

Introduction

What is a Complaint?

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction, whether made orally or in writing. This policy addresses general complaints. Complaints about the curriculum, collective worship, racist incidents or provision for children with special educational needs are dealt with under separate procedures.

How does the Staged Approach Work?

The staged approach is designed to ensure that every effort is made to deal with complaints **informally at school level** in partnership with the complainant. The formal stages should only be triggered in **exceptional** circumstances:

- Stage 1 is the **informal stage**. In the case of a complaint by a parent, the class teacher will receive the first approach and the majority of issues should be resolved at this stage. In the case of a complaint by a member of the public, the school office should be the first point of contact. A decision will then be made as to which member of staff is best placed to deal with the complaint.
- Stages 2 and 3 are **formal stages** involving the headteacher and governing body.

The policy is designed to manage all complaints but complaints vary in their nature and complexity. Therefore, the school will need to consider at which stage a complaint should be dealt with when it is initially raised and which member of staff is best placed to deal with it.

Principles and Procedures

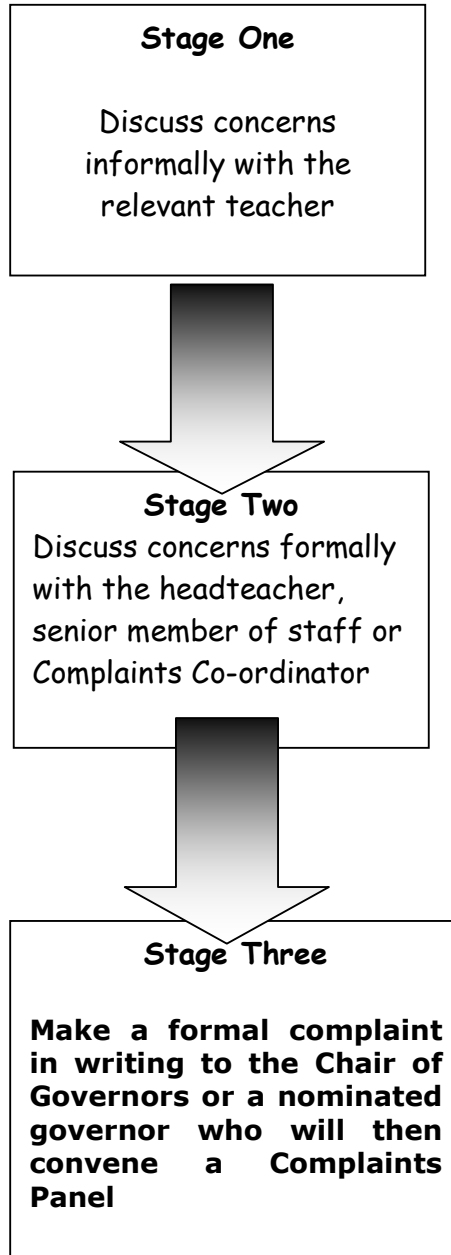
Our principle aim is to deal with complaints:

- ◆ Openly
- ◆ Fairly
- ◆ Promptly
- ◆ Without prejudice

Our procedures for dealing with complaints will:

- ◆ Be publicised in the School Prospectus
- ◆ Be simple to understand and follow
- ◆ Be focused on outcomes
- ◆ Have established time limits for action
- ◆ Keep people informed at all stages
- ◆ Where necessary, respect people's desire for confidentiality
- ◆ Be carefully monitored and evaluated
- ◆ Provide information to the school's senior management team so that the school's procedures can be improved

An Overview



Role of the School's Complaint Co-ordinator

The school's Complaints Co-ordinator is Jackie Hendry. She is responsible for the operation and management of the school complaints procedure and will be able to provide further information on request.

Guidance on the Each Stage of the Procedure

There are three stages to this procedure:

- **Stage 1 is** informal
- **Stages 2 and 3 are** formal

Any person expressing continued dissatisfaction should be advised of the next stage in the procedure.

Stage One: Discuss concerns informally with the relevant teacher.

