion it may be appropriate for someone to act on behalf of a parent and this must be taken into consideration.

It may be unclear at first whether a parent is asking a question or expressing an opinion rather than making a complaint. A parent may want a preliminary discussion about an issue to help decide whether he or she wishes to take it further. Ultimately, parents have a statutory right to complain and if they wish an issue to be handled as a complaint then this is the approach that has to be taken. Staff views as to the seriousness of the issue should not be a deciding factor. Where there is uncertainty, the parent should be asked if they want the issue treated as a formal complaint.

Stage 1: Referral to the Headteacher

Once it is clear that the concern is a definite complaint it should be investigated according to school guidelines (see the school procedure attached at Appendix A) to ensure consistency and to make sure that nothing happens which could make it difficult for later stages to proceed smoothly.

In some cases the Headteacher may already have been involved in looking at the matter; in other cases it may be his/her first involvement and in a large school it may be appropriate to delegate the investigation at this stage to another member of staff. What is important is that a staged procedure exists which reassures complainants that their complaint will be heard by more than one person, and that Headteachers ensure that their involvement will not predominate at every stage.

It should be noted that in some cases Headteachers will have been involved in the matter informally or the complaint may be against them, in which cases Stage 1 should be carried out by the Chair of the Local Governing Body. In other cases the Headteacher is advised to become involved in complaints at Stage 1.

Stage 2: Review by the Local Governing Body

Most complaints are resolved at the first stage but it is important that there is a

robust mechanism at the second stage and that governing bodies are well prepared to deal with them.

It is important that this review is not only independent and impartial but that it is seen to be so. Complaints should always be considered by a panel, not by the full local governing body. Some governors may have previous knowledge of the problem which led to the complaint and would be unable to give fair, unbiased consideration to the issue, whilst if a complaint resulted in disciplinary action against a member of staff it would be necessary for there to be sufficient governors with no prior involvement to form a staff dismissal committee and possibly a staff dismissal appeal committee.

The panel hearing should not be adversarial but should aim to provide a non-threatening environment in which resolution can be reached. In deciding the agenda, who should attend, the number of attendees, and in taking questions from attendees, the Chair should carefully take into consideration the need to avoid any attendee feeling intimidated by the proceedings. The Chair may wish to set time limits for presentations. In exceptional circumstances the Chair may decide that the panel should hear the complainant or a particular witness separately. For example if the complaint is about bullying, the Chair may decide to give the pupil the opportunity to put their case to the panel before others are admitted to the meeting to avoid a confrontational and distressing situation. In such cases the panel will need to ensure that allegations made are shared with the other parties so that they are able to respond.

It is recommended that the panel appoint a clerk to minute the meeting. The clerk would be the contact point for the complainant and be required to:

- Set the date, time and venue of the hearing and ensure 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
- Notify all parties of the panel's decision

The aim of the meeting should be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and complainant. However, it has to be recognised that sometimes it may only be possible to establish facts and make recommendations that will satisfy the complainant that their complaint has at least been taken seriously.

What if the complaint is about a governor?

The Chair of Governors can still address the complaint. If the complaint is about the Chair of Governors it should be referred to a member of the governing body. If you receive a complaint about the governing body as a whole, you should contact the Governors' Support for advice. The Local Government Ombudsman is also available for advice at any stage of the process.

Parents of Chilton Academy Trust can complain to the Education Funding Agency and Secretary of State for Education if they have exhausted the schools own procedure and feel that their complaint remains unresolved.

Appendix A- How to Listen to Complaints

When you realise that you are listening to a complaint, try to remember these points:

