

School Complaints Procedure

Coppice Farm Primary School

School Complaints Procedure Index

Overview	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Part 1: General Principles of complaints	1
Dealing with Complaints – Initial concerns	1
Dealing with Complaints – Formal procedures	1
Framework of Principles	2
Investigating Complaints	2
Resolving Complaints	3
Vexatious Complaints	3
Time-Limits	3
Part 2: The Formal Complaints Procedure	4
The Stages of Complaints	4
Part 3: Managing and Recording Complaints	4
Recording Complaints	4
Governing Body Review	5
Publicising the Procedure	5
Annex A - The Act	5
Annex B - An example of a complaints procedure	7
Annex C - Flowchart	12
Annex D - Example of a complaint form	13

General Principles of complaints

Dealing with Complaints – Initial concerns

4. The school will be clear about the difference between a concern and a complaint. Taking informal concerns seriously at the earliest stage will reduce the numbers that develop into formal complaints.

5. These key messages deal with complaints but the underlying principle 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 efforts to resolve the concern 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, including apologising where necessary. Concerns and complaints can be reported separately to governors.

Dealing with Complaints – Formal procedures

6. 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.

7. The Head Teacher is responsible for dealing with complaints. Complaints may be delegated to the Deputy Head Teacher in the Head

School Complaints Procedure

teacher's absence. The Chair of Governors may request other members of staff to be the complaints coordinator if the complaint concerns the Head Teacher.

Framework of Principles

8.

- encourage resolution of problems by **informal** means wherever 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;
- respect people's desire for **confidentiality**;
- address all the points at issue and provide an **effective** response and **appropriate** redress, where necessary;
- provide **information** to the school's senior management team so that services can be improved.

Investigating Complaints

9. The person investigating the complaint (the complaints co-ordinator), 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 what the complainant feels 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.

School Complaints Procedure

Resolving Complaints – a checklist of defining resolved complaints

10. At each stage in the procedure schools will want to keep in mind ways in which a complaint can be resolved. It might be sufficient to acknowledge that the complaint is valid in whole or in part. In addition, it may be appropriate to offer one or more of the following:

- an apology;
- an investigation and outcome
- 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.

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

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

Vexatious Complaints

13. 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 that the procedure has been exhausted, the governing body has made a final decision and that the matter is now closed.

Time-Limits

14. Complaints need to be considered, and resolved, as quickly and efficiently as possible. At Coppice Farm Primary school, 21 days is the formal limit. Parents will be informed that their complaint is being dealt with and a response will be given before the end of this time limit. However, where further investigations are necessary, new time limits can be set and the complainant sent details of the new deadline and an explanation for the delay.

School Complaints Procedure

Part 2: The Formal Complaints Procedure

The Stages of Complaints

15. A flow chart of stages can be found in Annex C. At each stage 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; the possibility of further meetings between the complainant and the member of staff directly involved and further investigations may be required by the head teacher after a meeting with the complainant. Both of these examples could be included.

16. Three school-based stages for a complaint

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

In very small schools it may be necessary to go straight to stage 2.

.17. The local authority may be involved with complaints at stage 3.

18. Complaints about the Head teacher are to be dealt with by the Chair of Governors.

19. An example of a complaints procedure can be found in Annex B.

Part 3: Managing and Recording Complaints

Recording Complaints

20. The school will record complaints using the complaints form with this policy. Complaints are to be reported at the Full Governing Body meeting each term.

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

School Complaints Procedure

Governing Body Review

22. 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.

23. 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 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

24. There is a legal requirement for the Complaints Procedures to be publicised. This is done through:

- The school prospectus;
- The school website;

Annex A - The Act

Section 29 of the Education Act 2002 requires that:

- (1) The governing body of a maintained school (including a maintained nursery school) shall –
 - (a) establish procedures for dealing with all complaints relating to the school or to the provision of facilities or services under section 27, other than complaints falling to be dealt with in accordance with any procedures required to be established in relation to the school by virtue of a statutory provision other than this section, and
 - (b) publicise the procedures so established.
- (2) In establishing or publicising procedures under subsection (1), the governing body shall have regard to any guidance given from time to time (in relation to England) by the Secretary of State.

Section 39 of the Education Act 2002 provides the following:

“maintained school” means a community, foundation or voluntary school, a community or foundation special school or a maintained nursery school;

“maintained nursery school” means a nursery school which is maintained by a local education authority and is not a special school;

School Complaints Procedure

School Complaints Procedure

Annex B - An example of a complaints procedure

Stage One: Complaint Heard by Staff Member

It is in everyone's interest that complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. The experience of the first contact between the complainant and the school can be crucial in determining whether the complaint will escalate. To that end, if staff are made aware of the procedures, they know what to do when they receive a complaint.

