



# Sefton Park Schools

## Complaints Procedure

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### What to do if you have concerns or complaints

It is in everyone's best interests to help ensure that any concerns or complaints can be resolved as quickly and informally as possible and we aim to resolve most concerns in this way. If you have an issue that you would like to discuss, please see your child's class teacher, or the appropriate member of staff - class teachers or office staff will be happy to point you to the right person if you are unsure. (It is usually best to arrange a time to meet the staff member involved in advance, rather than catching them in passing, so that you can be assured of their full attention.) If, after meeting staff informally, you feel that you still have a concern or complaint that hasn't been addressed to your satisfaction, the procedure to follow is outlined in the following pages.

We are fully committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, in a friendly, respectful and professional way. In order to make sure that complaints are addressed to the most appropriate person, the procedure described below follows a staged approach. It is our experience that almost all complaints that arise will be resolved at the early stages of the procedure, and that the later stages will only need to be followed on very rare occasions. The procedure refers to time limits in terms of "school days"; this refers to days the school is open, i.e. excluding weekends and school holidays.

### Accessibility

We expect to take all reasonable efforts to make sure that the complaints procedure is fully accessible to all. Help with accessing the procedure in different formats or with following any of the steps in the procedure may be requested at any stage (please see the office staff about this).



## Complaints Procedure

Complaints from anyone who is not a parent, or from a parent who is concerned only about a whole-school and not personal issue, will follow the same procedure as below, but will omit Stage 1. It is strongly encouraged that anyone with such a concern should make an informal approach to the Business Manager or the Headteacher first, but if it is subsequently decided to lodge a formal complaint, it should be addressed to the Headteacher who will follow the steps in Stage 2.

### Stage 1: The first contact

- 1.1. Parents/carers are always welcome to discuss any concerns with the appropriate member of staff, who will clarify with the parent/carer the nature of the concern and reassure them that the school wants to hear about it. The member of staff may explain to the parent/carer how the situation happened. It is helpful at this point to identify what sort of outcome the parent/carer is looking for (such as an explanation, a change in practice, or an apology where an error has been made).
- 1.2. If the member of staff first contacted cannot immediately resolve the matter, they will make a clear note of the date, name and contact address or phone number.
- 1.3. All members of staff will know how to refer, if necessary, to the person with responsibility for the particular issue raised by the parent/carer. They will check later to make sure the referral has been dealt with.
- 1.4. The member of staff dealing with the concern will make sure the parent/carer is clear what action (if any) or monitoring of the situation has been agreed, putting it in writing if appropriate.
- 1.5. If the matter is brought to the attention of the Headteacher they may decide to deal with concerns directly at this stage; if the complaint is against the Headteacher the parent/carer will be advised to contact the Chair of the governing body.
- 1.6. Where no satisfactory solution has been found within ten school days, Parents/carers will be advised by the member of staff dealing with the concern that if they wish their concern to be considered further they should put their complaint in writing to the Headteacher as soon as possible, and in any case within 30 school days.

### Stage 2: Referral to the Headteacher for investigation

- 2.1 The Headteacher (or designated person) will acknowledge the complaint in writing within three school days of receiving the written complaint. The acknowledgement will give a brief explanation of the school's complaints procedure and a target date for providing a response to the complaint. This should normally be within fifteen



school days. If this proves impossible, a letter will be sent explaining the reason for the delay and giving a revised target date.

2.2 The Headteacher will provide an opportunity for the complainant to meet them to supplement any information provided previously. It will be made clear to the complainant that if they wish they might be accompanied to any meeting by a friend, relative, representative or advocate who can speak on their behalf.

2.3 If necessary the Headteacher will interview witnesses and take statements from those involved. If the complaint centres on a pupil, the pupil should also be interviewed. Pupils should normally be interviewed with parents/guardians present, but if this would seriously delay the investigation of a serious/urgent complaint or if the pupil has specifically said that they would prefer that parents/guardians were not involved, another member of staff with whom the pupil feels comfortable should be present. If a member of staff is complained against, they must have the opportunity to present their case.

