



# Acre Heads Primary School

## School Complaints Procedure

### General Principles:

- This procedure is intended to allow you to raise a concern or complaint relating to the school, or the services that it provides.
- An anonymous concern or complaint will not be investigated under this procedure, unless there are exceptional circumstances.
- To enable a proper investigation, concerns or complaints should be brought to the attention of the school as soon as possible. In general, any matter raised more than 3 months after the event, being complained of, will not be considered.

### The difference between a concern and a complaint

A 'concern' may be defined as 'an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought'.

A complaint may be generally defined as 'an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action'.

It is in everyone's interest that concerns and complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. Many issues can be resolved informally, without the need to invoke formal procedures. At Acre Heads Primary School we take informal concerns seriously and make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible. There are occasions when complainants would like to raise their concerns formally. In those cases, the school's formal procedure should be invoked through the stages outlined below.

### Raising a concern or complaint

#### 1) Informal Stage

It is normally appropriate to communicate directly with the member of staff concerned. This may be by letter, by telephone or in person by appointment, requested via the school office. The school will ask you at the earliest stage what you think might resolve the issue. Many concerns can be resolved by simple clarification or the provision of information and it is anticipated that most complaints will be resolved by this informal stage.

In the case of serious concerns it may be appropriate to address them directly to the Headteacher. If the Headteacher is the subject of the complaint, it should be addressed to the Chair of Governors c/o the school and marked 'confidential'. If the complaint is about the Chair of Governors or any individual governor, it should be made by writing to the Clerk to the Governing Body.

#### 2) Formal Stage

If your concern or complaint is not resolved at the informal stage you may choose to put the complaint in writing and pass it to the head teacher, who will be responsible for ensuring that it is investigated appropriately. If the complaint is about the Headteacher, your complaint should be passed to the school office, marked for the attention of the chair of the governing body.

You should include details which might assist the investigation, such as names of potential witnesses, dates and times of events, and copies of relevant documents. It is very important that you include a clear statement of the actions that you would like the school to take to resolve your concern. Without this, it is much more difficult to proceed.

Please pass your letter, in a sealed envelope marked confidential, to the school office.

The envelope should be addressed to the Head teacher, Chair of Governors or Clerk to the Governing Body, as appropriate.

The Headteacher (or Chair) may ring you or invite you to a meeting to clarify your concerns and to explore the possibility of an informal resolution. If you accept that invitation, you may be accompanied by a friend, if you wish, to assist you in explaining the nature of your concerns.

In most circumstances complaints will be resolved through a meeting with the Headteacher (or chair). If not, arrangements will be made for the matter to be fully investigated, using the appropriate procedure. In any case you should learn in writing, usually within 5 days of the school receiving your formal complaint, of how the school intends to proceed. This notification should include an indication of the anticipated timescale.

Any investigation will begin as soon as possible and when it has been concluded, you will be informed in writing of its conclusion. If you are not satisfied with the manner in which the process has been followed, you may request that the governing body reviews the process followed by the school, in handling the complaint. Any such request must be made in writing to the chair of the governing body, within 10 school days of receiving notice of the outcome, and include a statement specifying any perceived failures to follow the procedure.

## **Governing body meetings**

### **a) Complaints panel**

If the school receives a formal complaint about one of the limited number of matters, that is not dealt with by another statutory process, it may be necessary to convene a governing body panel to consider the matter and formulate a response. The complaint is likely to relate to matters such as:

- the content or the application of a governing body policy;
- school facilities;
- services that the school provides.

If a governing body committee already has delegated power with respect to a policy that is being complained of, a panel of members from that committee should be convened. Otherwise the chair should convene a panel of 3 governors, who have not previously been involved with the complaint.

The complainant should submit the details of their concerns, in writing, to the Chair.

The Chair will seek similar written responses from the school, where this is necessary.

A meeting of the panel will take place, usually within 10 school days, to consider the matter. The complainant (who may be accompanied by a friend if they wish) and representative(s) from the school (who may also be accompanied by workplace colleagues or representatives from their professional associations) may be invited to attend this meeting in order to clarify the matter. As the panel meeting is intended to be investigatory, rather than adversarial, the persons giving evidence or making representations to the panel will normally attend separately.

When the panel has collected sufficient information, it will deliberate and then inform the complainant, the Headteacher and the governing body of the outcome, in writing.

Consideration of the complaint by the governing body and the school, save for any actions that are agreed, will terminate at this point.

If the complainant is not satisfied that the appropriate procedure has been followed, they may request a review of that process by another panel of the governing body.

### **b) Review meeting**

Any review of the process followed by the school will be conducted by a panel of 3 members of the governing body. This will usually take place within 10 school days of receipt of a written request.

The review will normally be conducted through a consideration of written submissions, but reasonable requests, from any of the parties, to make oral representations should be considered sympathetically.

The panel will first receive written evidence from the complainant.

The panel will then invite representatives of the school (usually the head teacher or the chair of the governing body panel that has considered the matter), as appropriate, to make a response to the complaint.

The panel may also have access to the records kept of the process followed.

The complainant and the school representative(s) will be informed in writing of the outcome, usually within 5 school days of the panel meeting. The matter will then be closed as far as the school is concerned.

## **Complaints not in the scope of the procedure**

The complaints procedure covers all complaints about any provision of facilities or services that we provide with the exceptions listed below, for which there are separate (statutory) procedures.

### **Exceptions Who to contact**

- Admissions to schools
- Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs (SEN)
- School re-organisation proposals
- Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation

Concerns should be raised direct with the East Riding Local Authority (LA).

### **Exclusion of children from school**

Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at: [www.gov.uk/school-disciplineexclusions/exclusions](http://www.gov.uk/school-disciplineexclusions/exclusions).

