

# Contents

	page
Preface	
<b>1 Introduction</b>	
1 Aims of these guidelines	5
2 Why have a policy and procedure for complaints ?	5
3 What is a complaint ?	5
4 Who is responsible for different complaints	6
<b>2 Managing complaints</b>	
1 Main principles	6
2 Home-school Agreements	7
<b>3 Roles in complaints</b>	
1 Role of headteacher	7
2 Role of governing body	8
3 Role of Local Authority	8
4 Role of Diocesan Board	9
<b>4 A School policy</b>	
1 Need for a policy and a procedure	9
2 Training for staff	9
3 Anonymous complaints	10
4 Vexatious complaints	10
5 Child protection	10
6 Complaints against members of staff	10
7 Timescales	11
8 Pupils as witnesses	11
9 Complaint form	11
10 Forms of redress	11
11 Monitoring complaints	12
<b>5 Stages in a complaints procedure</b>	
1 General guidance	12
2 Preliminary Stage	12
3 Formal	13
<b>Annexes</b>	
Annex A Complaints Form	18
Annex B Notes for Parents	19
Annex C Advice for conducting interviews with complainants	20
Annex D Complaint's Policy	21
Annex E Outline of the Procedure for a Complaints Committee	22
Annex F Model Letters	23
Annex G Home/ School Agreement	27

## Preface

Materials produced by the DfES, unions, different Local Authorities (LAs) and schools show a wide variation in recommended complaints procedures. There are no statutory requirements relating to stages in complaints procedures so there is no basic format to be followed. However, there is a need for schools to have a set of easily understood guidelines, that include steps to follow so that all parents, staff and governors know the procedures to be followed should the need arise.

It is hoped that schools will find some of the suggestions in these notes helpful in reviewing the complaints procedure.

January 2007

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Aims of these guidelines

It is not intended that the guidelines suggested in this document should replace the normal discussion on day to day problems and concerns which take place in schools as they arise. It is only where a complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome of such discussions that further steps may need to be taken.

These guidelines are to assist governors, staff and parents as they review their school's general complaints policy and procedure, to encourage schools to strengthen their home-school links and to reaffirm the partnership between governors, staff and parents as they work together for the good of the pupils in the school.

## 1.2 Why have a policy and procedure for complaints ?

Every complaint is a matter of concern to a school and should be investigated with due urgency and thoroughness. A key sign of quality in an organisation is its willingness to listen to criticism and challenge from the users of its services and its ability to respond positively to these in order to bring about improvement. Whenever a complaint is upheld, every effort should be made to rectify the issue and, if necessary, action should be taken to prevent a re-occurrence of the problem.

A school which has an effective complaints procedure reaps the benefits from the goodwill of its community, from savings in time and resources and from high staff satisfaction and morale. Feedback from the school community and others can help to improve the school, which in turn helps to develop a more confident and responsive image.

Values underpinning a policy include:

- pupils learn best if there is an effective partnership between school and parents;
- all members of the school community are entitled to have their points of view heard;
- unresolved complaints can result in unhealthy conflict.

## 1.3 What is a complaint?

From time to time parents will raise legitimate concerns about their child's education, these are dealt with as a matter of routine, and are not generally regarded as 'complaints' in the formal sense. Occasionally a parental concern may become more serious and develop into a complaint and be a clear statement of dissatisfaction. This may relate to a variety of issues including:

- the way in which an initial concern was handled;
- the conduct or actions of pupils;
- the action or lack of action of members of staff;
- inappropriate discipline;
- lack of information.

Complaints are not always easy to define and some find it difficult to articulate those issues that concern them. It is important to keep in mind the distinction between concerns and complaints as described above, but also to ensure that the exact nature of the concern or complaint is understood by all parties.

Pupils too may wish to express a concern where they feel they have been treated unfairly. They should be encouraged to speak to an appropriate adult who should investigate the concern and seek to resolve the matter informally. Should the investigation raise serious issues these should be dealt with through the appropriate channels.

Visitors to the school may make verbal complaints or allegations. These should be investigated as with parental complaints and the complainant responded to, while maintaining confidentiality. Written complaints received by individual members of staff should be forwarded to the head.

#### **1.4 Who is responsible for different complaints:**

The different bodies responsible for hearing complaints, and the complaints they might be asked to consider are:

school/governing body: - general matters relating to school management;

- collective worship and religious education;

Local Authority:

- matters connected with the curriculum;

- special educational needs;

- charging for school activities;

- provision of information on educational achievements;

- child protection.

## **2 Managing complaints**

### **2.1 Main principles**

- It is important that there are easily accessible procedures which are well publicised, easy to understand and use.
- If an individual is being complained against, it should be remembered that s/he has equal rights with the person making the complaint.

- The procedure should allow for speedy handling, with established time limits for each stage of the procedure.
- Confidentiality needs to be stressed at all times. The proceedings surrounding a complaint, as well as oral and written information, should be handled in confidence.
- There should be clear assurances that there will never be any victimisation of pupils as the result of a parental complaint.
- Meetings with complainants should be minuted if possible by a third party.
- Communication during the procedure is important, complainants should be kept informed of progress. It should be known that all the points raised have been addressed and appropriate redress achieved, but not what the redress was. When it is fitting to do so, complainants should be told of any positive changes in provision which have resulted from discussion of their complaint. Good communication between the school and the complainant plays a key role in the good handling of a complaint.
- Governors should monitor complaints to ensure that the procedure is working effectively.
- There should be consistency of action by all handling complaints.

## **2.2 Home-school Agreements**

Home-school agreements can generate goodwill and positive relationships between parents and the school. If they are to be truly effective, home-school agreements should be drafted and agreed by a working-party comprising parents, pupils, staff and governors. The guidelines should be reviewed on a regular basis. See model at Annex G

# **3 Roles in complaints**

## **3.1 Role of the headteacher**

The headteacher is responsible for the internal organisation and management of the school. S/he therefore has overall responsibility for considering complaints in the first instance, or, if appropriate, arranging for a designated member of staff to deal with them. Details of the headteacher's responsibilities for investigating complaints and deciding what action to take are given in section 5.

Where the headteacher chooses to arrange for other members of staff to consider complaints, there should be arrangements for the headteacher to be kept fully informed of the complaint and the way in which it is being addressed.

In determining which course of action to take over a response to a complaint, the headteacher may wish to consult the Chair of the governing body, the complaints officer at the LA or the Diocesan Board.

### **3.2 Role of the governing body**

The governing body is responsible for the overall conduct of the school and must ensure that a complaints procedure is in place and reviewed regularly.

The headteacher would normally inform the Chair of the governing body of complaints received. However, if it has been decided that the Chair will form part of any committee to hear disciplinary or capability procedures, they must remain untainted. Any complaints procedure should note that additional time may be needed should a disciplinary procedure need to be invoked.

If a governor receives a complaint from a parent, the complaint should normally be referred to the headteacher to investigate. Only in circumstances where the head is the subject of the complaint would the Chair of the governing body undertake the initial investigation. If the Chair of the governing body receives a formal written complaint, s/he would normally first discuss the matter with the headteacher and follow the appropriate procedures (see section 5).

The governing body should appoint a Complaints Committee of three governors to consider any formal written complaints should it reach this stage. This committee can be formed from the pool of governors appointed at the beginning of each school year to serve on staffing, pupil behaviour and complaints panels.

Parental complaints seldom reach the formal stage involving a committee of governors, nonetheless, it is important that governors do not become prejudiced by taking part in discussion of a complaint, either during a meeting of the governing body or with an individual. Such discussion would make a governor unable to serve on a complaints committee.

After a complaint has been dealt with it may be appropriate for the headteacher or Chair of the governing body to make a brief report to the governing body, without mentioning names. Details should not be divulged to the full governing body as to do so would violate confidentiality.