- ◆ Complainants are advised to speak to the teacher concerned so everyone has a clear picture of the situation from all points of view. Most problems can be resolved at this informal stage.
- ◆ If the complainant indicates that he/she would have difficulty in discussing a complaint with a particular member of staff, the complaint may be referred to another member of staff. This member of staff may not necessarily be more senior.
- ◆ The member of staff who is dealing with the complaint should ensure that the complainant is reassured that the matter will be investigated and is clear what action has been agreed. All staff should be aware of the need for confidentiality.
- ◆ A brief record of any telephone calls, meetings and agreed actions should always be kept although it is not always necessary to provide the complainant with a written record at this stage. The Complaints Co-ordinator / Senior Teacher should monitor these records.
- ◆ If either the complainant or staff member feels the matter needs to be taken further, the headteacher or a senior member of staff should be contacted.

Stage Two: Discuss concerns formally with the headteacher or a senior member of staff.

- ◆ More serious concerns which remain unresolved at the end of Stage 1 should be referred to the headteacher or a senior member of staff. He / she will then investigate the matter further. Any meetings that are held with the complainant in relation to the complaint should be arranged within 10 school days. However, more complex complaints may require an extension to this time limit.
- ◆ A log of all contacts relating to the complaint should be kept.
- ◆ The Headteacher or Senior Teacher should communicate the outcome to the complainant either verbally or in writing. Any agreed actions should be put in writing.
- ◆ If, as a result of the investigation, issues arise relating to staff discipline or capability, **details should remain confidential to the headteacher.** However, the complainant should be informed that the school has taken appropriate follow-up action.

Stage Three: Make a formal complaint in writing to the Chair of Governors (or a nominated governor) who will then convene a Complaints Panel.

- ◆ Governors should only proceed with this formal stage of the Complaint Procedure if they have received a complaint in writing addressed to the Chair of Governors and **all previous stages have been exhausted.**
- ◆ Acknowledgement of the written complaint should normally be sent by the clerk to the governing body within 5 school days.
- ◆ It is essential that this process is fair and objective. **To avoid a conflict of interest, it is vital that the full governing body does not hear the complaint at this stage.** Any governor who has been involved with the complaint at an earlier stage would be unable to give objective consideration to the issue.
- ◆ It is for the governing body to agree upon the procedures for the Complaint Panel meeting. However, the governing body will usually convene a small panel of 3 or 5 governors who have not previously been involved in the complaint. The panel will usually meet within 15 school days of receiving the complaint.
- ◆ The Chair of the panel should notify the headteacher and the complainant as to whether they will be invited to attend the panel meeting. Alternatively, the panel may decide to consider written material only. Both parties must be treated equally. For example, if the headteacher is invited to the meeting, so must the complainant.
- ◆ If the complaint relates to a staff disciplinary or capability matter about which the headteacher has already taken action, the governors should focus on how the original complaint was managed to avoid prejudicing any ongoing disciplinary or capability procedures.
- ◆ The headteacher and complainant should be informed of the Panel's decision in writing within 10 school days.
- ◆ This is the final stage in the school's Complaints Procedure.

The Governing Body's decision is final, however, if the complainant is not happy with the way in which the complaint was processed, they can complain to West Sussex County Council using the County Council's Complaints Procedure. Copies may be obtained by going to www.westsussex.gov.uk and following the link to Contact Us – Complaints or by ringing 0845 0751014 or writing to Freepost, West Sussex County Council, Comments, Compliments & Complaints, County Hall, Chichester PO10 1RQ.

If the complainant believes that the governing body or local authority acted "unreasonably", they can complain to the Secretary of State in the Department for Children, Schools and Families under Section 496 of the Education Act 1996. Please note that "unreasonable" is used in a strict sense and means acting in a way that no reasonable school or authority could act in the circumstances. The complainant should write to The Secretary of State, Department for Children, Schools and Families, Sanctuary Buildings, Great Smith Street, London SW1P 3BT or call 0870 001 2288.

Since 2007 Ofsted also has powers to investigate certain complaints by parents about their child's school. Complainants should write to Ofsted, Royal Exchange Buildings, St Ann's Square, Manchester, M2 7LA or call 08456 404045 or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk