

Complaints Policy & Procedures

Policy Statement

1. This policy statement sets out the school's approach to dealing with parental concerns and complaints.
2. We value good home/school relations and will, therefore, do everything we can to establish and maintain them. This includes seeking to resolve any concerns or complaints promptly, and to the satisfaction of all concerned.
3. We welcome feedback on what parents feel we do well, or not so well, as a school. We will consider carefully all feedback, whether positive or negative, and will review our policies and practices accordingly.
4. We will treat all concerns and complaints seriously and courteously and will advise parents and others of the school's procedures for dealing with their concerns. In return, we expect parents and other complainants to behave respectfully towards all members of the school community. In particular, any disagreement with the school should not be expressed inappropriately or in front of pupils.
5. The school's procedures will be reviewed regularly and updated as necessary.
6. Whilst we will seek to resolve concerns and complaints to the satisfaction of all parties, it may not be possible to achieve this in every case. We will, therefore, use our option to close a complaint before all the stages of the school's procedures have been exhausted, if this appears to be appropriate.
7. The government and the Local Authority(LA) advocate resolution of parental concerns and complaints at school level wherever possible, in the interests of maintaining good home/school relations. The role of the LA in advising parents and schools on the handling of concerns and complaints is set out in the school's procedures.

Complaints procedure

The majority of concerns from parents, carers and others are handled under the following general procedures. The procedure is divided into three stages;

The informal stage aims to resolve the concern through informal contact at the appropriate level in school.

Stage one is the first formal stage at which written complaints are considered by the head teacher who has special responsibility for dealing with complaints.

Stage two is the next stage once stage one has been worked through and involves consideration of the complaint by the chair of governors or the governing body. How each of these stages operates is explained below:

Informal stage – your initial contact with the school

1. Many concerns will be dealt with informally when you make them known to us. The first point of contact should be your child's key worker or the Deputy Head Teacher.
2. Once your concern is made known to us, we will see you, or contact you by telephone. If it is necessary, all members of staff know how to refer to the appropriate person with responsibility for your particular issues.
3. Any actions or monitoring of the situation that has been agreed, will be communicated clearly and we will confirm this with you.
4. If necessary we will contact appropriate people who may be able to assist us with our enquiries into your concern.
5. We will normally update you on the progress of our enquiries within ten school days. Once we have responded to your concern, you will have the opportunity of asking for the matter to be considered further.
6. If you are still dissatisfied following this informal approach, your concern will become a formal complaint and we will deal with it at the next stage.

Stage one - formal consideration of your complaint

This stage in our procedures deals with written complaints. It applies where you are not happy with the informal approach to dealing with your concern, as outlined above.

1. Normally, your written complaint should be addressed to the head teacher. If, however, your complaint concerns the head teacher personally, it should be sent to the school marked "for the attention of the chair of governors".
2. We will acknowledge your complaint in writing as soon as possible after receiving it. This will be within five school days.
3. We will enclose a copy of these procedures with the acknowledgement.
4. Normally we would expect to respond in full within **15 school days** but if this is not possible we will write to explain the reason for the delay and let you know when we hope to be able to provide a full response.
5. As part of our consideration of your complaint, we may invite you to a meeting to discuss the complaint and fill in any details required. If you wish, you can ask someone to accompany you to help you explain the reasons for your complaint.
6. The head teacher may also be accompanied by a suitable person if they wish.
7. Following the meeting, the head teacher will, where necessary, talk to witnesses and take statements from others involved.
8. If the complaint is against a member of staff, it will be dealt with under the school's internal confidential procedures, as required by law.
9. The head teacher will keep written, signed and dated records of all meetings and telephone conversations, and other related documentation.

10. Once we have established all the relevant facts, we will send you a written response to your complaint. This will give an explanation of the head teacher's decision and the reasons for it. If follow-up action is needed, we will indicate what we are proposing to do.

12. The person investigating your complaint may decide that we have done all we can to resolve the complaint, in which case we may use our discretion to close the complaint at this point. Please see the next page for further information about this process.

13. If you are unhappy with the way in which we reached our conclusions, you may wish to proceed to stage two, as described below.

Stage two – consideration by the chair of governors

If the complaint has already been through stage one and you are not happy with the outcome as a result of the way in which the complaint has been handled by the Head Teacher, you can take it further in writing to the chair of governors at the school. The chair of governors will consider the complaint and determine if the complaint is 'general' and deal with the matter him or herself, or if the complaint should be considered by a panel of governors. The chair of governors will confirm which action will be taken in writing within **10 school days**.

If the complaint is to be investigated further and dealt with by the chair of governors we would expect the matter to be dealt with and the outcomes communicated to you within a further **15 school days**.

Stage two is a formal process, and the ultimate recourse at school level.

Stage two – governing body review panel

In considering how the complaint has been handled the chair of governor may choose to refer the complaint to a panel of governors.

