

MANEY HILL PRIMARY SCHOOL



COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

Reviewed by Staff:

April 2015

Governor Ratification Date:

May 2015

Next Review Date:

April 2018

COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

Overview and Scope

From 1 September 2003 Governing Bodies of all maintained schools and maintained nursery schools in England were required, under Section 29 of the Education Act 2002, to have in place a procedure to deal with complaints relating to the school and to any community facilities or services that the school provides.

This procedure is to deal with all concerns or complaints relating to the actions of staff and application of school procedures where they affect individual pupils, **except** matters directly related to curriculum, or to a particular exclusion, child protection, special needs statementing or admission issue, all of which are dealt with under separate procedures; details of these procedures should also be available from the school.

Similarly, any complaints by members of staff should usually be dealt with through the appropriate separate procedures such as grievance, capability or anti-harassment.

Part 1: General Principles of Complaints

Dealing with Complaints – Initial concerns/informal procedures

These procedures make a distinction between dealing with a concern or complaint informally or formally.

The underlying principle of the procedure is that, if at all possible, concerns and complaints ought to be handled and resolved informally (usually by the staff directly concerned) without the need to invoke a formal referral and process.

It is expected that the class teacher will be able to resolve most concerns without the need to go any further.

An unreasonable refusal by the complainant to attempt an informal resolution may result in the concern or complaint being taken no further.

Dealing with Complaints – Formal procedures

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

There are four stages to the Complaints Procedure:

Stage one: receiving a complaint

Stage two: complaint heard by staff member (though not the subject of the complaint)

Stage three: complaint heard by headteacher

Stage four: complaint heard by the Governing Body's complaints panel

Framework of Principles

Any concern or complaint should be brought to the attention of the school at the earliest opportunity. Any matter raised more than 3 months after the event will only be considered in exceptional circumstances.

A concern or complaint from a member of the public who is not a parent or a guardian of a child attending the school should be referred directly to the headteacher, unless the complaint is about the headteacher in which case it should be referred to the Chair of Governors.

An anonymous complaint cannot be dealt with unless there are exceptional circumstances.

Any concern or complaint will be dealt with in a way that:

respects confidentiality

addresses all the points at issue

provides an effective response, and, *where necessary*,

appropriate redress

Concerns and complaints should be handled in both an impartial and non-adversarial manner, and an open, transparent and constructive way.

Investigating Complaints

At whatever stage, the person investigating the concern or complaint should:

establish what has happened so far, and who has been involved;

clarify the nature of the complaint and what remains unresolved;

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;

Any person interviewed as part of an investigation is entitled to be accompanied by a friend or representative and / or a translator, and to agree any notes taken, particularly if the investigation is part of the formal process.

Resolving Complaints

At whatever stage, the person dealing with the concern or complaint should endeavour to find a resolution, but obviously this will depend on the nature of the concern or complaint and what the complainant wants.

It is also of equal importance to clarify any misunderstandings that might have occurred as this can create a positive atmosphere in which to discuss any outstanding issues.

Complainants should be encouraged to state what actions they feel might resolve the problem at any stage – though this should be on the understanding that it may not be possible or reasonable to deliver them.

It may be appropriate and sufficient to acknowledge that the complaint is valid in whole or in part - an admission that the school could have handled the situation better is not the same as an admission of negligence.

In addition, it may be appropriate to offer one or more of the following:

an expression of regret for any distress, etc.

an explanation;

an admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better;

an assurance that every effort will be made to ensure that the event complained of will not recur;

an explanation of the steps that have been taken to try to ensure that it will not happen again;

an undertaking to review school policies in light of the complaint.

Use of the formal procedures means that all attempts at an informal resolution of the concern have failed; resolution will then depend upon any recommendations based on the judgements made from the evidence uncovered in the investigation.

Of course, an investigation may find no evidence for the complaint or that the complaint is otherwise groundless.

Vexatious Complaints

There will be occasions when, despite all stages of the procedures having been followed, the complainant remains dissatisfied. If the complainant tries to reopen the same issue, the chair of the Governing Body will inform them in writing that the procedure has been exhausted and that the matter is now closed.

The complainant may take their complaint to the LEA or to the appropriate Diocesan body, **but**, there is no onus on either of these bodies to re-open an investigation, etc. if they are satisfied that the school has dealt with the complaint appropriately; their remit is to review due process.

Time-Limits

A concern or complaint will be acknowledged as soon as it is received and attempts to deal with it informally started as soon as practicable in timescales agreed by all parties. (It is recommended that, if at all possible, this starts within 5 working days of receiving the concern or complaint and is completed within 10 working days of starting.)

Once a complaint has been lodged formally, an investigation should begin within 5 working school days and a realistic but reasonable timescale should be set for completion, etc. It is reasonable for a complainant to expect to receive verbal or written feedback within 10 working school days of an investigation completing.

However, where further investigations become necessary or delays occur, new time limits can be set and the complainant sent details of the new deadline and an explanation for the delay.

Part 2: The Complaints Procedure

Stage one: receiving a complaint

A complaint from a member of the public, who is not a parent or guardian of a child attending the school, should go directly to the headteacher in the first instance. Parents, carers or guardians wishing to complain should, where possible, contact the member of staff concerned (which may be the headteacher) - by letter, telephone or in person.

Whoever receives the complaint should direct the complainant to the member of staff concerned, or to the headteacher:

if the complainant wants an acknowledgement of the issue, and / or a resolution to a problem which is relatively straightforward, and / or the prevention of a recurrence, this is more likely to be suited by an informal process;

on the other hand, a formal process is required if the nature of the complaint is such that it requires (1) an investigation - rather than, or following, the appropriate person just “making enquiries about” or “looking into” an issue or the complaint - or (2), for the matter to be seen and recorded to have been dealt with.