### **3.3 Role of the local authority**

The LA has statutory responsibilities. In relation to complaints it should:

- provide guidance and advice to schools on good practice;
- provide procedures for schools for parental complaints against the curriculum and matters relating to it;
- provide advice to complainants on how to complain.

### **3.4 Role of the Diocesan Board**

The Diocesan Board acts in an advisory capacity to headteachers and governing bodies, it does not have any general power to investigate complaints in either voluntary aided or foundation schools.

## **4 A School Policy**

### **4.1 Need for a policy and a procedure**

All schools will have their own ways of responding to concerns and complaints expressed by parents, but all schools should have a written policy and a procedure for handling complaints. A policy makes clear the school's overall approach to handling complaints (see model policy Annex D). The procedure is a part of the policy but only provides guidance on specific action that could be taken. As parents, staff and governors could all be involved in a procedure relating to a complaint, it would be good practice to ensure that each group was represented on the working-party reviewing the school's policy and procedures. The policy needs to be as brief as possible, easy to understand and to use.

The benefits of a written policy are:

- parents will have a clear understanding of the way the school receives and deals with concerns and complaints;
- staff will be able to respond in a consistent way to parents;
- governors, staff and parents in writing the policy will be reminded that they are all working together to achieve what is best for the pupils in the school.

### **4.2 Training for staff**

It can be helpful for staff, both teaching and non-teaching, to receive training in how to respond to a parent who is expressing a concern or making a complaint. This can help staff to recognise any barriers there may be between themselves and parents and to know how to deal with these. Parents sometimes feel that they are not on the same level as the teachers. It should be accepted by both parents and teachers that each has a legitimate interest in the well-being of pupils in the school. Good home-school links can help to build mutual understanding in this area.

Regrettably some staff may have to face abusive and aggressive parents. It is important that all the staff are trained in handling this type of situation and how to support each other if an incident should occur. As employer, the governing body has a particular responsibility in this area.

The study of the school's policy and procedures could be included in a training session, together with advice and discussion on:

- the use of appropriate inter-personal skills;

- practical ways of handling conflict;
- an understanding that an effective complaints procedure is a protection and a measure of quality and not simply a means of attacking what schools do;
- how staff can obtain advice if a complaint is received against them.

### **4.3 Anonymous complaints**

Anonymous complaints should be considered as they may relate to something serious. The handling of such complaints should be left to the headteacher's or chair's discretion to decide whether the gravity of an anonymous complaint justifies investigation. If the headteacher, or chair of governors, believes there could be any substance to the complaint, s/he should investigate the matter and record the results of the investigation on file.

### **4.4 Vexatious complaints**

A good complaints procedure should limit the number of complaints that become protracted. However, there may be occasions when a complainant remains dissatisfied despite all stages of the procedure being followed. Should a complainant try to re-open a complaint on the same issues the chair of governors should write informing them that the procedure has been exhausted and that the matter is now closed. Where a complainant continues to be dissatisfied, even after the above measures have been taken, it may be advisable to ask for an officer from the diocese or LA to be present at a meeting.

### **4.5 Child protection**

For any complaint that involves a potential child protection issue the appropriate officer at the LA must be contacted immediately and any investigation must wait until the LA procedure has been completed.

### **4.6 Complaints against members of staff**

It is important that all members of staff understand the school's procedure. If members of staff are complained against, they should be kept fully informed of the content of the complaint. Members of staff should always be given an opportunity to explain their actions and be advised that they may have a friend or union representative present during any part of the process. The member of staff should provide a written statement in response to the complaint.

Complaints about the headteacher should be made or sent to the Chair of the governing body, who will investigate the matter personally or name an alternative governor.

Where a complaint has taken on a personal aspect and is unresolved before a governors' hearing, it may be advisable for the governors panel to hear each side's evidence separately.

## **4.7 Timescales**

Timescales for dealing with individual complaints will differ according to the complexity of the issue concerned. The timescales provided in these guidelines are only for guidance, they are not a statutory requirement. If the governing body feels that it would be better to allocate shorter or longer periods at various stages, it is free to decide to do so. However, it should be noted that parental satisfaction is sometimes proportionate to the time taken. An acknowledgement should not take longer than two school days.