### **Whistleblowing**

We have an internal whistleblowing procedure for our employees and voluntary staff.

**Other serious concerns** can be raised with the Local Authority or direct with Ofsted by telephone on:

0300 123 3155, via email at:

[whistleblowing@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:whistleblowing@ofsted.gov.uk) or by writing to:

WBHL, Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate

Store Street

Manchester M1 2WD.

The Department for Education is also a prescribed body for whistleblowing in education.

### **Staff grievances and disciplinary procedures**

These matters will invoke the school's internal grievance procedures.

Complainants will not be informed of the outcome of any investigation.

Complaints about services provided by other providers who may use school premises or facilities.

Providers should have their own complaints procedure to deal with complaints about service.

They should be contacted direct.

### **Unreasonable complaints**

The Headteacher and Governing Body are fully committed to the improvement of our school. We welcome feedback from parents/carers and will always try to resolve any concerns as quickly as possible. There is a proper procedure for parents to use if they wish to make a formal complaint and it is expected that complaints are made in an acceptable manner. Whilst we recognise that some complaints may relate to serious and distressing incidents, we will not accept threatening or harassing behaviour towards any members of the school community. We do not work for parents – we work with parents and their children.

### **Unreasonable behaviour may include:**

actions which are

- out of proportion to the nature of the complaint;
- persistent – even when the complaints procedure has been exhausted;
- personally harassing; or
- unjustifiably repetitious

- an insistence on pursuing unjustified complaints and/or unrealistic outcomes to justified complaints;
- pursuing justifiable complaints in an unreasonable manner (eg using abusive or threatening language);
- making complaints in public or via a social networking site such as Facebook; or
- refusing to attend appointments to discuss the complaint.

### **What is 'harassment'?**

We regard harassment as the unreasonable pursuit of issues or complaints, particularly if the matter appears to be pursued in a way intended to cause personal distress rather than to seek a resolution.

Behaviour may fall within the scope of this policy if:

- it appears to be deliberately targeted at one or more members of school staff or others, without good cause;
- the way in which a complaint or other issues is pursued (as opposed to the complaint itself) causes undue distress to school staff or others;
- it has a significant and disproportionate adverse effect on the school community.

### **What does the school expect of any person wishing to raise a concern?**

The school expects anyone who wishes to raise concerns with the school to:

- treat all members of the school community with courtesy and respect;
- respect the needs of pupils and staff within the school;
- avoid the use of violence, or threats of violence, towards people or property;
- recognise the time constraints under which members of staff in schools work and allow the school a reasonable time to respond to a complaint;
- follow the school's complaints procedure.

### **What do we mean by 'an unreasonably persistent complainant'?**

We will do our best to be helpful to people who contact us with a complaint or concern or a request for information.

However, there will be occasions when, despite all stages of the complaint procedure having been followed, the complainant remains dissatisfied. It is a poor use of schools' time and resources to reply to repeated letters, emails or telephone calls making substantially the same points. If a complainant tries to re-open the same issue, the Chair of Governors can inform them that the procedure has been completed and that the matter is now closed.

If the complainant contacts the school again on the same issue, then the correspondence may be viewed as 'serial' or 'persistent' and the school may choose not to respond.

### **School's responses to unreasonable complaints or harassment**

This policy sets out how we will always seek to work with parents, carers and others with a legitimate complaint to resolve a difficulty. However, in cases of unreasonably complaints or harassment, the school may take some or all of the following steps, as appropriate:

- inform the complainant informally that his/her behaviour is now considered by the school to be unreasonable or unacceptable, and request a changed approach;
- inform the complainant in writing that the school considers his/her behaviour to fall under the terms of Unreasonably Persistent Complaints/

Harassment;

- require all future meetings with a member of staff to be conducted with a second person present. In the interests of all parties, notes of these meetings may be taken;
- inform the complainant that, except in emergencies, the school will respond only to written communication and that these may be required to be channelled through the Local Authority.

## **Physical or verbal aggression**

The governing body will not tolerate any form of physical or verbal aggression against members of the school community. If there is evidence of any such aggression the school may:

- ban the individual from entering the school site, with immediate effect;
- request an Anti-Social Behaviour Order (ASBO);
- prosecute under Anti-Harassment legislation;
- call the police to remove the individual from the premises, under powers provided by the Education Act 1996.

Legitimate new complaints will always be considered, even if the person making them is (or has been) subject to the Unreasonably Persistent Complaints/ Harassment.

The school nevertheless reserves the right not to respond to communications from individuals subject to the policy.

## **The Role of the School Complaints Unit**

If a complaint has completed the local procedures and the complainant remains dissatisfied, they have the right to refer their complaint to the Secretary of State. The Secretary of State has a duty to consider all complaints raised but will only intervene where the governing body has acted unlawfully or unreasonably and where it is expedient or practical to do so.

The School Complaints Unit (SCU) considers complaints relating to LA maintained schools in England on behalf of the Secretary of State. The SCU will look at whether the complaints policy and any other relevant statutory policies were adhered to. The SCU also looks at whether statutory policies adhere to education legislation.

However, the SCU will not normally re-investigate the substance of the complaint.

This remains the responsibility of schools.

The SCU will not overturn a school's decision about a complaint except in exceptional circumstances where it is clear the school has acted unlawfully or unreasonably. If the SCU finds that the school has not handled a complaint in accordance with its procedure, we may request that the complaint is looked at again.

Further information can be obtained from the SCU by calling the National Helpline on 0370 000 2288 or going online at: [www.education.gov.uk/help/contactus](http://www.education.gov.uk/help/contactus) or by writing to:

Department for Education  
School Complaints Unit  
2nd Floor, Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

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