

Guidance for school governors when conducting/commissioning an independent review/investigation as part of the complaints procedure

It may be necessary as part of the school's complaint procedures to commission an independent review or investigation, especially if governors have too much knowledge of the complaint and therefore cannot investigate the matter in an open, transparent and fair manner. This paper lays out some points to be considered when setting up the review or investigation.

The school's complaints policy is a key document in this process. In addition, the Department for Education's document – *Best Practice advice for School Complaints Procedures*, published in January 2016 – provides some helpful information: www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-complaints-procedures

Points to consider

- Be clear that the complaints co-ordinator (head/chair/other staff member or governor) manages the review/investigation process
- Select an appropriate independent reviewer/investigator –the local authority and the education team at the Diocese will be good sources of advice
- Be clear about the costs involved
- Provide the reviewer/investigator with clear guidance on
 - the focus of the review/investigation and the specific points that need to be covered and reported on
 - the nature of the documentation/report that is to be produced, for example - are recommendations required, are specific questions to be answered. The report should be impartial, non-adversarial and the language used should be plain and simple to understand. It should address all the points at issue and provide an effective response.
 - the documentation that is required at the end of the review
 - who to send the draft report to
 - who “owns” the report
- Ensure the reviewer/investigator is clear about who the report will be submitted to, once the review/investigation has been completed
- Be precise about the circulation of the report – who will have access to it when it is completed?
- Refer the reviewer/investigator to *Best Practice Advice for School Complaints Procedures* page 19 interviewing – best practice tips, and page 16 the role of the investigator
- Ensure the reviewer/investigator keeps clear written notes of evidence/interviews etc., and that notes from meetings are agreed and signed by the interviewee.
- Ensure the timescales of the process are set out clearly and link to the school's complaints procedure
- Be clear with the complainant about timescales of the review/investigation and how the outcome of the report will be communicated to them

- Ensure the complainant is advised promptly if there should be a delay to the review/investigation due to any complexities of the matter
- Ensure the complainant understands what is likely to/may happen after the report is completed
- Consider sharing the report with the Diocese before it is circulated, in order to gain an additional perspective on the report
- Be aware that all documentation could be subject at some future date to a Freedom of Information or Data Protection request. Only write in all correspondence what can be evidenced and keep careful records.