

St Thomas More Catholic Primary School

COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

Catholic Academies aim to be places where love of one's neighbour is obvious at all times. As St John reports, Christ said to his disciples at the Last Supper "This is my commandment, that you love one another, as I have loved you".

Catholic Academies are staffed by teachers who are not only qualified and expert in their own field but who also, having freely chosen to become teachers in a Catholic institution, commit themselves to care for and help children in every way possible consistent with Catholic doctrine, principles and the Catholic ethos of the Academy. Nevertheless, as in any organisation, parents may from time to time raise a concern.

The Academy Committee of St Thomas More has adopted the following procedure to deal with formal complaints from members of the Academy community or general public

Stage 1 - Dealing with concerns at the earliest opportunity

If parents, pupils or members of the public have concerns they should:

1. Discuss their concerns with the member of staff most directly involved *and, if not satisfied;*
2. Discuss their concerns with the Principal.

At each stage in the procedure, Academies will want to keep in mind ways in which a concern or complaint can be resolved. It might be sufficient to acknowledge that the concern or 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 Academy policies in light of the complaint

Complainants should be encouraged to state what actions they feel might resolve the problem at any stage. An admission that the Academy could have handled the situation better is not the same as an admission of negligence. Equally, an effective procedure will identify areas of agreement between the parties. It is also of importance to clarify any misunderstandings that might have occurred as this can create a positive atmosphere in which to discuss any outstanding issues.

Only where all these avenues have been tried and found unsatisfactory should the complainant take a complaint to the Chair of the Academy Committee or the Secretary to the Academy Committee.

If the Principal considers s/he can do no more to resolve the complaint it should be stated explicitly that the complainant can write to the Chair of the Academy Committee if not satisfied. Complainants should be encouraged to take this step to resolve an issue which might otherwise cause ongoing resentment or distress.

Principles in forming our complaints procedure

This procedure is designed to:

- be well publicised and easily accessible
- 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
- allow a mediation process if agreed by the complainant
- allow for a hearing of a panel of Committee Representatives, where appropriate
- respect people's desire for confidentiality, wherever possible
- address all points of issue, provide an effective response and appropriate redress where necessary
- provide information to the Academy's Senior Management Team so that services can be improved

Stage 2 - Making a Complaint to the Academy Committee

Where informal attempts have been unsuccessful in resolving a complaint, the complainant should write to the Chair of the Academy Committee or the Secretary to the Academy Committee at the Academy address. The envelope should be marked 'FOR IMMEDIATE ACTION' and staff in the Academy office must ensure that the letter is forwarded without delay.

The complainant will be asked to complete a complaint form if they have not already done so. The Chair of the Academy Committee or the Secretary will offer to help an individual to complete the form if appropriate

On receipt of the complaint from the Chair of the Academy Committee (or other Committee Representative) will:

- 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

At this point the Chair of the Academy Committee will decide whether the complaint should go straight to the Committee's complaints panel or whether a mediation stage should be offered. Mediation can only proceed if the complainant and the Principal are willing for it to be tried. If mediation is not successful, the complaint will be considered by the Committee's complaints panel.

Mediation

Mediation can be a good way to resolve a complaint because:

- It gives both complainant and Principal another opportunity to hear each other's points of view (with a third party facilitating)
- It gives the third party an opportunity to help Principal and complainant identify and build on areas of agreement
- It gives Principal and complainant a structure within which they can resolve remaining differences.
- If both complainant and Principal emerge from the mediation satisfied, that is the best foundation for a continuing positive relationship between them.
- Even if the complaint continues to a Committee panel, the issues to be considered are likely to be much clearer following the mediation.

Mediation may elicit one or more of the responses listed below from either party:

- an acknowledgment that the complaint is valid in whole or in part.
- 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 Academy policies in light of the complaint.

Stage 3 – Academy Committee Complaints Panel

Where the complainant is still not satisfied that their complaint has been dealt with fully and properly, they may choose to take it to a panel of Academy Committee Representatives.

Establishing a complaints panel

The Academy Committee should agree the composition of the complaints appeals panel at the first meeting of the Committee each year.

