

Ark Schools Complaints Process

Guidance Note for Schools

1. Introduction

This guidance note is for school staff and senior leaders involved in the complaints process. It supports schools in implementing the Ark Schools Complaints Policy and is for internal use only.

Figure A, below, is from the Ark Schools Complaints policy and outlines the complaints process from the perspective of the complainant.

The table at **appendix A** outlines the key roles & responsibilities for each stage of this process from a staffing perspective. **Sections 2, 3 and 4** give more detail for staff directly involved in managing complaints.

For further support on managing complaints, contact the Governance Team - governance.team@arkonline.org.

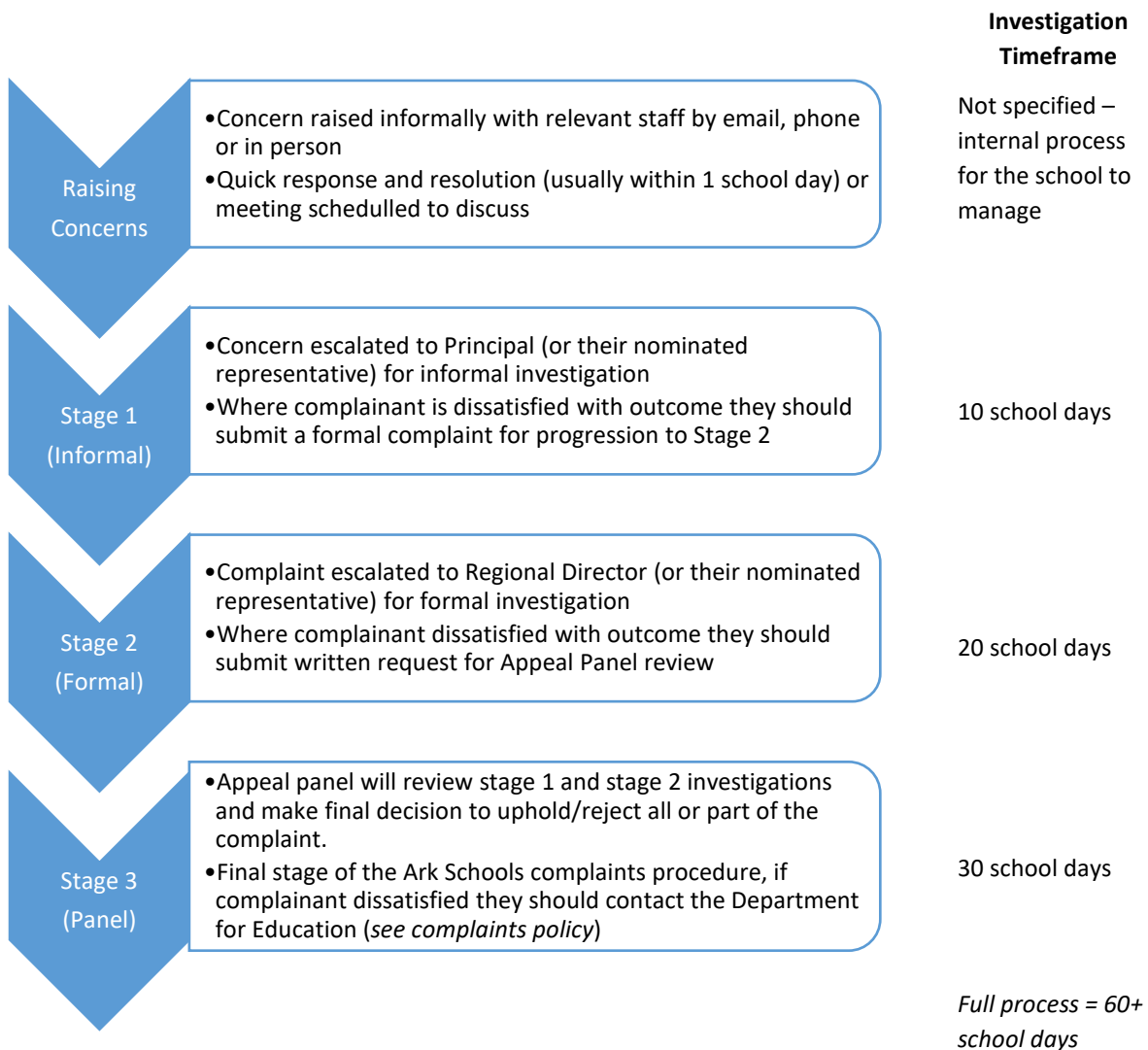


Figure A: Complaints process from the Ark Schools Complaints Policy

2. Managing Concerns and Stage 1 (informal) complaints

Refer to Appendix A: Roles & Responsibilities for a summary table of this process.

- i. **Administration:** Concerns and stage 1 complaints should be submitted directly to the school and then managed and tracked by relevant school staff.

Note: Any concern or stage 1 complaint received by the central Governance Team or Admin Team will be forwarded directly to the relevant school and will not be monitored further – this is the school’s responsibility.

- ii. **Approach:** Schools should ensure that all concerns and stage 1 complaints are treated seriously and responded to/resolved as quickly as possible. If, at any time, the issue raises safeguarding concerns this should immediately be escalated according to the school’s Safeguarding procedures.

- iii. **Staffing responsibility:**

- Concerns should be dealt with by the member of staff best placed to resolve the concern. This will usually be the relevant class/subject teacher or member of the Senior Leadership Team.
- Stage 1 complaints are the Principal’s responsibility though they may nominate a relevant member of staff to conduct the investigation and respond on their behalf.

Note: Where a stage 1 complaint is about a Principal, the Regional Director has responsibility and may nominate a relevant member of staff to conduct the informal investigation.

- iv. **Timeframe:**

- Concerns should be dealt with as soon as they arise (usually within 1 school day). Where this is not possible, an informal meeting should be arranged for a later date.
- Stage 1 complaints should be acknowledged within 2 school days then investigated and responded to within 10 school days.

