

Complaints Policy – March 2016



Governors' Committee Responsible: T&L

Status: Statutory

Review Period: 2 years

Next review Date: March 2018

Aims:

An effective Complaints Procedure will:

- Encourage resolutions of problems by informal means where possible;
- be easily accessible and publicised;
- 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;
- ensure a full and fair investigation by an independent person where necessary;
- provide information to the school's senior management team so that services can be improved.

Procedures:

Dealing with complaints- Initial concerns

Taking informal concerns seriously at the earliest stage will reduce the numbers that develop into formal complaints.

These key messages deal with complaints but the underlying principles is that concerns ought to be handled, if at all possible without the need for formal procedures. The requirement to have a complaints procedure need not in any way undermine the efforts to resolve the concerns informally. In most cases the class teacher or the individual delivering the service in the case of extended school provision, will receive the first approach. It would be helpful if staff were able to resolve issues on the spot, include apologising where necessary.

Dealing with complaints- Formal procedures

The formal procedures will need to be invoked when initial attempts to resolve the issue are unsuccessful and the person raising the concern remains dissatisfied and wishes to take the matter further. Schools might wish to nominate a member of staff to have responsibility for the operation and management of the school complaints procedure. They could be termed the school's 'complaints co-ordinator'. In smaller schools this may often be the headteacher.

Investigating complaints

It is suggested that at each stage, the person investigating the complaint, makes sure that they;

- establish what has happened so far, and who has been involved;
- 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 with the complainant what they would put things right;
- interview those involved in the matter and /or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish;
- conduct the interview with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning;
- keep notes of the interview

Resolving complaints

At each stage of the procedure the schools will want to keep in mind ways in which the complaint can be resolved. It might be sufficient to acknowledge that the complaint is 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 school policies in light of the complaint.

It would be useful if complainants were encouraged to state what actions they feel might resolve the problem at any stage. An admission the school could have handled the situation better is not the same as an admission of negligence.

An effective procedure will identify areas of agreement between the parties. It is of also equal importance to clarify a misunderstanding that might have occurred as this can create a positive atmosphere in which to discuss any outstanding issues.

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 reopen the same issue, the chair of the GB is able to inform them in writing the procedures has been exhausted and that the matter is now closed.

Time-limits

Complaints need to be considered, and resolved as quickly as possible. An effective complaints procedure will have realistic time limits for each action within each stage. However, where further investigations are necessary, new time limits can be set and the complainant sent details of the new deadline and explanation for the delay.

Part 2: The Formal Complaints Procedure

The stages of complaints

An efficient school complaints procedure will have well defined stages. A flow chart of suggested stages can be found in Annex C. At each stage it would be helpful to clarify exactly who will be involved, what will happen, and how long it will take. There may, on occasion be the need for some flexibility; for example the possibility of further meetings between the complainant and the member of staff directly involved and further investigations may be required by the headteacher after a meeting with the complainant. Both of these examples could be included.

Three school based stages are likely to be sufficient for most schools:

- **Stage one:** complaint heard by the staff member (though not the subject of the complaint)
- **Stage two:** complaint heard by the headteacher
- **Stage three:** complaint heard by GB's complaints appeal panel;

An effective procedure will specify how a complaint will be dealt with if it concerns the conduct of the headteacher or a governor or where a headteacher or a governor has been involved in the issue previously.

Part 3: Managing and Recording Complaints

Recording complaints

It would be useful for schools to record the progress of the complaint and the final outcome. A complaint may be made in person, by telephone, or by writing. An example of a complaint form can be found in annex D. At the end of a telephone call, it would be helpful if the member of staff ensure that the complainant and the school have the same understanding of what was agreed and discussed. A brief note of meetings and telephone calls can be let and a copy pf any written response added to the record.

The complaints co-ordinator could be responsible for the records and hold them centrally.

Governing Body Review

The GB can monitor the level and nature of complaints and review the outcomes on a regular basis to ensure the effectiveness of the procedure and make changes where necessary. Preferably, complaints information shared with the whole GB will not name individuals.

As well as addressing an individual's complaints, the process of listening to, and resolving complaints will contribute to school improvement. When individual complaints are heard, schools may identify underlying issues that may need to be addressed, the monitoring and review of complaints by the school and the GB can be a useful tool in evaluating a school's performance.

Publicising the Procedure

There is a legal requirement for the Complaints Procedure to be publicised. It is up to the GB to decide how to fulfil this requirement but details of the Complaints Procedures could be included in:

- The school prospectus;
- The governor's report to parents
- The information given to new parents when their children join the school;
- The information given to the children themselves;
- The home school agreement
- Home school bulletins or newsletters
- Documents supplied to community users including course information or letting agreements;
- A specific complaints leaflet which includes a form on which a complaint can be made;
- Posters displayed in areas of the school that will be used by the public, such as reception or the main entrance;
- The school website