As Representatives may not be available at all times, Academy Committees are advised to agree the names of 4 or 5 possible Representatives from

whom a panel of three may be drawn. The decision about the membership of a particular panel will depend on factors such as availability, whether any Representatives have prior knowledge etc. and the decision will be made by the Chair of the Academy Committee.

When the Secretary to the Academy Committee receives a copy of the complaint form he/she will inform the Academy Committee that a complaint has been received and that it has been passed to the panel to deal with. **No further information about the complaint should be shared with other Representatives.**

There are several points which any Representative sitting on a complaints panel needs to remember:

- a) It is important that the appeal hearing is independent and impartial and that it is seen to be so. No Committee Representative may sit on the panel if they have had a prior involvement in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it.
- b) The aim of the hearing, which needs to be held in private, will always be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the Academy and the complainant
- c) The panel chair will ensure that the proceedings are as welcoming as possible. The layout of the room will set the tone and care is needed to ensure the setting is not intimidating and not adversarial
- d) Representatives sitting on the panel need to be aware of the complaints procedure and any other procedures relating to the complaint eg. Anti-bullying, Behaviour and Discipline, Equal Opportunities, Safeguarding or SEN policies.

The Chair of the Panel will be nominated by the Chair of the Academy Committee and is responsible for ensuring that both complainant and Principal are given a fair hearing and that the panel arrives at its judgement without fear or favour.

Remit of the panel: the complaints panel can:

- dismiss the complaint in whole or in part;
- uphold the complaint in whole or in part;
- decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint
- recommend changes to the Academy's systems or procedures to ensure problems of a similar nature do not recur

It may:

- Consider and, if appropriate, criticise the way in which an operational decision was communicated – **but cannot overturn the decision itself**
- Consider the thoroughness with which the Principal investigated a complaint about a member of staff – **but cannot expect the Principal to provide details about confidential discussions with that staff member.**

- Consider the manner in which a complaint about any decision was addressed – **but cannot expect the Principal to have changed the decision**
- Consider and, if appropriate, identify limitations in a policy or procedures – **but cannot make or improve policy.** (It can, however, recommend that the policy be reviewed by the Academy Committee to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not recur, and individual panel members can subsequently play their part in improving the policy)
- Consider whether it should recommend that the Academy Committee offers appropriate redress

Format of a Panel Hearing

1. Complainant, who may be accompanied by a ‘friend’, and Principal will enter the room where the hearing is taking place together.
2. The chair will introduce the panel members and the Secretary and outline the process.
3. The complainant is invited to explain the complaint
4. The Principal may question the complainant
5. The panel will question the complainant
6. The Principal is then invited to explain the Academy’s actions
7. The complainant may question the Principal
8. The panel will question the Principal
9. The complainant is then invited to sum up their complaint.
10. The Principal is then invited to sum up the Academy’s actions and response to the complaint.
11. The chair explains that both parties will hear from the panel within five working days.
12. Both parties leave together while the panel decides on the issues.
13. The Secretary will remain with the panel to clarify the panel’s decision and the content of the decision letter to the complainant.

Notes

The hearing should be made as unthreatening as possible to all parties.

The panel may ask questions at any point. Panel members must find ways to ask probing questions while maintaining an air of impartiality.

The Principal must have no contact with members of the complaints panel except when the complainant is present to preserve the principle of neutrality. This means that Principal and complainant enter and leave the room where the hearing is held together.

The chair of the panel should discourage the introduction of fresh documentary evidence at the hearing – there should be every encouragement to produce the evidence in advance so that both sides have time to study it. However, if new and relevant evidence is accepted by the chair, the chair will adjourn the hearing for a few minutes to allow everyone to read the document. Both parties must leave the hearing room during the adjournment.

Some notes on exceptional circumstances

For the sake of clarity, the description above does not cover exceptional circumstances which might include:

1. The Chair of the Academy Committee may not be able to find three Committee Representatives who have no prior knowledge of the case

If a case has become a major talking point around the community, the chair can nominate three Committee Representatives with minimal prior knowledge

If there are still insufficient Committee Representatives able to sit on a panel, the Academy Committee in consultation with the Board of Directors or Diocese will put in place an alternative fair process.

