

Complaints Policy

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Guidance notes for parents

We welcome suggestions for improving our work in the school. If you have a concern or complaint about the school, we should like you to tell us about it. Be assured that no matter what you tell us, our support and respect for you and your child in the school will not be affected in any way. Please tell us of your concern as soon as possible. It may be more difficult for us to investigate properly an incident or problem which occurred some time ago.

What to do first

Stage 1: Most concerns can be sorted out quickly by speaking initially to your child's class teacher. We ask that time be considered of the teacher in dealing with your concern and that should it be a quick discussion a mutually convenient appointment should be made. If you feel your complaint has not been addressed to your satisfaction you should approach the Phase Leader. The Phase Leader, as an experienced member of staff will listen to your issue and help devise a way forward in an endeavour to strengthen home school relationships. If you feel that the Phase Leader has been unable to follow through effectively, your next step is to approach the Senior Leadership Team (SLT), or the Headteacher. Staff structure is identified in detail on the school website.

If your complaint is about a teacher, it must be directed to the Headteacher. It is usually best to discuss the matter face to face. You will need an appointment for this, and can make one by telephoning or calling at the school office. You may take a friend or relative to the appointment with you, if you would like to, but such a person will be there as a support for you, not as an advocate on your behalf.

All members of the school's staff will make every effort to resolve your problem informally. They will make sure that they understand what you think has gone wrong, and they will explain their own actions to you. They will ask what you would like the school to do to put things right. Of course, this does not mean that in every case they will agree with you – but it will help both you and the school to understand both sides of the issue. It may also help to prevent a similar problem arising again.

What to do next

Stage 2: If you are not satisfied with the school's response (or with the Headteacher's initial reaction, if he or she has already been involved), you may make a formal complaint to the Headteacher. This should be made in writing. If your complaint is about an action of the Headteacher personally, you should refer it in writing to the Chair of the Governing Body, who can be contacted through the school office. You may find it helpful at this stage to have a copy of the school's Complaints Procedure, which will explain in detail what procedures are to be followed. This is available from the school office.

The Headteacher or Chair of Governors will ask to meet you for a discussion of the problem. Again, you may take a friend or relative with you as a supporter if you wish. The Headteacher or Chair will conduct a full investigation of your complaint and may interview any members of staff or pupils involved. You will receive a written response to your complaint.

If you are still not satisfied

Stage 3: The problem will normally have been resolved by this stage. However, you may wish to contact the Chair of the Governing Body (in writing) to ask for your complaint to be referred to a Governors' Complaints Panel. There will be a hearing before a group of three governors who have no previous knowledge of the problem and so will be able to give it a fresh and impartial assessment. You will be invited to attend the hearing and to speak to the panel, as will the Headteacher. The school follows Haringey guidelines for the procedures relating to carrying out a hearing.

Further action: Complaints about school problems are almost always settled within the school but in exceptional cases it may be possible to refer the problem to an outside adjudicator such as the Secretary of State for Education and Employment. More information on this is available in the Haringey guidelines.

Aims of the policy

- To acknowledge that a complaint, concern or problem exists.
- To provide a formal procedure for resolving the complaint.
- To convey the message to parents that complaints are taken seriously.
- To ensure the policy is accessible to all parents and aims to obtain the best results in the interests of the school as a whole.
- To be fair and equitable, and will be applied consistently.
- To take an objective assessment of a problem.
- To provide a rapid resolution of a problem.
- To reduce embarrassments and sensitivities between staff and parents.

