

# Complaints Policy



**Reviewed: September 2018 by Headteacher – M Haywood**

**Next review: September 2019**

## **What is a complaint?**

A complaint is defined as an expression of grievance or dissatisfaction received from parents/carers or members of the community regarding;

- action taken by or on behalf of the school.
- failure by the school or its staff or contractors to respond to a reported problem.
- the standard of service(s) provided or discrimination in their delivery.
- the policies of the school.

(This procedure does not limit complainants to parents or carers of pupils registered at a school. A complainant could be a member of the wider community or representing an ex-pupil. The law also requires the procedure to be publicised.)

We hope that community members feel able to approach the school about any concerns they may have. Most difficulties can be resolved providing they are identified early and in many cases misunderstandings can be prevented if parents make contact with the school.

We do not expect the staff at Old Park Primary School and Nursery to deal with parents/carers, or anyone who is rude or aggressive in their manner, or who shout and use inappropriate language. In such cases the person will be asked to leave until they can return acting in a more appropriate manner.

## **Informal discussion**

Most complaints or queries can be dealt with quickly and easily if parents and carers contact the relevant class teacher at the end of the school day. It should be noted that all teaching staff are available from 3.15 – 3.30 p.m., or appointments can be made. It may be appropriate to keep a record of some informal discussions to monitor for any patterns that may develop.

If the teacher or Head Teacher cannot deal with a complaint informally, the person making the complaint may wish to enter into a Formal Complaints System. All such complaints will be recorded and monitored.

## **Formal Complaints**

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

A complaint may be made in person, by telephone or in writing. At the end of a meeting or telephone call, it would be helpful if the member of staff ensured that the complainant and the school have the same understanding of what was discussed and agreed. A brief note of meetings and telephone calls can be kept and a copy of any written response added to the record.

## **Investigating complaints**

At each stage, the person investigating the complaint makes sure that they:

- establish **what** has happened so far, and **who** has been involved;
- clarify the nature of the complaint and what remains unresolved;

- meet with the complainant or contact them (if unsure or further information is necessary);
- clarify what the complainant feels would put things right;
- interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish;
- conduct the interview with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning;
- keep notes of the interview or arrange for an independent note taker to record minutes of the meeting.

### **Resolving a complaint**

It might be sufficient to acknowledge that the complaint is valid in whole or in part. In addition, it may be appropriate to offer one or more of the following:

- an apology;
- an explanation;
- an admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better;
- an assurance that the event complained of will not recur;
- an explanation of the steps that have been taken to ensure that it will not happen again;
- an undertaking to review school policies in light of the complaint.

### **Dealing with Complaints**

**Stage 1 (informal)** – Complaint heard by staff member

Head teacher is informed of outcome. If not resolved, then escalate to **Stage 2 (formal)** – Complaint heard by Head teacher

- Head teacher acknowledges receipt of complaint, talks to complainant and investigates concerns (This is carried out as soon as is practically possible after complaint has been made)
- Head teacher feeds back and/or writes to complainant with outcome of investigation

If not resolved, then escalate to **Stage 3 (formal)** – a written complaint is sent Chair of Governors

- Chair of Governors acknowledges receipt of complaint within 5 working days
- write to complainant with outcome of investigation within 10 working days
- Head teacher is informed of outcome

If not resolved then escalate to **Stage 4 (formal)** – Governors Complaints Appeal Committee meeting arranged

**(Note:** Members of this panel are selected according to availability of Governors at the time of the meeting. The panel will choose their own Chair. Terms of reference available in school) The complainant will write to the nominated Clerk to the Governing Body Mrs Esther McDermot at Old Park Primary School giving details of the complaint and asking that it is put before the appeal panel. The Chair, or if the Chair has been involved at any previous stage in the process, a nominated governor, will convene a Governing Body complaints panel.

The governors' appeal hearing is the last school-based stage of the complaints process and is not convened merely to rubber-stamp previous decisions.

**(Note;** 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.)

If the person making the complaint remains dissatisfied with the outcome of the referral to the Governing Body they may then turn to the Secretary of State.

### **What to do if the complaint is about the Head teacher**

Complaints about the Head teacher, that the complainant cannot or does not wish to raise directly with the Head teacher, should in the first instance be sent to the chair of governors who will arrange for the matter to be dealt with as set out above.

### **Notification of the panel's decision**

The Chair of the Panel needs to ensure that the complainant is notified of the panel's decision, in writing, with the panel's response (including the reasons for the decision); this is usually within a set deadline which is publicised in the procedure. The letter needs to explain if there are any further rights of appeal and, if so, to whom they need to be addressed. This may be the LA or Diocesan Board.

The final stage of appeal is to the Secretary of State for Education.

Complainants should be advised to write to

The School Complaints Unit (SCU)

Department for Education

2nd Floor, Piccadilly Gate

Manchester

M1 2WD

### **What will the Department for Education do?**

If a complaint has exhausted the local procedures, SCU will examine if the complaints policy and any other relevant policies were followed in accordance with the provisions set out. SCU also examines policies to determine if they adhere to education legislation. However, the department will not re-investigate the substance of the complaint. This remains the responsibility of schools.

If legislative or policy breaches are found, SCU will report them to the school and the complainant and, where necessary, require remedial action to be taken. Failure to carry out remedial actions could ultimately result in a formal Direction being issued by the Secretary of State.

### **Monitoring of Complaints**

An anonymous analysis of all formal complaints will be reported to the governing body regularly through the Head teacher termly report to the Governing Body. The report will include the number of formal complaints received, how many are pending, any decisions made, or any, which are to be forwarded to the Governors. This will inform Governors any necessary changes in the school's policies, practices or procedures can be considered and implemented. For further information please refer to *School Complaints Toolkit 2014 - Gov.uk* 6