A complaint should be acknowledged as soon as it is received.

If any member of staff receives a complaint, they should not attempt to deal with the issue but should pass it to the appropriate person. Similarly, if a member of staff feels too compromised to deal with the complaint, the matter should be referred to a more appropriate member of staff.

Also, there will be occasions when the complainant may have concerns about discussing their complaint with a particular member of staff, if so, the complainant should be directed to address their concerns to the headteacher or a designated senior teacher.

Please note: if the first approach is made direct to a governor they should direct the complainant to the appropriate person - usually the class teacher. Governors should not act unilaterally on an individual complaint outside the procedure - such action may compromise future action regarding the complaint.

Stage two: complaint dealt with by staff member

The class teacher or appropriate member of staff or headteacher will attempt to resolve the complaint using whatever reasonable means are appropriate. This will usually involve meeting the complainant to discuss the matter further, and may also involve talking to pupils, other staff members or consulting senior staff including the headteacher.

If having raised their concerns with the class teacher or appropriate member of staff, the complainant is still dissatisfied, or if the class teacher or other nominated member of staff is the subject of the complaint, then the complainant should contact the headteacher (unless the headteacher is the subject of the complaint - then the complainant should contact the Chair of Governors).

Stage three: complaint dealt with by headteacher

The headteacher will attempt to resolve a complaint using whatever reasonable means are appropriate. This may involve meeting the complainant to discuss the matter further; it may also involve the headteacher interviewing staff members.

The headteacher must be allowed reasonable time to investigate the complaint and gather any information that is required. On this basis, the headteacher should aim to be able to give either verbal or written feedback to the complainant no later than 10 school days after receipt of the complaint.

On some occasions the headteacher may delegate the investigation to a senior member of staff, usually a deputy or assistant head teacher who has had no involvement with the case: the decision on the appropriate person rests with the headteacher.

If having raised concerns with the headteacher, the complainant is still dissatisfied, or if the headteacher is the subject of the complaint, then the complainant should contact the Chair of Governors.

Stage four: complaint dealt with by governing body

The Governing Body has responsibility for ensuring that any formal complaints are dealt with: **complaints must be in writing** – using a specific form if required.

In cases that require urgent consideration the Chair may deal with the matter exclusively and without delay.

Otherwise, the Chair of Governors should decide if a reasonable attempt has been made by the headteacher or other staff to address the concern or complaint. It is important that concerns or complaints are dealt with appropriately as well as properly, and that staff are not subjected to “double jeopardy”.

The Chair of Governors may refer to School and Governing Body Support or the appropriate Diocesan Office for advice and guidance in deciding, and these agencies may deal with the concern or complaint if the nature of it requires this.

If the Chair of Governors decides that the concern or complaint has been dealt with reasonably, then the complainant should be told that, **and** that their only grounds for appeal may be on the basis of the way in which their concern or complaint was handled (and not against the decision made).

If the Chair of Governors decides that the concern or complaint may not have been dealt with reasonably, or that a formal appeal is appropriate, or if the headteacher is the subject of the concern or complaint, then a hearing by a Complaint Panel of the Governing Body should be arranged.

The Chair will ensure that a designated panel of three or five governors will be convened to hear the complaint.

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 designated governors will deal with the complaint on an impartial basis via a **panel hearing** – please refer to **Notes for Guidance**

It is important that any hearing is independent and impartial and that it is seen to be so: no governor may sit on the panel if they have had a prior involvement in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it.

Also, in deciding the make-up of the panel, governors should try to ensure that it is a cross-section of the categories of governor and, as far as is practicable, sensitive to the issues of race, gender and religious affiliation.

The clerk to the Governing Body will normally record the proceedings.

The aim of the hearing, which must be held in private, will always be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant.

The panel will:

Dismiss the complaint in whole or in part, or

Uphold the complaint in whole or in part, or

Where appropriate decide action to be taken to uphold the complaint, or

Recommend changes to the school systems or procedures to seek to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not recur.

However, it has to be recognised the complainant might not be satisfied with the outcome if the hearing does not find in their favour, and therefore it may only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations which will satisfy the complainant that their complaint has been taken seriously.

Following the hearing, the complainant will receive written feedback from the clerk including any decisions, recommendations and the reasons for them and, if appropriate, the next steps. The written feedback should be issued within ten working days after the investigation has concluded.

If the outcome might lead to action under another procedure, e.g. disciplinary, then the complainant need only be told that appropriate action will be taken.

Further, there may be occasions when a panel would wish to resolve an issue by means which are clearly within the responsibility of the internal management of the school: governors (and headteachers) need to be mindful of their roles and responsibilities in regulation – see Guide to the law for School Governors.

Only in exceptional circumstances should governors consider taking a decision that may undermine the authority of a headteacher or other staff and governors must consult School and Governor Support before doing so.

This is the final step of the process for the school though the recommendations may be such, eg: changes in policy or practice, that it is necessary for the full Governing Body to receive a short report regarding the findings of the investigation. (Please note: this should not mention names).

The Chair of Governors is responsible for ensuring that the correct procedures have been followed.

Of course, there will be occasions when, despite all stages of the procedures having been followed, the complainant remains dissatisfied. If the complainant tries to reopen the same issue, the Chair of the Governing Body will inform them in writing that the procedure has been exhausted and that the matter is now closed but that the complainant may take their complaint to the LEA or to the appropriate Diocesan body. Their remit is to review in due process, so there is no onus on them to re-open an investigation: they may only decide to do so if they judge that there has not been due process.