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Complaints Policy and Procedures

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Introduction

Your views are welcomed. In the spirit of true partnership between home, school and the community, you are encouraged to say what you think should go on within the school. Schools aim for high standards but sometimes things can go wrong or expectations are not met.

What is a complaint?

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction or disquiet which may be about an event that has happened, failed to happen or the way in which something was handled.

The vast majority of concerns can be resolved informally. It is in everyone's best interests that complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. This can usually be achieved through discussion and good communication. However, if you are not satisfied with the outcome, a formal procedure (as outlined in this policy) would then need to be followed when attempts to resolve the issue are unsuccessful.

The procedure described does not include complaints covered by a separate statutory procedure, for example: complaints about the National Curriculum; school admission decisions; statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND); school re-organisation procedures; matters likely to require a Child Protection investigation; pupil exclusion decisions; whistleblowing; staff grievances and procedures; complaints about services provided by other providers who may use school premises or facilities.

For complaints to be investigated fully you need to give full information and not make them anonymously.

What can you expect?

- There are set response times for each stage of the complaints procedure.
- A complaint register should be maintained for formal complaints (see below).

- Conversations and correspondence should be handled with discretion, but you need to be aware that some information may have to be shared with others involved in the complaints procedure.
- Raising a concern or making a complaint should not affect the relationship between the school and you or your child.
- When investigating your complaint the school should talk to your child, witnesses and others involved as soon as possible.
- The school and the governors have a duty to act properly and investigate complaints impartially. Once investigations are complete the person making the complaint should receive a written response from the school within 20 school days.

Advice

- Many concerns can be resolved quickly with goodwill, often by making early contact with the class teacher.
- Remember, the more information you have, the better able you will be to discuss the matter. Fact find by asking the school for information. Obtain copies of relevant policies from the school e.g. behaviour policy (including anti-bullying and exclusion), home school agreement, SEND policy, health and safety policy, etc.
- You can seek support from independent bodies such as Citizens Advice (<https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/>), community relations centres and the Advisory Centre for Education (<http://www.ace-ed.org.uk/>), etc.
- Schools are very busy so please make an appointment for discussion through the school office. It helps to outline the purpose and how long you think you may need with the staff member/head teacher. Cover all the relevant points, but be as brief as you can. Avoid writing long letters or emails. Make it easy to read by using bullet points or headings. Include dates, times, names, etc and explain clearly what your complaint is, what effect the issue is having on your child or you and what you would like to see happen. Keep it factual and avoid making judgements or hearsay. If more information is needed from you, the person investigating your complaint will contact you.
- Sometimes it helps to take a friend with you. You may forget something - if you are doing all the talking, they can do the listening for you and record main points and agreed action.
- Try to keep calm! Avoid confrontation – it will cloud the issue.
- Remember to ask “what happens next?”.

Complaint against a member of staff

- The complaint procedure is distinct from any formal disciplinary proceedings for staff. If a complaint did result in a disciplinary procedure, then the complaint would be put on hold and you should be advised of the delay and updated every three weeks.
- If a complaint is made against a member of staff or governor they will be informed and have the opportunity to respond.

The governing body will form a complaints panel as described below:

- Parents, carers or pupils who wish to pursue a complaint regarding a school issue can refer the complaint to a review committee of governors, known as a complaints panel. This should be formed of at least three people who have had no prior involvement with the complaint.
- The head teacher should not be a member of the panel.
- Governors should be mindful of equality issues when looking at the composition of a complaints panel.
- The governors’ review hearing is the last school based stage of the complaints process.

Complaints Procedure

Stage 1. Informal

- Your expression of concern should be made to the school at the earliest opportunity.
- First talk to the teacher most closely concerned to clarify the facts and resolve through discussion. A request for discussion with the head teacher may also be desirable before making a formal complaint.

Stage 2: Complaint

- If you are not satisfied with the outcome at Stage 1 you may wish to make a formal complaint. This should be done in writing to the head teacher. Your complaint should be acknowledged within three school days.
- The investigation should be carried out and the outcome communicated to you **within 20 school days**. The written response should include a full explanation of the decision and the reasons for it (if additional time is required to formulate a response this should be explained to you). Where appropriate, the response should include what action the school will take to resolve it.
- The head teacher may delegate the task of collating the information to another member of staff but not the decision or the action to be taken.
- Once a decision has been reached, the head teacher should ensure that you are clear about the action taken and what to do if you remain dissatisfied (see below).
- When the head teacher receives your written complaint, they may decide to refer the matter immediately to a governing body complaint panel.
- If the complaint is about the head teacher, the matter should be referred to the Chair of Governors of the school.
- If the complaint is about the Chair of Governors or any individual governor, the matter should be referred to the Clerk of the governing body.

Stage 3: Governing body

- Complaints rarely reach this formal level but should you need to, you should make a formal complaint to the Chair of Governors within 10 school days of receiving the decision from the school. This needs to be sent in a sealed envelope via the school office; for the attention of the Chair of Governors.
- Your letter to the Chair needs to set out details of your complaint including why you remain dissatisfied and what outcomes you are seeking. The Chair will then set up a panel of governors to consider the complaint.
- A governing body complaints panel should normally consist of three people, none of whom should have been previously involved in your complaint. They should let you know when your complaint is to be considered. If a meeting with you and others involved is considered appropriate, you should be given seven days notice. The complaints panel should make their decision in private and write to you with their findings and any recommendations within 7 school days.

Stage 4: Final complaint stage

- If all attempts to resolve the complaint have been unsuccessful, you may refer your complaint to the Secretary of State for Education at the Department for Education (DfE), Sanctuary Buildings, Great Smith Street, London, SW1P 3BT. For more information, please visit: <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-education>
- The Secretary of State is unlikely to investigate individual issues but can inspect the school's policies and procedures and make sure these have been followed correctly.