

Advice to Parents School Complaints Procedure

If you have a complaint, it is the responsibility of the school, and not the Local Authority, to investigate most complaints.

Communication, written or spoken, is valued as part of the partnership between home and school. Co-operation between parents, staff and governors leads to a shared sense of purpose and a good atmosphere in the school. This section explains the procedure that you, a parent, should follow if you have a concern or a complaint.

Dealing with concerns informally

If you have a concern you should make contact with the appropriate member of staff. This may be the class teacher or the headteacher if s/he is immediately involved.

They can then look into your concern and give you a response, making clear any action or monitoring of a situation that may be necessary. At this stage, misunderstandings can usually be cleared up. An apology can be given if something is found to be wrong. Everyone benefits from the speedy resolution of difficulties and from suggestions for improvement.

If no satisfactory solution to the concern has been agreed you should be informed of your option to take the matter further.

What do I do next?

If by this point, you remain dissatisfied with the school's response, your concern becomes a complaint. If you want to take the matter further, you should put your complaint, in writing, to the headteacher. If your complaint is about the headteacher, you should put your complaint, in writing, to the chair of governors.

Your complaint should be dealt with in an agreed timescale as part of the school's complaints procedure. You should ask for a copy of the school's complaints procedure which should tell you how the governing body will investigate the complaint. An investigation into your complaint should be carried out by the appropriate person (the headteacher or the chair of governors).

Depending on the reason for the complaint, statements from witnesses may be required.

When all the relevant facts have been established, you should receive a detailed written response.

To find contact details please use [Search for schools](#).

If I am unhappy with the response, what do I do?

You should be advised that if you wish to take the matter further you should notify the chair of the governing body, at the school, in writing, to this effect.

A further investigation of your complaint should be carried out:

- by the chair of governors if s/he has not had any previous involvement; and/or
- by the governing body's complaints committee.

If the matter is dealt with at this stage by the chair of governors, and you are unhappy with the outcome, you should be advised of your right to take the matter further to the governing body's complaints committee.

The complaints committee should carry out a detailed investigation into the complaint.

It is very important that you do not discuss the complaint with any other governor as this might prejudice the outcome of the investigation.

A meeting should be arranged, and everyone involved should receive copies of all available documentation about the complaint. You should be invited to attend the complaints committee meeting to put your case (***you may bring a friend or someone to represent you***). The headteacher should also be invited to put the case for the school (the headteacher will be able to bring a friend or professional representative). You and the headteacher will be invited to speak to the panel (which will have three governors on it) and to ask and answer questions. ***The panel normally allows witnesses to attend part of the meeting.***

A governing body may decide not to consider a complaint about something that occurred more than two months previously.

What happens next?

You should be informed in writing of the panel's decision. There is no appeal mechanism to the governing body. If you are not happy with this decision you can ask the Group Director, Children and Young People's Services whether your complaint is one which can be heard by them. The local authority cannot investigate a complaint, it can only investigate the process followed by the governing body.

If you are still unhappy, the final resort is the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families.

Remember . . .

This whole process exists so that your views, and the views of others, can be heard. You have rights. Pupils have rights. Staff and governors have rights. The aim is that the complaint should be properly and fairly dealt with. Communications with schools are frequent and are welcome. The later stages of the complaints procedure are used rarely but remain part of the process. Services are improved by a positive response to compliments, concerns and complaints.

Governing Bodies' Complaints Committees and Procedures

Introduction

Schools are required by law to have, and to publish to parents, their complaints procedures. We recommend the following guidance to governing bodies.

The constitution of a complaints committee

In appointing members to the complaints committee, consideration must be given to the possible need for further action by the disciplinary/dismissal committees with regard to the issue of tainting other committees. With that in mind, the complaints committee should be small and constituted as follows:

- That 3 governors be appointed from 5 named governors or a designated other committee
- That the committee, when it meets, includes at least one parent governor, if possible and appropriate
- That governors who are employed to work at the school and who may have a direct involvement, are precluded from membership
- That the committee has delegated powers. As such it needs formal notice, an agenda and brief minutes (care needs to be taken about the content of minutes re: tainting, when reporting back to the full governing body)
- If the governing body has not appointed a chair, or the chair is not available, the committee shall appoint one of their number to be chair.
- That any feedback to the full governing body is restricted to basics facts, such as, that a complaint has been heard and upheld or dismissed.

The terms of reference of the complaints committee

It is assumed that, unless the complaint is about the head teacher personally, the head will always be expected to be the person to initially resolve a complaint. The suggested terms of reference are:

- To ensure the previous, more informal stages of the process, have been followed.
- To review the headteacher's decision where a complainant is dissatisfied
- Where a complainant requests, to allow the complainant to present his/her case personally
- To allow the complainant to be accompanied by a friend
- At the Committee's discretion, to allow a pupil to be heard.
- Following a tribunal format, the complainant and the head teacher will only be heard in each other's presence.

Decisions to be taken

Firstly, To confirm or not that the complaints process has been followed fully and fairly.

Secondly, one of the following:

- To confirm the headteacher's decision
- To ask the headteacher to reconsider certain aspects of the complaint
- To ask the LA to investigate the complaint, if either party is not satisfied.

Procedures to be followed by the complaints committee

- The complaints committee is a review body and not an initial investigation.
- The complaints committee should have received all the complainant's and the headteacher's correspondence about the complaint.
- The chair of the committee should write to the complainant to inform him/her about the meeting. The complainant should be offered every accommodation regarding the timing of the meeting but there must be an acknowledgement that governors hearing the complaint have commitments too, so arrangements that are mutually convenient should be made.
- Brief minutes, regarding the date, time and place of the meeting; people present; a brief account of the complaint; a brief account of the headteacher's decision; a record of the committee's decisions.
- The minutes should not refer to people by name but by initials and will be resolved to be 'not available to the public at the school'.

Please note:

The complaints committee does not deal with complaints against the headteacher because the head cannot investigate her/himself. These must be referred to the chair of governors (who may decide to invite the LA or an independent person to investigate).

We strongly recommend that the chair contact the LA (via the School Link Officer or Legal Services) for advice and support.

Summary of School Complaints Procedures

1. Parents who wish to raise a concern should raise it in the first instance with the most appropriate person in the school. This will usually be an informal conversation with a teacher.
2. If the parent remains concerned, s/he should raise their concern with the headteacher. This should still be quite informal, in the hope of a speedy resolution.
3. If the meeting between the headteacher and the complainant does not resolve the matter, then it is advisable that both parties should formally, in writing, set out their understanding of the situation.
4. If the matter continues to remain unresolved, ask the complainant to take their written complaint to the Chair of Governors for investigation and/or consideration by the Governing Body's Complaints Committee.
5. The Complaints Committee considers written evidence from the headteacher and the complainant. Both parties are entitled to be present at the meeting.
6. The Governors Complaints Committee may decide to:
 - Uphold the headteacher's decision.
 - Ask the headteacher to reconsider certain aspects of their decision.
 - Ask the LA to investigate the complaint.