It would assist the procedure if the school respected the views of a complainant who indicates that he/she would have difficulty discussing a complaint with a particular member of staff. In these cases, the complaints co-ordinator can refer the complainant to another staff member. Where the complaint concerns the head teacher, the complaints co-ordinator can refer the complainant to the chair of governors.

Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels too compromised to deal with a complaint, the complaints co-ordinator may consider referring the complainant to another staff member. The member of staff may be more senior but does not have to be. The ability to consider the complaint objectively and impartially is crucial.

Where the first approach is made to a governor, the next step would be to refer the complainant to the appropriate person and advise them about the procedure. It would be useful if governors did not act unilaterally on an individual complaint outside the formal procedure or be involved at the early stages in case they are needed to sit on a panel at a later stage of the procedure.

Stage Two: Complaint Heard by Head teacher

The head teacher's influence will already have shaped the way complaints are handled in the school. At this point, the complainant may be dissatisfied with the way the complaint was handled at stage one as well as pursuing their initial complaint. The head may delegate the task of collating the information to another staff member but not the decision on the action to be taken.

Stage Three: Complaint Heard by Governing Bodies Complaints Appeal Panel

The complainant needs to write to the Chair of Governors giving details of the complaint. The Chair, or a nominated governor, will convene a GB complaints panel.

The governors' appeal hearing is the last school-based stage of the complaints process, and is not convened merely to rubber-stamp previous decisions.

School Complaints Procedure

Individual complaints would not be heard by the whole GB at any stage, as this could compromise the impartiality of any panel set up for a disciplinary hearing against a member of staff following a serious complaint.

The governing body may nominate a number of members with delegated powers to hear complaints at that stage, and set out its terms of reference. These can include:

- drawing up its procedures;
- hearing individual appeals;
- making recommendations on policy as a result of complaints.

The procedure adopted by the panel for hearing appeals would normally be part of the school's complaints procedure. The panel can be drawn from the nominated members and may consist of three or five people. The panel may choose their own chair.

The Remit of The Complaints Appeal Panel

The panel can:

- dismiss the complaint in whole or in part;
- uphold the complaint in whole or in part;
- decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint;
- recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not recur.

There are several points which any governor sitting on a complaints panel needs to remember:

- a. It is important that the appeal hearing is independent and impartial and that it is seen to be so. No governor may sit on the panel if they have had a prior involvement in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it. In deciding the make-up of the panel, governors need to 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.
- b. The aim of the hearing, which needs to be held in private, will always be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant. However, it has to be recognised the complainant might not be satisfied with the outcome if the hearing does not find in their favour. It may only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations which will satisfy the complainant that his

School Complaints Procedure

or her complaint has been taken seriously.

c. An effective panel will acknowledge that many complainants feel nervous and inhibited in a formal setting. Parents often feel emotional when discussing an issue that affects their child. The panel chair will ensure that the proceedings are as welcoming as possible. The layout of the room will set the tone and care is needed to ensure the setting is informal and not adversarial.

d. Extra care needs to be taken when the complainant is a child. Careful consideration of the atmosphere and proceedings will ensure that the child does not feel intimidated. The panel needs to be aware of the views of the child and give them equal consideration to those of adults. Where the child's parent is the complainant, it would be helpful to give the parent the opportunity to say which parts of the hearing, if any, the child needs to attend.

e. The governors sitting on the panel need to be aware of the complaints procedure.

Roles and Responsibilities

The Role of the Clerk

The Department strongly recommends that any panel or group of governors considering complaints be clerked. The clerk would be the contact point for the complainant and be required to:

- set the date, time and venue of the hearing, ensuring that the dates are convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible;
- collate any written material and send it to the parties in advance of the hearing;
- meet and welcome the parties as they arrive at the hearing;
- record the proceedings;
- notify all parties of the panel's decision.

The Role of the Chair of the Governing Body or the Nominated Governor

The nominated governor role:

- check that the correct procedure has been followed;
- if a hearing is appropriate, notify the clerk to arrange the panel;

School Complaints Procedure

The Role of the Chair of the Panel

The Chair of the Panel has a key role, ensuring that:

- the remit of the panel is explained to the parties and each party has the opportunity of putting their case without undue interruption;
- the issues are addressed;
- key findings of fact are made;
- parents and others who may not be used to speaking at such a hearing are put at ease;
- the hearing is conducted in an informal manner with each party treating the other with respect and courtesy;
- the panel is open minded and acting independently;
- no member of the panel has a vested interest in the outcome of the proceedings or any involvement in an earlier stage of the procedure; each side is given the opportunity to state their case and ask questions;
- written material is seen by all parties. If a new issue arises it would be useful to give all parties the opportunity to consider and comment on it.