- v. **Record Keeping:** Schools *must* keep a record of any stage 1 complaints received, including the response / outcome. Schools should be mindful of GDPR guidelines when recording personal data and complaint logs and records should be kept confidential to the relevant administrator(s) and senior leaders. Records held of the complainant’s personal data should be minimal, only enough to identify who made the complaint, what it was about and the response in case of escalation to stage 2.

Note: a complaints log template is available from the Governance Team.

3. Managing Stage 2 (formal) Complaints

Refer to Appendix A: Roles & Responsibilities for a summary table of this process.

- i. **Administration:** Complaints must have been through Stage 1 before they can progress to Stage 2. A Formal Complaints Form (Appendix B) should be submitted to the central governance team who manage the formal complaints process.

Note: upon request, schools will need to provide relevant details of the stage 1 complaint for central records.

Note: The LGB Principal's report, submitted to governors three times a year, confirms the total number of formal complaints received in each term and a final total for the year.

- ii. **Approach:** Formal complaints should be dealt with as quickly as possible in-line with the Ark Schools Complaints Policy. Investigators should always maintain a non-biased perspective, gather relevant information as needed and consider the allegations and evidence on a factual basis, linked to relevant statutory legislation where needed. The Governance Team monitor the progression of all formal complaints and will liaise with senior leaders where necessary to ensure compliance with published timeframes.

Note: further guidance and templates for conducting an investigation are available from the Governance Team.

- iii. **Staffing responsibility:** Stage 2 (formal) complaints are the Regional Director's responsibility. They may nominate a relevant member of staff to conduct the investigation on their behalf however, the final response/outcome should come directly from the Regional Director.
- iv. **Timeframe:**
 - The Governance Team will acknowledge the formal complaint within two school days and forward to the relevant Regional Director.
 - The investigation and response should be completed within 20 school days.
- v. **Record Keeping:** A central Formal Complaints Log will be maintained by the governance team and owned by the Director of Governance. Schools, investigators and senior leaders should regularly liaise with the governance team throughout any formal complaint process to ensure the log is kept up to date.