2. The complaint may not be against the Principal

A complaint to the Academy Committee complaints panel will never be against a junior member of staff (it may be against the way the Principal handled a complaint against a junior member of staff) but it is conceivable that a senior manager will appropriately stand in for the Principal. That would need to be considered very carefully but if agreed the senior manager would be ‘the Principal’ for the purpose of the panel.

There may be exceptional circumstances in which the complaint is against the Chair of the Academy Committee – e.g. for wilfully refusing to deal with a complaint. In those circumstances the procedure above would be adapted and every reference to ‘Principal’ would be read as ‘Chair of the Academy Committee’.

3. The complainant and/or the Principal may wish to call witnesses

The use of witnesses is discouraged. In nearly every case, a complaints panel will want to work with **written** witness statements if appropriate, but there may be particular circumstances where the presence of witnesses is necessary to establish key facts. In those cases, witnesses must be agreed in advance. They will remain outside the hearing room until called in to give their evidence. They can be questioned by the panel members and the other party. They will leave the room when their evidence is completed.

4. The complainant may be a pupil at the Academy

Good Academies encourage pupils to raise concerns and would expect

to resolve them before it becomes a formal complaint to the Academy Committee. If it is not resolved it would be very unusual if parents have not by picked it up and made it a parental complaint. However, if a pupil is the complainant, panel members will wish to ensure that the same process is followed but special consideration is given to ensuring that the child is supported and does not feel intimidated. The panel needs to give the views of the child equal consideration to those of adults

5. Vexatious complaints

If properly followed, a good complaints procedure will limit the number of complaints that become protracted. However, there will be occasions when despite all stages of the procedures having been followed, the complainant remains dissatisfied. If the complainant tries to re-open the same issue, the chair of the Academy Committee is able to inform them in writing that the procedure has been exhausted and the matter is now closed. If parents make repeated complaints that appear to be vexatious the Academy is encouraged to seek advice from the Diocesan Academies Commission.

Writing the decision letter

The Secretary should ensure that s/he has clear wording stating the panel decision about each of the issues that the panel considered before the panel is allowed to finish. The Secretary will use that wording to draft the decision letter. This should be sent to all members of the panel for checking. Once approved by all three panel members, it should be sent to the complainant with a copy to the Principal.

The letter should clearly express how seriously the panel considered the complaint.

The Secretary should be careful that the letter sticks to the facts and gives no hint of partiality.

The Secretary should ensure that the letter reaches the complainant and the Principal by the deadline stated in your policy and/or in a statement by the chair at the end of the hearing – usually five working days.

Monitoring Complaints

As well as addressing an individual's complaint, the process of listening to and resolving complaints would contribute to Academy improvements. When individual complaints are heard, Academies may identify issues that need to be addressed. The monitoring and review of complaints by the Academy and Academy Committee can be useful to evaluating the Academy's performance. Any discussion of complaints by the Academy Committee or others in the Academy community should not name or be able to identify individuals.

The flowchart overleaf summarises the complaints process.