The purpose of this arrangement is to give you the chance to present your arguments as to how the complaint has been handled in front of a panel of governors who have no prior knowledge of the details of the case and who can, therefore, consider it without prejudice.

However, the aim of a panel is not to rehear the complaint. It is there to review how the complaint has been investigated and to determine whether this has been conducted fairly. It is there to establish facts and make recommendations which will reassure you that we have taken the complaint seriously.

The governors appeal panel operates according to the following formal procedures:

1. The governing body will convene a panel of three governors and will aim to arrange for the panel meeting to take place within **20 school days**.

2. You will be asked whether you wish to provide any further written documentation in support of your appeal.

3. The head teacher will be asked to prepare a written report for the panel. The panel can request additional information from other sources if necessary.

4. You will be informed, at least **5 school days** in advance, of the date, time and place of the meeting.

5. With the letter, you will receive any relevant correspondence or reports regarding stage one and you will be asked whether you wish to submit further written evidence to the panel.

6. The letter will explain what will happen at the panel meeting and that you are entitled to be accompanied to the meeting. The choice of person to accompany you is your own, but it is usually best to involve someone in whom you have confidence but who is not directly connected with the school. They are there to give you support but also to witness the proceedings and to speak on your behalf if you wish.

7. If it is necessary in the interests of ratifying the investigative process, the complaint investigator may, with the agreement of the chair of the panel, invite relevant witnesses directly involved in matters raised by you to attend the meeting.

8. The chair of the panel will bear in mind that the formal nature of the meeting can be intimidating for you and will do his or her best to put you at your ease.

9. As a general rule, no evidence or witnesses previously undisclosed should be introduced into the meeting by any of the participants. If either party wishes to do so, the meeting will be adjourned so that the other party has a fair opportunity to consider and respond to the new evidence.

10. The chair of the panel will ensure that the meeting is properly minuted. Please understand that any decision to share the minutes with you, the complainant, is a matter for the panel's discretion and you do not have an automatic right to see or receive a copy as the minutes are the property of the governing body. Since such minutes usually name individuals, they are understandably of a sensitive and, therefore, confidential nature.

11. Normally, the written outcome of the panel meeting, which will be sent to you, should give you all the information you require.

12. During the meeting, you can expect there to be opportunities for:

- the panel to hear you explain your case and your argument for why it should be heard at stage two;
- the panel to hear the complaint investigator's case in response;
- you to raise questions via the chair;
- you to be questioned by the complaint investigator through the chair;
- the panel members to be able to question you and the complaint investigator; and
- you and the head teacher, or their representative, to make a final statement.

13. In closing the meeting, the chair will explain that the panel will now consider its decision and that written notice of the decision will be sent to you and the head teacher **within 5 school days**. All participants other than the panel and the clerk will then leave.

14. The panel will then consider the complaint and all the evidence presented in order to:

- reach a unanimous, or at least a majority, decision on the case;
- decide on the appropriate action to be taken, if necessary; and
- recommend, where appropriate, to the governing body changes to the school's systems or procedures to ensure that similar problems do not happen again.

15. The clerk will send you and the head teacher a letter outlining the decision of the panel. The letter will also explain that you are entitled to have the handling of the complaint reviewed by the Secretary of State for Education.

16. We will keep a copy of all correspondence and notes on file in the school's records but separate from pupils' personal records.

Closure of Complaints

Very occasionally, a school will feel that it needs, regretfully, to close a complaint where the complainant is still dissatisfied.

We will do all we can to help to resolve a complaint against the school but sometimes it is simply not possible to meet all of the complainant's wishes. Sometimes it is simply a case of "agreeing to disagree".

If a complainant persists in making representations to the school – to the head teacher, designated governor, chair of governors or anyone else – or to the local authority, this can be extremely time-consuming and can detract from our responsibility to look after the interests of all the children in our care.

For this reason, we are entitled to close correspondence (including personal approaches, as well as letters and telephone calls) on a complaint where we feel that we have taken all reasonable action to resolve the complaint and that the complaint has exhausted our official process.

In exceptional circumstances, closure may occur before a complaint has reached stage two of the procedures described in this document. This is because a complaints panel takes considerable time and effort to set up and we must be sure that it is likely to assist the process of investigating the complaint.

The chair of governors may decide, therefore, that every reasonable action has been undertaken to resolve the complaint and that a complaints review panel would not help to move things forward.

Where you have been through the school's internal complaints procedures (with or without recourse to a complaints review panel) and you feel that the governing body have acted unreasonably about your concerns, you can write to the Secretary of State for Education. You will need to list the steps you have already taken and the responses you have received. Write to:

The Secretary of State
Department for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
London SW1

We would advise parents that, unless the school is shown to have behaved unreasonably or not to have followed their own procedures, there is likely to be little further action that can be taken, as governing bodies are empowered to deal with many issues without reference to either the local authority or the secretary of state. The DfE advise parents that they will not usually consider a complaint if parents have not first followed the school's complaints procedure.