4. Managing Stage 3 (Panel) Complaints

Refer to Appendix A: Roles & Responsibilities for a summary table of this process.

- i. **Administration:** Complaints must have been through stage 1 and stage 2 before complainants can request a review panel (stage 3). Complainants must make the request for a review panel within 20 school days of receiving the outcome letter from the stage 2 investigation. The request should be submitted to the central governance team who manage and track the formal complaints process.

Note: upon receipt of the request, the central governance team will instruct the school's Clerk to Governors to convene a review panel. The Clerk is responsible for all panel administration and will liaise with the central governance team for monitoring the progression of the complaint.
- ii. **Approach:** The complaint review panel will consider statements and evidence from all parties and will review the stage 1 and 2 investigations. The panel will either uphold or dismiss the complaint, in part or in full, and may make recommendations for changes to school policy/practice if applicable.
- iii. **Staffing responsibility:** A Complaint Review Panel, made up of two governors and one independent person, is responsible for Stage 3 complaints. The Clerk to

Governors will manage the panel process and send final outcome letters to all relevant parties.

iv. **Timeframe:**

- The Governance Team will acknowledge the request for a review panel within two school days and forward to the relevant Clerk for next steps.
- The Complaint Review Panel should be held within 30 school days of receiving the request.

v. **Record Keeping:** A central Formal Complaints Log will be maintained by the governance team and owned by the Director of Governance. The panel Clerk will liaise with the governance team to ensure the log is kept up to date throughout the stage 3 process.

***Note:** Stage 3 is the final stage of the Ark Schools complaints process. If complainants wish to take the matter further, they can escalate to the Department for Education. See section 13 of the Arks Schools Complaints Policy.*

Appendix A: Roles and Responsibilities

Complaint level	Administration	Responsibility	Timeframe	Record Keeping
Concerns	School	Relevant staff best placed to resolve (e.g. <i>Class/Subject Teacher</i>)	Usually within 1 school day (<i>this may be to set-up a later meeting</i>)	No central requirement – manage according to the school’s internal policies
Stage 1 (Informal)	School <i>Including monitoring to ensure timeframes adhered to</i>	Principal <i>(they may delegate investigation to a relevant member of staff)</i>	Acknowledge within 2 school days Investigation & response within 10 school days	School to record basic details of complainant, summary of complaint, staff involved and response/outcome
Stage 2 (Formal)	Central Governance Team <i>Including monitoring to ensure timeframes adhered to</i>	Regional Director <i>(they may delegate investigation to a relevant member of staff)</i>	Acknowledge within 2 school days Investigation & response within 20 school days	Central: Formal Complaints Log to record all relevant details, including information from stage 1 complaint
Stage 3 (Panel)	Clerk to Governors <i>Liaise with central governance team for recording & monitoring</i>	Complaint Review Panel <i>(two governors and one independent member)</i>	Panel meeting to be held within 30 school days of request. Papers circulated 5 school days before the panel meeting	Clerk to maintain panel records, including outcome letters Central: Formal Complaints Log to record relevant details and outcome

Appendix B

Ark Schools Formal Complaints Form

This form should be used to raise a formal complaint only *after* a matter has been raised with the school at stage 1 of the complaints process and you are not satisfied with the response. Please refer to the Ark Schools Complaints Policy (available on the school's website) when completing this form.

Formal complaints should be submitted to governance.team@arkonline.org.

School Name (<i>where applicable</i>)	
Name	
Name of pupil, year group and your relationship to them (<i>where applicable</i>)	
Contact email address	
Contact telephone	
Contact address	
Details of the complaint	
What action has been taken so far, which staff member has dealt with the matter and what solution has been offered (<i>where relevant</i>)?	
The reason this was not satisfactory for you	
What action would you like to be taken to resolve the matter?	

Signed.....

Date.....