Notification of the Panel's Decision

The chair of the panel needs to ensure that the complainant is notified of the panel's decision, in writing, with the panel's response; this is usually within 7 working days. The letter needs to explain if there are any further rights of appeal and, if so, to whom they need to be addressed.

School Complaints Procedure

Checklist for a Panel Hearing

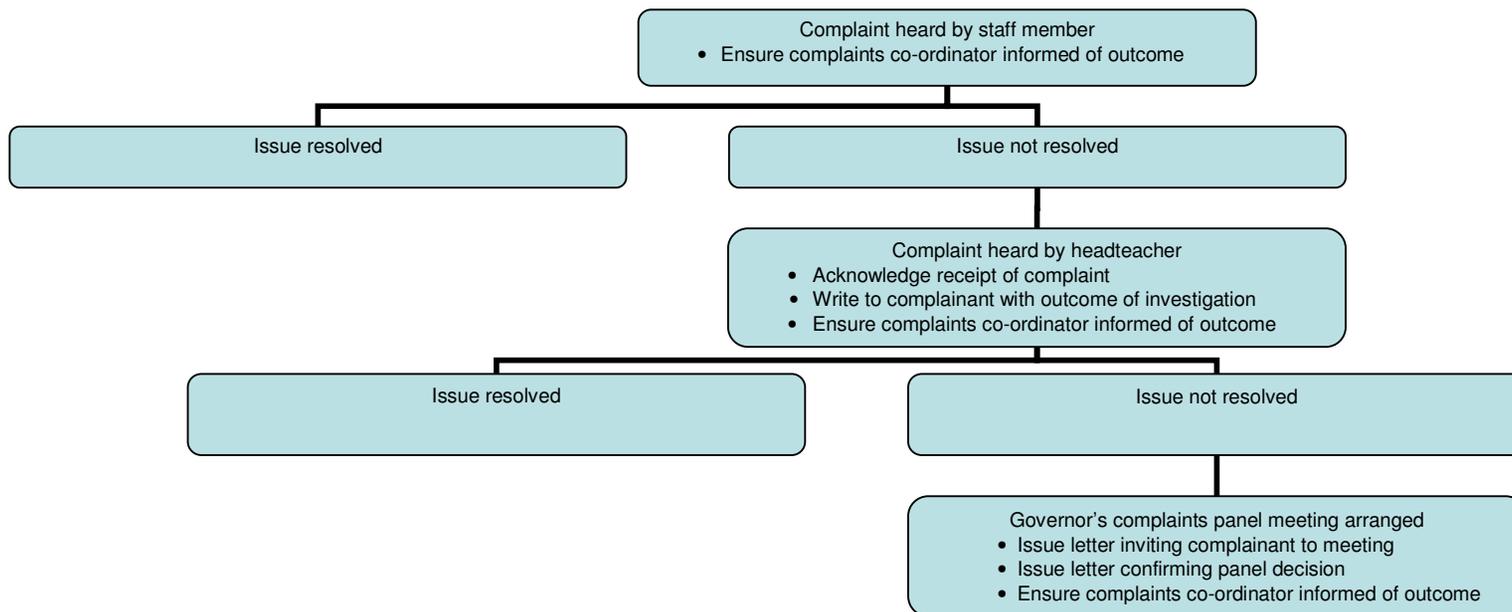
The panel needs to take the following points into account:

- The hearing is as informal as possible.
- Witnesses are only required to attend for the part of the hearing in which they give their evidence or provide a statement.
- After introductions, the complainant is invited to explain their complaint, and be followed by their witnesses. If the complainant is not attending then a statement or the original letter of complaint may be read out.
- The Head Teacher is then invited to explain the school's actions and be followed by the school's witnesses.
- The panel may ask questions at any point.
- The complainant is then invited to sum up their complaint.
- The Head Teacher is then invited to sum up the school's actions and response to the complaint.
- Both parties leave together while the panel decides on the issues.
- The chair explains that both parties will hear from the panel within a set time scale; usually 7 working days.

School Complaints Procedure

Summary of Dealing with Complaints

Annex C - Flowchart



School Complaints Procedure

What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?

Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details.

Signature:

Date:

Official use

Date acknowledgement sent:

By who:

Complaint referred to:

Date:

School Complaints Procedure