The Dominic Barberi Multi Academy Company

Cricket Road

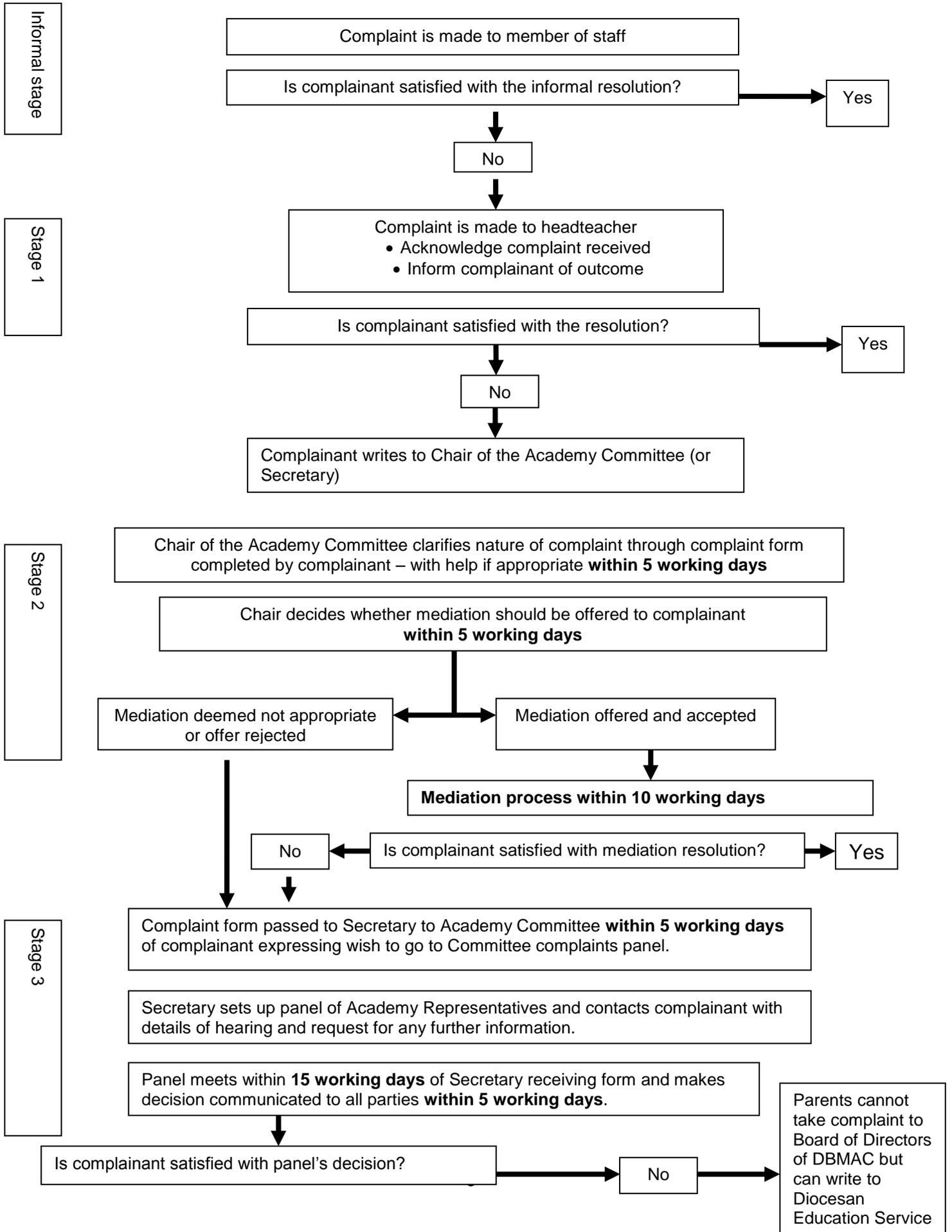
Oxford

OX4 3DR

Tel: (01865) 749933 x 209

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Complaints process from start to finish



St Thomas More Catholic School

COMPLAINTS FORM

Notes

The form overleaf can be used by any person making a complaint about the operation of the Academy which is not covered by an alternative specific procedure. Complaints will most often come from parents or carers but may also come from pupils/students or members of the public, e.g. Academy neighbours.

Anyone receiving this form should be advised verbally that help in completing it is available from the Academy. A member of Academy staff who is familiar with the process should be nominated to give help.

If it is appropriate for a member of staff to look into this complaint, it should be returned to the Principal.

If it is appropriate that it should be dealt with by the Academy Committee, it should be returned to the Secretary to the Academy Committee at the Academy.

St Thomas More Catholic Primary School

COMPLAINTS FORM

Please complete and return to the Chair of the Academy Committee at St Thomas More Catholic Primary School, who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

Your name:

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.....

Address:

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.....
.....
.....
.....

Postcode:

.....
.....

Daytime telephone number:

.....

Evening telephone number:

.....

If applicable, name of child(ren) at Academy:

.....
.....

Please give details of your complaint:

What action, if any, have you already taken to try and resolve your complaint?
(Who did you speak to and what was the response?)

Your relationship to the Academy, e.g. parent, carer, neighbour, member of public:

What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?

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

Signature:

.....
.....

Date:

.....
.....

Official Use:

Date of acknowledgement sent:

.....



The Dominic Barberi Multi Academy Company

Cricket Road

Oxford

OX4 3DR

Tel: (01865) 749933 x 209

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By Whom:

.....
.....

Complaint referred to:

.....
...

Date:

.....
.....