Whatever timescales the governing body decides to adopt, it is important that there be clear provision for the Chair of the governing body, together with the Chair of the Complaints Committee, to have power to vary the timescales when they consider it appropriate to do so.

Any investigations need to be carried out as close to the day of an incident as possible. It is difficult to carry out a reliable investigation of an incident or problem if more than a few days have elapsed. Parents should be urged to raise any concerns as soon as possible.

## **4.8 Pupils as witnesses**

Only in exceptional circumstances would pupils be interviewed i.e. where there are no adult witnesses and the matter is sufficiently serious to warrant it. Headteachers are advised to seek parental consent before any interview with a child where they are being asked to clarify facts concerning a parental complaint. Children should be accompanied by a responsible adult where the parent has given permission for the interview but is not present. The headteacher should ensure that pupils do not participate in any discussion where they might witness confrontation between adults. Where there may be a child protection issue see 4.5 above.

## **4.9 Complaint form**

Some schools have found it helpful to provide a simple complaint form to be used by parents wishing to make a complaint. This can enable the school to be more systematic in the way it handles and monitors complaints. It could also be helpful for parents who might find it difficult to frame a letter. The wording on such a form could be sufficiently conciliatory to help reduce feelings of antagonism or confrontation (see Appendix A).

## **4.10 Forms of redress**

The need for any form of redress will vary considerably. In cases where there has been redress, studies have shown that 90% of complainants felt their complaint had been addressed if they received an apology. Listed below are some of the actions which may be expected to satisfy a complainant:

- an apology;
- an explanation of why things went wrong;

- a promise that efforts will be made to review practice so that similar actions are not repeated;
- compensation;
- an answer to a specific question;
- an official investigation;
- a meeting with staff.

#### **4.11 Monitoring complaints**

Ways of monitoring informal complaint procedures will vary from school to school because, of its very nature, the process may not always be easy to quantify and measure. It is easier to monitor the handling and outcomes of formal complaints.

Some of the areas relating to complaints which schools may wish to monitor are:

- the numbers of complaints and their categories;
- whether the complaints were dealt with within agreed time limits;
- the stages at which complaints were ended satisfactorily;

## **5 Stages in a complaints procedure**

### **5.1 General guidance**

It is normal for each stage in the complaints procedure to be completed before moving to the next stage. In very exceptional circumstances the headteacher, usually in consultation with the Chair of the governing body, may decide to omit a stage.

The headteacher, or member of staff investigating a complaint, should always be aware of the fact that a concern or complaint may escalate into a larger issue and be referred to the Complaints Committee of the governing body. It is therefore essential that clear, concise written notes of discussions and incidents are made and kept for every stage of the procedure.

### **5.2 Preliminary Stage**

Most parents' concerns can be resolved by the class teacher or other designated member of staff by:

- responding to the parent courteously;
- handling the complaint seriously;
- taking action quickly.

It is essential to give time to complainants and to be patient, so that they can feel they have been heard properly. It is important that parents are reassured

that there are established procedures and, if appropriate, that their case will be impartially investigated.

Sometimes parents might like to complain but do not do so because they fear that this would be held against them or their child. Parents need to be reassured, both in the school's written policy and by individual members of staff, that this will not happen.

When a parent is making an initial complaint there is usually no need to ask for the complaint to be put in writing. To insist on this could result in a genuine complaint not being resolved due to fear or lack of confidence on the part of the parent. If parents are pushed into writing down their concerns, this can also lead to them taking an entrenched position from which it could be difficult to achieve a resolution. However, the completion of a complaints form will aid the tracking of a complaint and if this is part of the procedure it will become a parental expectation.

Some headteachers find it helpful to inform parents of the times during the week when they would be available to have informal discussions about any concerns or topic of the parents' choice.

Those dealing with complaints should consider whether or not to invite to the informal discussion any staff member named as involved in the matter. Hostile confrontation and entrenched defensive positions will not aid resolution of the problem.

