

**Complaints’ Procedure**

Introduction:

* Governing bodies are required by law to have a procedure in place to deal with complaints relating to aspects of the school or the provision of facilities or certain services at the school. The law requires that this procedure must be publicised.
* The vast majority of complaints and concerns can be resolved informally.
* A complaint can be brought by a parent of a registered child at the school or any person who has been provided with a service or a facility at the school. The procedure refers to this person as a complainant.
* The complainant must feel able to raise concerns and complaints with members of staff without formality, either in person, by telephone or in writing.
* Complainants may be unclear whether they are asking a question or expressing an opinion rather than making an education complaint. Complainant are invited to request preliminary discussion about an issue to help decide whether he or she wishes to take it further. We recommend contacting class teachers, in the first instance, to raise any concerns or ask any questions (except where the comment/ question relates directly to the behaviour of that member of staff, in which case complainants are invited to contact the head teacher directly).
* A concern or unresolved problem only becomes a complaint only when the complainant asserts that a school has acted wrongly in some significant decision, action or failure to take action.
* Even when a complaint has been made it can be resolved or withdrawn at any stage.
* The nominated member of staff with responsibility for the operation and management of the school complaints procedure is the head teacher. In the absence of the head teacher, the deuputy head takes on this responsibility.

Special Circumstances

Any complaint or other notice that suggests that a child has been at risk of significant harm through violence, emotional abuse, sexual interference or neglect may be referred without further notice to Children’s Social Care and/or to the social services authority for the area in which the child lives. The school may also choose to make such a referral without necessarily informing the complainant. If a social services authority decides to investigate a situation this may postpone or supersede investigation by the head teacher or governing body.

Other Solutions to Complaints

Where a matter can be resolved through a legal appeal it will not be considered as a formal complaint. The key areas are: admissions decisions; certain decisions relating to formal assessment of special educational needs; and decisions to permanently exclude a child.

Dealing with concerns informally

* The complainant should be given an opportunity to discuss their concern with the appropriatemember of staff. An appointment may need to be made. In smaller schools or on major issues, the Headteacher may be the appropriate member of staff at this stage.
* The complainant should be able to bring a friend to any discussion.
* The member of staff dealing with the concern should make sure that the complainant is clear what action (if any) or monitoring of the situation has been agreed.
* This stage should be completed speedily and concluded in writing with appropriate detail.
* Where no satisfactory solution has been found, the complainant should be informed that s/he will need to consider whether to make a formal complaint in writing to the Headteacher. To assist in this process a complaint form isprovided in appendix 1.1.

Stage 1 – Referral to the Headteacher for investigation

* 1. Where formal complaints have been received, the Headteacher should acknowledge will complaint in writing. In some cases the Headteacherwill have already been involved in looking at the matter; in others it will be his/her first involvement.
  2. The Headteacherwill normallyarrange to meet with the complainant to supplement any information previously provided. In exceptional circumstances (immediate risk to children, absence of complainant, aggressive behaviour by the complainant) the head teacher may go ahead with an investigation without meeting the complainant; the deputy head may carry out these meetings if the head teacher is unavailable.
  3. If the complaint is against a member of staff the Headteacherwill talk to the staff member against whom the complaint has been made.

1.4 If necessary, the Headteacherwill interview witnesses and take statements from those involved.

1.5 The Headteacherwill keep reasonable written records of meetings, telephone conversations and other documentation. These may be summary notes, rather than verbatim records.

1.6 Once all the relevant facts have been established, the Headteacherwillproduce a written response to the complainant. The Headteacher may also meet the complainant to discuss/resolve the matter before confirming the outcome in writing.

1.7 The written response will include a full explanation of the decision and the reasons for it. Where appropriate, it will include what action the school will take to resolve the complaint.

1.8 Stage 1 will normally be completed in 15 school days. However, it is recognised that where the case is complex, it may prove difficult to meet this timetable. In such cases, the Headteacherwillcontact the complainant giving a revised target date.

1.9 Schools will not pay financial compensation as a response to complaints, though may spend money on a relevant educational purpose (e.g. paying a fee for a repeat examination).

1.10 The formal stage 1 response will also advise the complainant that if s/he is not satisfied with the response and wishes to take the matter further, s/he should write to the Chair of the Governing Body within 15 school days of receiving the outcome letter. The outcome letter will set out the name of the Chair of the Governing Body and the address to which the complainant can send the letter.

1.11 Complaints against the Headteacher - If the complaint is wholly or mainly about the Headteacher, the Governing Body will consider the complaint in accordance with Stage 2 of the procedure described below. However, before Stage 2 is instigated the Chair of the Governing Body will invite the Headteacher to respond to the complaint in writing within ten school days. The Chair will send a copy of the Headteacher’s response to the complainant who will be asked to indicate within five school days of receipt of the response whether s/he is satisfied with the response. If the complainant is not satisfied with the response stage 2 should commence as described in paragraph 2.1 below.

Stage 2 – Consideration by the Governing Body

2.1 If the complainant decides to take the matter further, the Chair of the Governing Body will write to the complainant to acknowledge the complaint within five school days of receipt of the complaint. A copy of the acknowledgement and the complaints form will be sent to the Headteacher and the Clerk to the Governing Body.

2.2 Investigating the complaint – If the complaint has been investigated at Stage 1, the result of the investigation will be made available to the Clerk/Chair by the Headteacher. However, where the complaint is against the Headteacher and the complaint is referred to Stage 2, the Chair of the Governing Body will decide how the complaint should be investigated. Where the facts of the complaint are clearly established, it is unlikely for the Chair of the Governing Body to order an investigation. The matter may instead be escalated directly to the Complaints Appeal Panel.