St Thomas More Catholic Primary School

Sharing your concerns about your child's education A guide for parents

Catholic Academies aim to be places where love of one's neighbour is obvious at all times. As St John reports, Christ said to his disciples at the Last Supper "This is my commandment, that you love one another, as I have loved you".

Catholic Academies are staffed by teachers who are not only qualified and expert in their own field but who also, having freely chosen to become teachers in a Catholic institution, commit themselves to care for and help children in every way possible consistent with Catholic doctrine, principles and the Catholic ethos of the Academy. Nevertheless, as in any organisation, parents may from time to time raise a concern.

St Thomas More Catholic Primary School recognises that at times things can go wrong. This guidance will help you understand how to resolve concerns you may have about your child's education.

The Academy has procedures for dealing with concerns or complaints and we value any feedback about our services, including compliments and suggestions. If you are concerned about any aspect of your child's education, you should contact the Principal at the Academy.

The Academy's Academy Committee has overall responsibility for the Academy and for ensuring the well-being of pupils and that all pupils receive an appropriate and high standard of education.

The Principal is responsible for making decisions on a daily basis about the Academy's internal management and organisation. So you should contact the Academy if you are concerned about an issue such as:

- your child's academic progress
- special education needs provision
- your child's welfare
- bullying
- something that has happened in Academy.

How do I complain to the Academy?

First, we hope you will speak to the relevant member of staff as soon as you have a concern. This will be the class teacher.

This informal approach is nearly always the quickest and most effective way of resolving your concerns.

If you feel that your concern has not been resolved, then it is important to speak to or write to the Principal who will look into your concern.

If you are unhappy with the Principal's response you should write with your complaint to the Chair of the Academy Committee/Secretary to the Academy Committee at the Academy address. Mark your envelope 'FOR IMMEDIATE ATTENTION'.

This is how your complaint will be handled

Within 5 working days the Chair of the Academy Committee will clarify the nature of your complaint by asking you to complete a complaint form and will offer help in completing the form, if appropriate

Within 5 working days of receiving the form the Chair will decide whether mediation should be offered to help you and the Principal explore possible resolution.

If mediation is agreed, the Chair of the Academy Committee will endeavour to set up the meeting **within 10 working days**. If that timescale is not possible you will be told the reason.

If mediation is not deemed appropriate or if it is not successful, the Chair of the Academy Committee or Secretary will set up a panel of Committee Representatives to meet **within 15 working days** to consider your complaint. The Secretary will provide details of the hearing and will request any further information you may wish to provide.

The complaints panel will consist of three Committee Representatives who (as far as possible) will have no prior knowledge of the events being complained of. The panel will be supported by a secretary who will take notes during the hearing and will stay with the panel while they make their decision in case Committee Representatives need to be reminded about responses to a particular question. The panel will hear the complaint impartially and make their decision without fear or favour.

Five working days before the hearing the secretary will send to you, the complainant, the Principal and the three panel members, copies of all papers submitted by both sides so that there is sufficient time to read the evidence before the hearing.

At the hearing

Parents may be accompanied by a friend or supporter

1. You and the Principal will be invited into the room where the panel is being held at the same time.
2. After introductions, you, the complainant will be invited to explain your complaint,
3. The Principal may question you

4. The panel will question you
5. The Principal will be invited to explain the Academy's actions
6. You, the complainant may question the Principal
7. The panel will question the Principal
8. The panel may ask questions at any point.
9. You, the complainant will then be invited to sum up your complaint.
10. The Principal will then be invited to sum up the Academy's actions and response to the complaint.
11. The chair will explain that you and the Principal will hear from the panel **within five working days**.
12. Both you and the Principal will leave together while the panel decides on the issues.
13. The Secretary will remain with the panel.

Can I take my complaint further?

Not all complaints can be resolved to the satisfaction of the complainant. For example, there will be occasions, when after investigation, the staff member has been seen to act appropriately and reasonably. Therefore, it is possible that a complaint may not be upheld.

The Board of Directors of the Dominic Barberi Multi Academy Company cannot investigate Academy matters on a parent's behalf nor can it review how the Academy has dealt with your complaint. However, if you feel that the Academy has acted unreasonably or not followed the correct procedures, you can write to the Director of Academies at the Diocesan Academies Commission. The letter should include the time limit for any such appeal.