In the case of an oral complaint to the headteacher, an assurance should be given that the matter will be investigated and a response given within a certain time, normally 7 school days. At the end of the discussion it should be clear to the complainant what action, if any, will be taken, the timescale within which it will take place and how s/he will be notified of any outcome. Every effort should be made to resolve the matter to the satisfaction of the parent.

If it becomes clear that the parent is not happy with the response to their complaint, or the member of staff or headteacher would like the protection of the formal procedure, the parent should be advised that the complaint should be put in writing and a complaint form may be used (Appendix A). If a parent is reluctant to put their concerns in writing, they may need assistance, especially if English is not their first language.

Governing bodies will need to decide on an acceptable timescale for the complainant to request a stage 2 or stage 3 for their complaint.

### **5.3 Stage 1: Formal**

If a written complaint is received by the headteacher, it should be acknowledged within two school days and the complainant told that the matter will be investigated and a response given within a certain time, normally five school days. It is advisable for the headteacher and staff to keep notes of any discussions held with parents who are expressing concerns or bringing a complaint. It is advisable to have a separate note taker present at the meeting.. Where the headteacher, or designated member of staff, undertakes

an investigation, it is most important that clear written statements are taken and that every statement is signed and dated.

#### **5.4 Stage 2: Formal**

If the Chair of the governing body receives a written complaint from a parent s/he should consult with the headteacher before taking any action. It is important to ensure that the informal stages of the procedure have all been exhausted. If this is not the case, the Chair would normally advise the complainant to follow the procedures described for the informal stage in 5.2 above.

The Chair should try to acknowledge the written complaint within two school days of receipt, stating that the matter is being investigated and that s/he hopes to be able to make a further response within ten school days. Good practice suggests that it is helpful to give an indication of timescale at each stage of the procedure.

Assuming that all steps in the previous stage have been followed, the Chair would normally undertake an investigation of the matters raised in the complaint.

Investigation process:

- there should be a clear understanding of the complaint, clarification should be sought if necessary;
- interviews should be held as soon as possible after the incident to minimise the possibility of evidence becoming tainted;
- strict attention should be paid to confidentiality;
- separate discussions should be held with all parties involved, and with any witnesses;
- careful written notes be made of all discussions;
- the complainant's desired outcome and any possibilities of redress discussed;
- written statements should be obtained where appropriate, and be signed and dated;
- if pupils are to be interviewed reference should be made to section 4.8;
- efforts should be made to resolve the complaint, if possible to the satisfaction of the complainant;
- complainant and member of staff should be given an opportunity to provide documentation and identify potential witnesses.

After completing the investigation, the Chair of the governing body prepares a written summary of his/her findings, writes to the complainant saying the investigation has been completed and includes some of the following points:

- all appropriate steps have already been taken and s/he considers no further action is necessary;

- as a result of the investigation the following arrangements have been made ..... which it is hoped the complainant will find satisfactory;
- the following recommendations will be made to the governing body .....
- if the complainant is not happy with this response, s/he may write to the Clerk to the governing body at the school address requesting that the complaint be considered by the Complaints Committee of the governing body.