2.4 The Headteacher will keep written records of meetings, telephone conversations and other documentation.

2.5 Once all the relevant facts have been established as far as possible, the Headteacher will then produce a written response to the complainant, including a full explanation of the decision and the reasons for it. Where appropriate, this will include what action the school will take to resolve the complaint. At the Headteacher's discretion, a follow-up meeting with the complainant may be arranged.

2.6 If, in the course of an investigation, a fault is identified, the headteacher should take immediate action to put matters right so that any potential injustice does not continue or risk happening to somebody else.

2.7 The complainant will be advised that should they wish to take the complaint further they should notify the Chair of Governors in writing within 20 school days of the date of the Headteacher's written response.

### **What if the complaint is about the Headteacher?**

If the complaint is against the Headteacher, or if the Headteacher has been closely involved at Stage 1, the Chair of the governing body will carry out all the Stage 2 procedures. (If the Chair of the governing body has prior knowledge of the complaint, this role will be carried out by the Vice-Chair or a nominated Governor.)

### **What if the complaint is about a Governor?**

The complainant should still contact the Chair of Governors who will investigate the concerns. If the complaint is about the Chair of Governors the complainant should be



referred to the Vice Chair. If the complaint is about the governing body as a whole, the complainant should be referred to the Strategic Director, Children, Young People and Skills, Bristol City Council.

### Stage 3: Review by the Governing Body

3.1 The Chair of the governing body will write to the complainant to acknowledge receipt of the written request for the governing body to review the complaint. The acknowledgement will inform the complainant that a panel of three members of the school's governing body will hear the complaint within twenty school days of receiving the complaint. If a complaint requires additional investigation or legal advice before the panel can meet, then the complainant will be advised of any delay in setting the panel date. The letter of acknowledgement will also explain that the complainant has the right to submit any further documents relevant to the complaint. These must be received in time for the documents to be sent to the three members (as soon as possible and at least five school days prior to the meeting).

3.2 A meeting of the Governors' Complaints Panel will be convened by the Chair of Governors and a clerk to the panel will be appointed.

The Complaints Panel can be drawn from the whole governing body. Governors with prior involvement must not be included on the panel. If they have not previously been involved the Chair of Governors can Chair the panel. However this does not need to be the case. It is up to the Complaints Panel to decide who should be its chair. When deciding on the make-up of the panel, bear in mind the advantages of including a Governor and if possible having a balance of race and gender. It is not appropriate for the Headteacher to sit on the panel. Careful consideration will need to be given whether it is appropriate for staff Governors to be appointed as panel members; in many instances this may lead to a conflict of interest.

3.3 The Chair of the Complaints Panel will ensure the panel hears the complaint within twenty school days of receiving the letter. All relevant correspondence relating to the complaint will be given to each panel member as soon as the composition of the panel is confirmed. If the correspondence is extensive, the Chair may prepare a thorough summary for sending to panel members.

3.4 The Clerk will write and inform the complainant, Headteacher, any relevant witnesses and members of the Panel at least five school days in advance of the date, time and place of the meeting. The notification will also inform the complainant of their right to be accompanied to the meeting by a friend/advocate/interpreter and explain how the meeting will be conducted.

3.5 The Headteacher will be invited to attend the panel meeting and will be asked to prepare a written report for the panel in response to the complaint. The report will



contain a chronological account of the incident and the investigations. All concerned, including the complainant, should receive any relevant documents including the Headteacher's report, at least five school days prior to the meeting. The Headteacher may also invite members of staff directly involved in matters raised by the complainant to respond in writing or person.

### 3.6 The meeting should allow for:

- The complainant to explain their complaint and the Headteacher to explain the school's response. · The opportunity for both parties to ask questions of each other about the complaint.
- Panel members to have an opportunity to question both the complainant and the Headteacher.
- Any party to have the right to call witnesses (subject to approval of the Chair) and all parties having the right to question all the witnesses.
- The panel may need to recall the complainant, headteacher or witnesses at any stage to seek clarification.
- Final statements by both the complainant and the Headteacher.