2.3 In this situation, the Governing bodies will establish a Complaints Appeal Panel (CAP) drawing on three governors with no prior, direct involvement with the complaint. In deciding the make-up of the CAP, where possible the governing body will try and ensure that it is a cross-section of the categories of governor and sensitive to the issues of race, gender and religious affiliation.

2.4 The Headteacher should not serve on the CAP. If the Chair of the governing body has had any prior involvement in the complaint then the Chair must not sit on the CAP.

2.5 The CAP will consider the complaint on the basis of the written evidence and set up a hearing to hear both parties. The CAP will reconsider the issues raised in the original complaint and not confine themselves to consideration of procedural issues.

2.6 The Chair of the CAP should take a decision at the beginning of Stage 2 on whether to seek the services of a local authority Clerk to:

* Deal with the administration of the procedure;
* Provide independent advice on procedure and evidence;
* Ensure that the relevant facts are established;
* Minute the meeting; and
* Draft the decision letter.

2.7 The Clerk/Chair of the CAP will write to the complainant to explain how the review will be conducted. The letter should be copied to the Headteacher.

2.8 The Clerk/Chair of the CAP will confirm the date of the meeting with the other governor(s).

2.9 The complainant and Headteacherwill be invited to attend the meeting. The date and time of the meeting should be convenient to the complainant and Headteacher, within reason. The notification will inform the complainant of his/her right to be accompanied to the meeting by a friend/representative. It will also explain how the meeting will be conducted and of the complainant’s right to submit further written evidence to the committee.

2.10 The Headteacherwill also be invited to prepare a written report for the CAP in response to the complaint.

2.11 All relevant correspondence regarding the complaint will be circulated to the CAP, the complainant and the Headteacher in advance of the meeting.

2.12 If the Headteacher and/or the complainant wish to call witnesses, the agreement of the Chair of the CAP should be obtained in advance of the meeting.

2.13 It is the responsibility of the Chair of the CAP to ensure that the meeting is properly conducted. However, the proceedings should be as informal as possible.

2.14 The aim of the meeting should be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant. However, at the end of the meeting the CAP will need to issue a finding in writing either upholding or not upholding the complaint or upholding some parts and not others.

2.15 If either party wishes to introduce previously undisclosed evidence or witnesses, it is in the interest of natural justice to adjourn the meeting so that the other side has time to respond to the additional information, allegations or facts.

2.16 The meeting will allow for:-

* The complainant to explain his or her complaint and the Headteacher to explain the reasons for his or her decision;
* The Headteacher to question the complainant about the complaint and the complainant to question the Headteacher;
* The CAP to have an opportunity to question both the complainant and the Headteacher;
* Any party to have the right to bring witnesses (subject to the approval of the Chair of CAP) and all parties having the right to question all the witnesses; and
* A final statement by the Headteacher and complainant.

2.17 The Chair of the CAP will explain to the complainant and the Headteacher that the CAP will consider its decision and a written response will be sent to both parties as soon as possible. The complainant, Headteacher and any witnesses will then leave.

2.18 The CAP will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented and reach an unanimous, or at least a majority, decision on the complaint. Where appropriate the CAP can decide on the action to be taken to resolve the complaint and/or suggest recommended changes to the school’s system or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not happen again.

2.19 As in Section 1.8 above, the CAP will not pay financial compensation as a response to a complaint, though may spend money on an appropriate educational purpose.

2.20 The Clerk/Chair of CAP will send a written statement outlining the decision with reasons to both the complainant and the Headteacher.

2.21 Stage 2 should be completed in 15 school days. However, it is recognised that this timetable is likely to prove impossible for complaints which are complex. In such cases the chair of the complaints committee will write to the complainant and Headteacher giving a revised target date.

Role of the Secretary of State, Department for Education:

If the complainant is unhappy with the way in which a school has dealt with the complaint, they may be able to approach the Secretary of State, Department for Education to intervene.

For the Secretary of State to intervene following a complaint, he/she needs to be sure that either

The school has acted or is proposing to act unreasonably in the exercise or performance of its functions imposed by or under the Education Act 1996; or

The school has failed to discharge any duty imposed by or for the purposes of the Education Act 1996.

Guidance on making a submission about a school complaint to the Department for Education can be found on Department for Education website at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/complain-about-school>

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Appendix 1.1

If you have tried unsuccessfully to resolve your complaint and wish to take the matter further, please complete this form and send it to the Headteacher. {If your complaint is against the Headteacher you will need to send the form to the Chair of the Governing Body}

School Complaint Form

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Your Name:** |  | | | |
| **Address:** |  | | | |
|  | | | **Post Code** |  |
| **Telephone Number (Home):** | |  | | |
| **Telephone Number (Day):** | |  | | |
| **Telephone Number (Mobile):** | |  | | |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Name of Child** |  |
| **Date of Birth of Child** |  |

|  |
| --- |
| **What is your complaint about and what would you like the Headteacher to do?** |
|  |
| *Continue on a separate sheet as necessary* |

|  |
| --- |
| **When did you discuss your concern/complaint with the appropriate member of staff?** |
|  |
| *Continue on a separate sheet as necessary* |

|  |
| --- |
| **What was the result of the discussion?** |
|  |
| *Continue on a separate sheet as necessary* |

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Signed:** |  | **Date:** |  |