### **5.5 Stage 3: Formal**

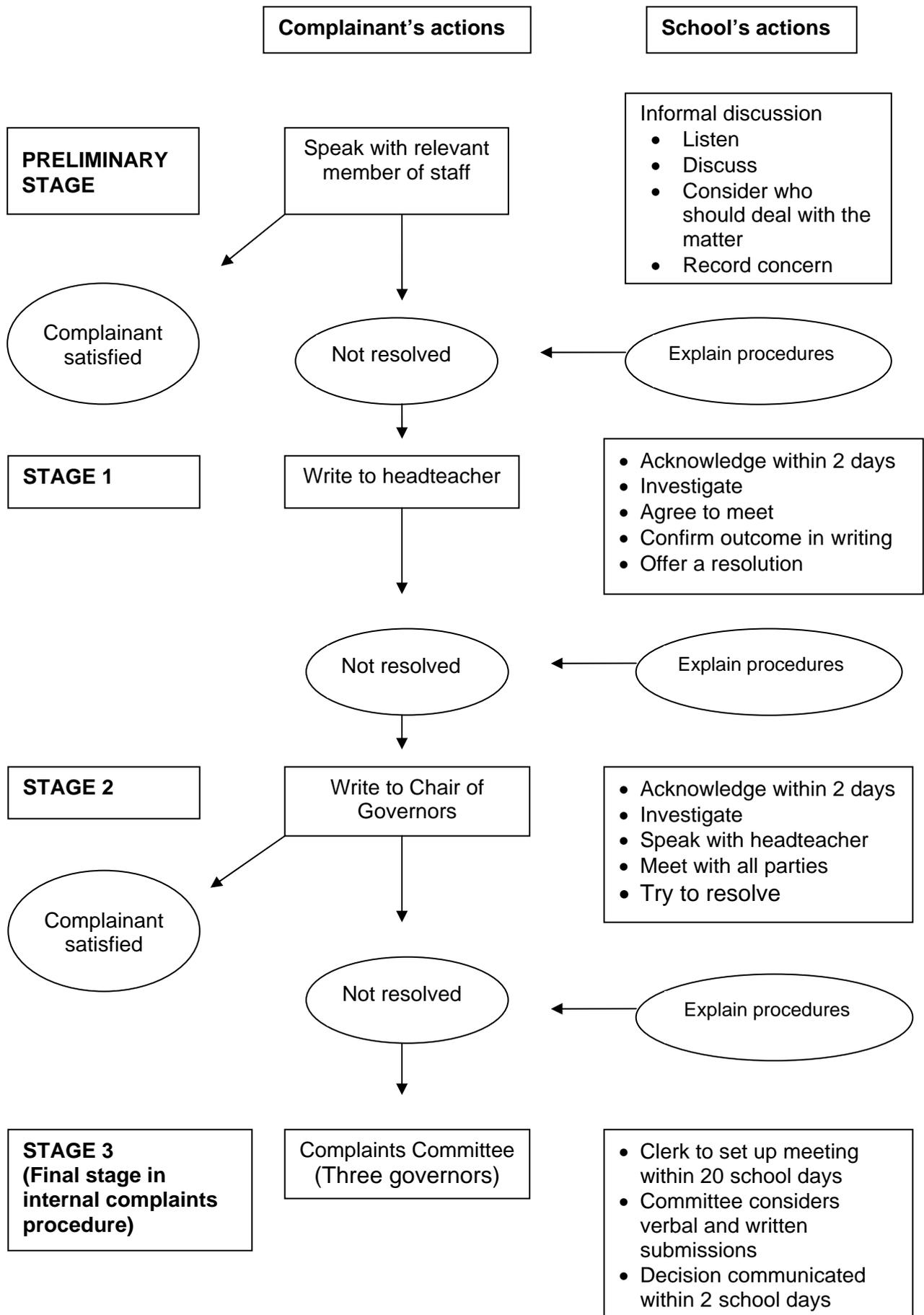
If the Complaints Committee of the governing body is to consider the complaint, the Clerk to the governing body should set up the meeting within 20 school days giving at least ten school days' notice of the meeting to: the members of the committee, complainant, headteacher and the Chair of the governing body and the LA's complaints officer, sending them the following:

- (a) an invitation to attend the meeting including details of date, time, place of meeting; (see Appendix F)
- (b) a request for copies of any written papers which people may wish to be considered to be sent to her/him by (Date) so that they can be distributed to members of the Complaints Committee and the other parties;
- (c) a request for the names of any witnesses who may be called;
- (d) a statement saying that the claimant may wish to be accompanied by a friend and asking for the name of any such friend;
- (e) where appropriate, an enquiry as to whether or not it would be helpful for an interpreter to be available;
- (f) an enquiry as to whether or not access should be provided for the disabled;
- (g) a summary of the procedure to be followed at the meeting.