Guiding principles

1. **The policy will be well publicised.** Parents should always know how they can raise concerns or lodge a formal complaint. The policy will be published on the school website.
2. **The procedures will be as speedy as possible,** consistent with fairness to all the parties involved. Each stage of the procedure will have known time limits. Where it is not possible to meet these, information about progress will be given to the complainant.
3. **The complainant should receive support,** ideally from individuals or organisations which are clearly separate from those complained against. Such support can be found from organisations such as Citizens' Advice Bureaux, Community Relations Councils, other local advice centres, individual governors, or L.A. officers (provided that the latter individuals are able to remain apart from any later stages in the procedure, where they might otherwise be called upon to make a judgment on a complainant's disagreement with the school). Parents who raise concerns or complaints should be invited to bring a friend or relative as a supporter, not as an advocate, to any stage of the procedure.
4. **The person complained against should receive support.** Staff who may be questioned as part of a complaints procedure investigation must feel that they are being treated fairly and that they will have the opportunity to put their case. They should be told about the procedure and kept informed of progress. There is a crucial balance to be maintained between supporting the individual so that his or her rights and reputation are protected and investigating a complaint thoroughly and impartially.
It should be made clear to all concerned that this complaints procedure is distinct from formal disciplinary proceedings for staff. There may be occasions where a complaint initiates a disciplinary procedure which suspends temporarily the complaints procedure. If so, the complainant will be informed of this and any non-disciplinary aspects of the complaint will be held over to be dealt with under this policy. The complainant will be informed of progress every three weeks on the likely further delay. It may be clear after the disciplinary procedures have been completed that particular responses to the complaint are required (for example, an apology, or an explanation of new policies adopted to avoid a similar problem in the future).
5. **Confidentiality.** It is very important to treat conversations and correspondence with discretion. It is essential that parents feel confident that their complaints will not penalise their children. However, all parties to a complaint will have to be aware from the outset that some information may have to be shared with others involved in the operation of this procedure.
It is usually correct to disregard anonymous complaints unless someone is prepared to substantiate them, but the danger in this is that they may relate to a serious matter. If the foreseen eventuality occurs, to the detriment of the school, the complainant may surface subsequently and say that he or she alerted the school even though the complaint was made anonymously. It should be at the Headteacher's or the Governing Body's discretion to decide whether the gravity of an anonymous complaint warrants an investigation.
6. **Redress.** If the outcome of the complaints procedure shows that the school has been at fault, it may be sufficient to provide redress in the form of an acknowledgement that the complaint was valid. Alternatively, it may be appropriate to offer one or more of: an apology, an explanation, a commitment to try to ensure that the event complained of will not recur, an undertaking to review school policies or practices in the light of the

complaint. Fear of litigation should not prevent the school from admitting to parents that mistakes have been made but advice should be taken from the L.A. if litigation seems a possibility.

7. **Staff awareness and training.** All school staff should be familiar with the complaints procedures so that they can advise parents about their operation if approached. Potentially, a great many staff are involved in handling complaints, especially at the informal level. Their confidence in doing so depends upon their having clear information about the procedures, knowledge of the responsibilities of their colleagues (so that parents are not continually passed from one person to another), and some basic training in the practical skills required when dealing with people who are upset or angry (see Annex B).
8. **Record keeping.** If complaints are to contribute to raising the quality of life in the school, they should be recorded, and monitored each term by the Headteacher and Governing Body. Record keeping should begin at the point when a concern or problem has become the kind of complaint that cannot be resolved instantly but needs investigation and/or consultation with others in the school, and will require a later report back to the parent, either orally or in writing. Record keeping at the preliminary stages will be a basic note of the complaint in a book designated for this purpose. It will record the date, name of parent and general nature of the complaint.

Monitoring and reviewing the policy

The Headteacher will include reference to complaints at Stage 2 in his termly report to the Governing Body. Once in each academic year the Governing Body will review the complaints received, how they have been dealt with and the results. Changes to this policy and/or to the Complaints Procedure and the *Guidance Notes for Parents* may be made as a result of that review.

The table below summarises the procedures:

| Stage | Description | Timescale for receipt of complaint | Time-limit for School's response |
|-------------------------|--|---|---|
| Informal Stage 1 | Informal discussions with relevant member of staff, Phase Leader or SLT/Headteacher | | As soon as possible but no later than 5 school days. |
| Formal Stage 2 | Written complaint to Headteacher (or Chair of Governors if complaint is about the Headteacher) within 3 months of the concern being made informally Complaints outside the 3 month timeframe will only be considered under exceptional circumstances (DfE) | Within 10 school days of receipt of response to Stage 1 | Acknowledge within 2 school days. Response normally within 5 school days. |
| Formal Stage 3 | Governors' Complaints' Panel Hearing | Within 10 school days of receipt of response to Stage 2 | Hearing set up within 15 school days with 10 days' notice of meeting. Agenda and papers sent out 7 days in advance. Decision letter within 2 school days. |

In all cases if any stage in the procedure is likely to take longer than publicised, parents will be informed of new timescales and the reasons for delay. Written records will be kept of all complaints – formal and informal – including whether they are resolved at a preliminary stage or a hearing. The correspondence and records of complaints are to be kept confidential except where a body conducting an inspection under Section 163 of the Education Act 2002 or Secretary of State requests access to the records or other documents involved in the complaint.