Don't pass the buck	<i>Try not to keep transferring an angry person from one place to another. Take the responsibility to ensure the right person deals with it if you cannot deal with it yourself.</i>
Don't be flippant	<i>First impressions count. You and the school may be judged on your immediate reaction.</i>
Treat all complaints seriously	<i>However small or trivial it may seem to you, the complaint will be an important problem for anyone who takes the trouble to complain. Access to the procedure is a right which should not be restricted by a judgement as to the seriousness of the issue.</i>
Treat every complaint individually	<i>Even if you have already received several similar complaints the same day, it is probably the person's first chance to have their say.</i>
Be courteous and patient	<i>Be sympathetic and helpful, but do not blame other colleagues.</i>
Say who you are	<i>If you are unknown to the other person, introduce yourself.</i>
Ask for their name and use it	<i>Anonymous complaints are acceptable only where there are special circumstances.</i>
Take time to find out exactly what the problem is	<i>It is easy for someone to forget to tell you an important detail, particularly if they are upset or annoyed. Asking what outcome the complainant seeks is a good way to find out what it is really all about and will help you to know if you can resolve it</i>
Don't take the complaint personally	<i>To an angry or upset person, YOU are the school, and the only one they can put their feelings to right now.</i>
Stay cool and calm	<i>Do not argue - be polite and try to find out exactly what the person thinks is going wrong, or has gone wrong.</i>
Check you are being understood	<i>Make sure that the person understands what you are saying. Don't use jargon - it can cause confusion and annoyance to someone 'not in the know'.</i>
Don't rush	<i>Take your time. Let people have their say, and let off steam if they need to. Listen carefully and sympathetically to their problems before replying and attempting to find a solution or offer a next step.</i>

Appendix B – Copy of schools letter shared annually with Parents

Dear Parents / Carers,

Statutory Notice for parents - Compliments and complaints

At, we strive to be a school where you are more than satisfied with what we do to support your child, especially in difficult situations. When you think we do this particularly well, please let us know. Staff work hard for the pupils and we all want to recognise that.

But sometimes things may not go well. For example, you may feel that situations are not going well for your child and you may not be happy that the right things have been done to address the issue. We hope that good communication would solve such a problem. Our aim is that by careful listening, constructive discussion and sensible actions we can work together to solve problems, and so improve our school systems further. But if the problem persists you may wish to make a complaint.

When should I complain?

If you believe that something is seriously wrong, make a complaint. We will investigate it and base what we do on Chilton Academy Trust's agreed policy. (This is already available to parents via the school office and the schools website.)

Whom do I contact?

That depends on the particular situation. Often your child's class teacher or form tutor will be able to deal with the matter. More serious problems might require the intervention of a senior member of staff or the Headteacher. Most problems can be solved in this way. A complaint about the conduct of the Headteacher should go to the chair of governors, addressed to the clerk to the governors at the school address.

Certain specific complaints (e.g. about school admissions) are dealt with separately. Staff at the school or the local authority can advise you about where to direct your complaint. Details are also in the school prospectus.

What if the matter is still unresolved?

You should write to the Headteacher, in the first instance, if you are dissatisfied with the handling of a complaint. The Headteacher will investigate the matter and may invite you to a meeting to talk about it. The school may arrange for a suitable mediator to be present.

After trying all other avenues, you may decide to make a formal complaint to the governing body by sending a letter to the clerk to the governors at the school address. The governors will investigate and may invite you to meet them to discuss your concerns.

If you are still dissatisfied, after an investigation by the governing body, you may appeal directly to the Secretary of State for Education if you believe you have exhausted the school's own procedure and feel your complaint remains unresolved. In cases where you believe that the school has acted unlawfully or unreasonably, or failed to fulfill a statutory duty, again you can take your complaint to the Secretary of State for Education, contact details are available from the school.

If you want further information or support I recommend Parentline Plus to you as a

source of information and advice (telephone: 0808 800 2222 or visit their website).

All this looks very formal, but very few problems have to go through such steps because we work hard to understand and resolve problems as quickly as possible. In this way, pupils of the school get the best possible chance to succeed in their learning.

Yours sincerely,

Complaints form

Appendix C

Please complete and return to	
who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken	
Your Name	
Pupil's Name	
Your relationship to the Pupil	
Address	
Postcode	
Daytime Tel Number	
Evening Tel Number	
Please give details of your complaint here	
What actions, if any have you taken to try and resolve your complaint	
What actions do you feel might resolve the problem?	
Are you attaching any paperwork?	
Signature	
Date	
For Office Use only	
Date acknowledgement sent	By Whom
Complaint referred to:	Date: