

COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

INFORMAL STAGE

Concern heard by staff member

At Polegate School we like to be told how we are doing. We regularly actively seek the views of parents and pupils. We like to celebrate what is going well but also to act quickly to rectify any problems or deal effectively with any concerns.

This complaints procedure is for general complaints. The school must follow other procedures for complaints or appeals about the curriculum, special educational needs provision, exclusions and admissions. Staff disciplinary action, child protection issues or criminal investigation will also need to be handled differently. The school will inform the complainant which is the right process to follow when the concern is raised.

It is to be expected that parents or others, from time to time, may have legitimate concerns about aspects of the school. Such concerns ought to be handled, if at all possible, without the need for formal procedures. They should be raised with a member of staff, preferably the person who is most closely involved, who should be able to resolve the issue on the spot, including offering an apology if necessary.

It is in everyone's interest that concerns are resolved at the earliest possible stage. The experience of the first contact between the aggrieved party and the school can be crucial

in determining whether the concern will escalate into a complaint. To that end staff will know what to do when they receive a complaint, and which procedure to follow.

The school will respect 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 headteacher, 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 member of staff and advise them about the procedure. Governors should 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.

FORMAL STAGE 1

Complaint heard by Headteacher

When initial attempts to resolve the issue are unsuccessful and the person raising the concern remains dissatisfied and wishes to take the matter further the formal procedure will need to be invoked.

This procedure is simple to understand and accessible on the school's website. The Deputy Headteacher acts as the school's 'complaints co-ordinator' and has responsibility for the co-ordination and management of the school's complaints procedure.

A complaint should be submitted either verbally or in writing to the Headteacher, who will acknowledge receipt of the complaint within 5 school days and provide a full written response within 15 school days. The head may delegate the task of collating the information to another staff member but not the decision on the action to be taken. Information will be provided to the complainant on how to progress the complaint to Stage 2 if they are not satisfied with the outcome of stage 1. They will be provided with a school "Complaint form" (See Annex 1).

FORMAL STAGE 2

Complaint heard by Chair of Governors

The complainant may ask for a review of their complaint by writing to the chair of governors care of the school, making it clear why they are complaining, who they have already spoken to and what they want to happen as a result of their complaint.

Complaints made to the chair will be acknowledged within 5 school days with a substantive response within 15 school days. The chair may need to hold interviews

with the headteacher and possibly other members of staff and notes should be kept of those meetings.

It may be appropriate for the chair to meet with the complainant. The letter conveying the chair's findings will include details of the next stage of the procedure. The chair may need to explain the power of the governing body in the matter in question and the extent it may be possible to achieved the outcome desired by the complainant.

FORMAL STAGE 3

Complaint heard by Governing Body's Complaints Panel

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

The governors' complaints panel is the last school-based stage of the complaints process, and is not convened to merely rubber-stamp previous decisions. Individual complaints would not be heard by the whole governing body 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 will nominate three or five members with delegated powers to hear complaints at this stage, and set out its terms of reference, consistent with East Sussex CSA guidance. The panel will choose their own chair.

The Complaints Panel will meet between 12 and 20 school days from receipt of the letter. The Complainant will be told in advance about the process and what will happen at the meeting, and will be invited to attend with the support of a friend or relative. They will be informed of the panel's findings within 5 school days from the date of the hearing. Information will be provided giving full contact details about how the complaint can be progressed to the Secretary of State (DCSF) or the local Government Ombudsman.

The Complaints Flowchart at Annex 2 gives a visual summary of the Complaints Procedure.



Learning without Limits

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COMPLAINT FORM

Please complete and return to (complaints co-ordinator)
who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

Your name	<input type="text"/>		
Pupil's name	<input type="text"/>		
Your relationship to the Pupil	<input type="text"/>		
Address	<input type="text"/>		
Day time Tel No.	<input type="text"/>	Evening Tel No.	<input type="text"/>

Please give details of your complaint

What action if any, have you taken to try and resolve your complaint. (who did you speak to and what was the response)?

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

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

Signature	<input type="text"/>	Date	<input type="text"/>
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Official use:

Date acknowledgement sent	<input type="text"/>	By who	<input type="text"/>
Complaint referred to	<input type="text"/>	Date	<input type="text"/>

CONCERN OR COMPLAINT RECEIVED

INFORMAL PROCEDURE

Informal discussion with the relevant class teacher or other relevant member of staff usually resulting in resolution of the issue.

If the complaint is about the headteacher - proceed to Stage 2.

SCHOOL ACTION

The person is informed of the action to be taken to resolve the issue. If they are not satisfied they should be provided with a copy of the school's complaints procedure and information on how to proceed to stage 1.

FORMAL PROCEDURE - STAGE 1

The complaint is submitted, either verbally or in writing to the headteacher

SCHOOL ACTION

The headteacher acknowledges receipt within 5 school days and provides a full written response within 15 school days. Information is provided to the complainant on how to progress the complaint to stage 2.

FORMAL PROCEDURE - STAGE 2

A written complaint is submitted to the chair of governors

SCHOOL ACTION

The chair acknowledges receipt within 5 school days and provides a full written response within 15 school days. Information is provided to the complainant on how to progress the complaint to stage 3.

FORMAL PROCEDURE - STAGE 3

Complainant writes to the clerk to the governors requesting that the complaint be heard by the complaints panel.

SCHOOL ACTION

Clerk arranges for complaints panel to meet between 12 and 20 school days from receipt of letter and informs the complainant of findings within 5 school days of hearing. Information is provided to the complainant on how to progress the complaint to the Secretary for Children, Schools and Families and Local Government Ombudsman.

FURTHER RECOURSE

Complainant writes to the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families, or the Local Government Ombudsman

The Secretary of State may intervene if a governing body or the Children's Services Department has acted unreasonably. The ombudsman only investigates issues of maladministration.