It is the responsibility of the Clerk of the panel to ensure that sufficient notes are taken to record an accurate reflection of the points considered and any decisions taken or actions agreed. The notes do not need to be verbatim but should be sufficient to remind the panel of the evidence that has been presented and the reason for the decision.

### 3.7 The Chair of the Panel will explain to the complainant and Headteacher that the panel will consider its decision and that a written decision will be sent to both parties within five school days. The complainant, Headteacher, other members of staff and witnesses will then leave.

### 3.8 The panel will then consider the complaint and all the evidence presented and

- Reach a majority decision on the complaint;
- Decide upon any appropriate action to be taken; and, where appropriate, recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not happen again;
- Aim to achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant. However, it has to be recognised that the complainant might not be satisfied with the outcome if the hearing does not find in their favour. It may only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations which will satisfy the complainant that his or her complaint has been taken seriously and investigated thoroughly.

### 3.9 A written statement outlining the decision of the panel must be sent to the complainant and Headteacher within five school days. The letter to the complainant should also explain how a further appeal can be made (see Stage 4).



3.10 The school should ensure that a copy of all correspondence and notes relating to the complaint are kept on file in the school's records. These records should be kept separately from the pupil's personal records.

#### Stage 4: Review of the Governing Body Complaints Panel Decision

We hope that you feel your complaint has been handled correctly and resolved to your satisfaction. However, once the school's complaints procedure has been exhausted, if you remain unhappy with the outcome you can write to the Secretary of State for Education. A complaint may be made to the Secretary of State if you believe the governing body or LA is acting unreasonably or is failing to carry out its statutory duties properly. You should set out in full your concerns, and the reasons why the complaint is being submitted, enclosing all previous correspondence relevant to the complaint.

This is the final stage in the complaint handling process.



## Procedure regarding unreasonably persistent complainants and unreasonable complainant behaviour

We are fully committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, in a friendly, respectful and professional way. We are sure that you will understand the need to behave in a similar way as it is in everyone's best interest to help ensure the matter can be resolved as quickly and informally as possible. However, the school does not expect its staff or Governors to tolerate behaviour by complainants which is unacceptable, for example, which is abusive, offensive or threatening, and they will take action to protect staff and Governors from any such behaviour if it occurs. Also, there may be complainants who, because of the frequency of their contact with the school, hinder our consideration of their, or other people's, complaints and potentially the running of the school.

We anticipate that such behaviour will be a very rare occurrence, but if we consider a complainant's behaviour is unacceptable or unreasonably persistent, we will tell them why and ask them to change it. If the behaviour continues, we may take action to restrict the complainant's contact with the school.

The decision to restrict access to the school will be taken by the headteacher and Chair of Governors. Any restrictions imposed will be appropriate and proportionate. They may include:

- requesting contact in a particular form (for example, letters only);
- requiring contact to take place with a named member of staff or Governor;
- restricting telephone calls to specified days and times; and/or
- asking the complainant to enter into an agreement about their conduct.

In all cases we will write to tell the complainant why we believe their behaviour is unacceptable or unreasonably persistent, what action we are taking and the duration of that action. We will also tell them how they can challenge the decision if they disagree with it.

Where a complainant continues to behave in a way which is unacceptable or unreasonably persistent, we may decide to terminate contact with that complainant and discontinue any investigation into their complaint. If we decide to carry on treating someone as an unreasonably persistent complainant and we are still investigating their complaint six months later, we will carry out a review and decide if restrictions will continue.

Where the behaviour is so extreme that it threatens the immediate safety and welfare of the school's staff or Governors, we will consider other options, for example reporting the matter to the Local Authority, the police or taking legal action. In such cases, we may not give the complainant prior warning of that action.



Where a complainant whose case is closed persists in communicating with us about it, we may decide to terminate contact with that complainant. In such cases, we will read all correspondence from that complainant, but unless there is fresh evidence which affects our decision on the complaint we will simply acknowledge it or place it on the file with no acknowledgement. New complaints from people who have come under the unreasonably persistent complainants' policy will be treated on their merits.