

School Complaints A Brief Guide for Parents and Carers

People Services

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School Complaints

Advice to Parents/Carers about making a complaint

If you have comments or concerns please let your school know. We welcome suggestions for improving our work in schools. We understand a common fear is that the school's relationship with you and your child/children will be affected if you express dissatisfaction. We wish to assure you that by having an effective complaints procedure, we would hope to be able to minimise problems, provide the school with helpful information and to treat complaints as constructive suggestions to improve standards and prevent cause for further complaint. For schools, the definition of a complaint within the terms of the procedures referred to here is an expression of dissatisfaction by parents or carers of children who attend a Sheffield school, or from neighbours of the school or school community affected by the services the school provides.

Definition of a Complaint

For schools, the definition of a complaint within the terms of the procedures described here is an expression of dissatisfaction verbally or in writing by parents or carers of children who attend or who have attended the school, or from neighbours of the school or school community affected by the services the school provides.

A formal complaint is different from a concern which can usually be addressed informally by the school. Furthermore, after initial investigation of a complaint, a decision may well be made to use the discipline, capability or other appropriate procedures.

Anonymous complaints will not normally be considered under the procedure set out here.

The procedure set out in the following pages outlines the stages both formal and informal through which a complaint made against the school will proceed. At all stages, the aim is resolution to the satisfaction of both parties and a mutual understanding of the problems believed to exist in order that improvements can be made where necessary.

Where agreement and resolution cannot be reached, the aim of the procedure is to ensure that all parties are treated fairly and equitably.

Conciliation or mediation between school and complainant can be considered at any time within the informal or formal stages as set out in this guide.

1. What to do first

Many concerns arise from misunderstandings and are best dealt with positively in discussion with the staff at the school. This is best done by speaking with your child's class or form teacher. All staff will make every effort to resolve your concern quickly and informally. They will make sure that they understand what you feel went wrong and they will explain their own actions to you. They will ask what you would like the school to do to put things right. Of course, this does not necessarily mean that in every instance they will agree with your point of view but the response should help both you and the school to understand both viewpoints. It may also prevent a similar problem arising in the future.

You should allow 10 school working days for the school to respond

2. What to do next

Should you remain dissatisfied with the teacher's initial response, you can make a complaint to the Head Teacher. This is best done in writing or by making an appointment to discuss the problem. You may find it helpful at this stage to have a copy of the full School Complaints Procedure as this explains in detail what procedures should be followed. (This is available from the School Office). The Head Teacher will ask to meet with you for a discussion of the problem and you may take a friend or someone else with you if you wish.

The Head Teacher will conduct a full investigation of your complaint and may interview members of staff or pupils involved. You will then receive a written response to your complaint. This will hopefully resolve the matter. However, should you remain dissatisfied, the Head Teacher should give you detail and of ways to take matters further.

You should allow 10 school working days for the school to respond.

3. If you are still unhappy

If you are still not satisfied, you may wish to contact the Chair of Governors and request that they look again at your complaint and the Head Teacher's response. The Chair of Governors will seek to clarify your concerns and undertake their own independent investigation; this may well involve speaking with members of staff and others. Once their investigation has been concluded, you will then receive a written response to your complaint. This will hopefully resolve the matter.

Should you remain dissatisfied with the response from the Chair of Governors, you can ask for your complaint to be referred to a Governing Board Complaints Review Panel. This will comprise a group of three governors from the school who, as far as is possible, have no previous knowledge of the problem and who will therefore be able to give it fresh assessment. You will be invited to attend a meeting and speak to the Panel in

person. The full School Complaints procedure explains how these meetings operate.

4. Further Action

The Department for Education

Complaints about school are almost always settled within school but, complaints about maintained schools not resolved by the school can be referred to the Secretary of State for Education.

Should you believe that either the Local Authority or Governing Board has acted unreasonably you can take your complaint to the Secretary of State for Education. 'Unreasonably' for these purposes means that you believe the school has acted in such a way that no reasonable school would act. This is a high threshold to overcome.

Maintained Schools

If your complaint is about a local authority maintained school, that is, it is not an academy or Free School, and you feel your complaint has not been resolved satisfactorily by the school's governors, you can refer your complaint to the Secretary of State for Education.

by using the online School Complaints form. This can be accessed at:

<https://www.education.gov.uk/form/school-complaints-form>

Before submitting your complaint, please read the guidance section on making a complaint about a school. This can be accessed at:

<https://www.gov.uk/complain-about-school>

Academies

If your complaint is about an academy and you feel it has not been resolved satisfactorily by the academy's governors or trustees, you can also make your complaint to the School Complaints Team, who will refer it to the Education Funding Agency. The Education Funding Agency is the arm of the Department for Education which oversees academies. However, you must make your complaint in writing in the first instance to the Department for Education as above.

Is there a time limit for complaining?

You should complain to the school as soon as possible and certainly within three months. **If you do not contact the school within that time, normally no further action will be taken in respect of your complaint.** However, any exceptional reasons you may give for not meeting this time limit will always be taken into account and any

decision to hear a complaint after this time will be at the discretion of the Chair of Governors.

Dealing with Unreasonably Persistent Complainants and Vexatious Complaints

The Headteacher and Governing Board are fully committed to the improvement of the school. Feedback from parents and carers is welcomed and schools will always do their utmost to resolve any issues that are brought to their attention as quickly as possible. The formal procedure for parents and carers should always be followed should you wish to make a complaint.

Occasionally, however, parents and carers in raising issues with staff or others do so in a way that is unacceptable. **Whilst it is recognised that some complaints may well relate to what are considered serious and distressing incidents, threatening or harassing behaviour towards any members of the school community, be this staff, school governors, parents, pupils or others will not be tolerated.**

The full School Complaints Procedure available from the school gives further details about how the school will always seek to work in a positive way with parents, carers and others to resolve complaints at the earliest opportunity. It also gives information about what action may be taken in respect of those complaints which appear unreasonably persistent and instances where the behaviour of the complainant gives cause for concern.

Model School Complaints Form

Your name:

Pupil's name:

Your relationship to the pupil:

School:

Address:

Postcode:

Day time telephone number:

Evening telephone number:

Please give details of your complaint.

**What action, if any, have you already 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:

Date:

For Official use by the school

Date acknowledgement sent:

By whom:

Complaint referred to:

Date:

Flowchart Summary of Stages of Complaints Procedure

