



Mereside CE Primary Concerns, Complaints and Compliments Policy

1. Introduction

1.1 We believe that our school provides a good education for all our children, and that the headteacher and other staff work very hard to build positive relationships with all parents. However, the school is obliged to have procedures in place in case there are complaints by parents. The following policy sets out the procedure that the school follows in such cases.

2. Aims and objectives

2.1 Our school aims to be fair, open and honest when dealing with any complaint. We give careful consideration to all complaints and deal with them as swiftly as possible. We aim to resolve any complaint through dialogue and mutual understanding and, in all cases, we put the interests of the child above all other issues. We provide sufficient opportunity for any complaint to be fully discussed, and then resolved.

3. Compliments

3.1 These are always welcome and very encouraging to teachers and staff. The school encourages feedback or opinions from pupils and parents. In practice this dialogue is continuous, sometimes directly and also indirectly, for example, through the Parents' Council. It may not always be possible to act immediately but pupils and the school always benefit so please don't hold back.

4. The complaints process

How to share a concern or a complaint

Our school draws on guidance from the DfE published in 2016 and defines a concern as "an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought" where as a complaint is "an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action"

4.1 It is natural that parents may, occasionally, be concerned about an aspect of their child's education or welfare at school. This could include issues concerning the school's approach to aspects of the curriculum, homework, behavioural problems or any other issue.

4.2 The school welcomes enquiries from parents about any matter. If a parent is concerned about anything to do with the education that we are providing at our school, they should, in the first instance, discuss the matter with their child's class teacher. Most matters of concern can be dealt with in this way. All teachers work very hard to ensure that each child is happy at school, and is making good progress; they always want to know if there is a problem, so that they can take action before the problem seriously affects the child's progress.

4.3 At all times the staff will do their utmost to help resolve a problem. If occasionally parents feel they must state their complaint formally, this too is not a problem. The school has defined procedures for handling complaints so don't be embarrassed if you feel an issue warrants more attention.

What to do if the matter is not resolved through informal discussion

4.4 Where a parent feels that a situation has not been resolved through contact with the class teacher, or that their concern is of a sufficiently serious nature, they should make an appointment to discuss it with the headteacher. The headteacher considers any such concern very seriously and investigates each case thoroughly. Most concerns or complaints are normally resolved at this stage.

4.5 If the parent feels that the matter has not been resolved then an approach can be made to the Chair of Governors who will investigate the complaint and convey the outcome to them.

Sharing a concern about the headteacher

4.6 Should a parent have a complaint or concern about the headteacher, s/he should first make an informal approach to one of the members of the governing body, who is obliged to investigate it. The governor in question will do all s/he can to resolve the issue through a dialogue with the school, but if a parent is unhappy with the outcome, s/he can make a formal complaint, as outlined below. A list of governors is available on our website or from the school office. Communication can be contacting a governor by e-mail through the website or face to face.

5. How to take the matter further

5.1 Only if informal procedures fail to resolve the complaint matter should a formal complaint be made to the governing body. This complaint should be made in writing, by telephone or in person, stating the nature of the complaint and how the school has handled it so far. The parent should address this complaint to a member of the governors' complaint committee.

5.2 The clerk of this committee will acknowledge receipt of the communication within 10 days and arrange to convene a governing body complaints committee. The governing body will consider all written complaints within three weeks of receipt wherever practicable (excluding school holidays) unless a longer period is necessary in which case the chair will

inform the complainant the reason for the delay. It arranges a meeting to discuss the complaint, and invites the person making it to attend the meeting, so that she/he can explain their complaint in more detail. The school will give the complainant at least three days' notice of the meeting.

5.3 After hearing all the evidence, the governors will consider their decision and inform the parent about it in writing within seven days of the meeting. The governors will do all they can at this stage to resolve the complaint to the parent's satisfaction.

6. Who to appeal to next

6.1 If the complaint is not resolved, a parent may make representation to the Local Authority. Further information about this process is available from the Local Authority.

A further meeting is chaired by an independent person, who considers all the evidence and makes a further judgement in an attempt to resolve the complaint.

If any parent is still not content that the complaint has been dealt with properly, then s/he is entitled to appeal to the Secretary of State for Education.

7. Unreasonable complainants (As defined in DfE document "Best Practice Advice for Schools Complaint Procedures" January 2016)

7.1 Mereside CE Primary school is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially and to providing a high quality service to those who complain. We will not normally limit the contact complainants have with the school. However, we do not expect our staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour and will take action to protect staff from that behaviour, including that which is abusive offensive or threatening.

We define unreasonable as "those who, because of the frequency or nature of their contacts with the school, hinder our consideration of their or other people's complaints."

A complaint may be regarded as unreasonable when the person making the complaint:-

- refuses to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcomes sought by raising the complaint, despite offers of assistance;
- refuses to co-operate with the complaints investigation process while still wishing their complaint to be resolved;
- refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of a complaints procedure;
- insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the adopted complaints procedure or with good practice;

- introduces trivial or irrelevant information which the complainant expects to be taken into account and commented on, or raises large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions, and insists they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales;
- makes unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues, and seeks to have them replaced;
- changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds;
- repeatedly makes the same complaint (despite previous investigations or responses concluding that the complaint is groundless or has been addressed);
- refuses to accept the findings of the investigation into that complaint where the school's complaint procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed including referral to the Department for Education;
- seeks an unrealistic outcome;
- makes excessive demands on school time by frequent, lengthy, complicated and stressful contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with.

7.2 A complaint may also be considered unreasonable if the person making the complaint does so either face-to-face, by telephone or in writing or electronically:-

- maliciously;
- aggressively;
- using threats, intimidation or violence;
- using abusive, offensive or discriminatory language;
- knowing it to be false;
- using falsified information;
- publishing unacceptable information in a variety of media such as in social media websites and newspapers.

7.3 Complainants should limit the numbers of communications with the school while a complaint is being progressed. It is not helpful if repeated correspondence is sent (either by letter, phone, email or text) as it could delay the outcome being reached. Whenever possible, the headteacher or Chair of Governors will discuss any concern with the complainant informally before applying an 'unreasonable' marking. If the behaviour continues the headteacher will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and asking them to change it.

7.4 For complainants who excessively contact causing a significant level of disruption, we may specify methods of communication and limit the number of contacts in a communication plan. This will usually be reviewed after 6 months. In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, the concerns and actions taken will be put in writing immediately and the police informed. This may include banning an individual from our school.

8. Monitoring and review

8.1 The governors will monitor the complaints procedure, in order to ensure that all complaints are handled properly. The headteacher will log all formal complaints received by the school and record how they were resolved. Governors will examine this log on an annual basis.

8.2 Governors will take into account any local or national decisions that affect the complaints process, and make any modifications necessary to this policy. This policy is made available to all parents via our website, so that they can be properly informed about the complaints process.

This policy will be reviewed every three years. It is next due to be reviewed in Autumn 2019