The hearing by the Complaints Committee should be as informal as possible. The Chair of the governing body and the headteacher may be present. The Clerk to the governing body, or another person appointed by the Chair of the governing body, should be present throughout the hearing and after the parties have withdrawn, in order to take notes. A model procedure for the meeting is in Annex E.

The decision and recommendations of the Complaints Committee are sent as soon as possible to all parties. The committee's decision is final.

# COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE



## Summary of Timescales

<b>Stage</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Response</b>
<b>Preliminary Stage</b>	Discussions with relevant member of staff and/or headteacher	As soon as possible but no later than 7 school days.
<b>Stage 1</b>	Written complaint to Headteacher	Acknowledge within 2 school days.  Response normally within 5 school days.
<b>Stage 2</b>	Written complaint to Chair of Governors	Acknowledge within 2 school days.  Response normally within 10 school days.
<b>Stage 3</b>	Complaints' Committee Hearing	Hearing set up within 20 school days with 10 days notice of meeting. Agenda and papers sent out 7 days in advance.  Decision letter with 2 school days.

## Annex A

# Complaints Form

### Name of School

When we receive a complaint, we aim to acknowledge its receipt within 2 days and send a full or interim response within 7 days.

Name of complainant:

Address:

Postcode:

Telephone (day:

Telephone (evening):

What is your concern and how has it affected you?

Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please list this below:

Have you discussed this matter with a member of staff before filling in this form? If so, who did you speak to and what was the response?

What would you like to happen as a result of making this complaint?

Signature:

date:

## Expressing a Concern ; Notes for Parents

**NB: Schools should ensure that these notes match their procedure.**

### **If you have a concern**

We would like you to tell us about it so that we can talk with you and see how best to resolve your concern. We welcome suggestions for improving our work in the school. Whatever your concern, please know that we shall treat it as being strictly confidential.

Be assured that no matter what you wish to share with us, our support and respect for you and your child in the school will not be affected in any way. Please do not delay telling us of your concern. It is difficult for us to investigate properly an incident or problem which is more than a day or two old.

After hearing your concern we shall act as quickly as we can. Please allow time for any action we may take to be effective.

### **What to do first**

Please contact your child's class teacher (or other appropriate member of staff) and arrange a time when you can discuss your concern. It may be possible for you to see the teacher straight away but usually it is better to make an appointment so that you can sit and talk things through.

### **What to do next**

If you are still unhappy, ask for an appointment with the Headteacher. If you wish to do so, it is helpful if you can give a brief outline of your concern when you make the appointment. After your discussion with the headteacher you may have to wait a short time while investigations are carried out.

Every effort will be made to resolve the situation as quickly as possible and the headteacher will send you a written response.

### **If you are still unhappy**

The problem will normally be solved by this stage. However, if you are still not satisfied you may wish to write to the Chair of the governing body.

The Chair of the governing body will probably discuss the matter with the headteacher and may arrange for a further investigation. S/he will then write to you to say what s/he has decided to do in response to your complaint

### **Further action**

Finally, if the complaint has still not been resolved you may ask for your complaint to be heard by the Complaints Committee of the governing body. The Complaints Committee would listen to you, to the headteacher and others involved and come to a decision.

## **Procedural advice for conducting interviews with complainants**

In conducting interviews with complainants, headteachers should:

Have regard to confidentiality at all times. The need to treat conversations and correspondence as confidential is of paramount importance. From the outset all parties to a complaint should be made aware of this advice.

Listen attentively and sympathetically to complainants, allowing them to explain their concern/s in their own way. After they have finished, it may be necessary to try to identify the issue(s) by asking questions and summarising what has been said. It is helpful to ascertain what is the complainant's desired outcome and possibilities of redress. Headteachers may wish to ensure that the meeting is minuted by a third party, so that there is a clear record of the meeting.

At the end of the interview decide if it is possible to:

- (a) make an immediate response to the concern/s; or
- (b) delay a response. It is often necessary to say to complainants that their concerns will be carefully considered and when all the facts and circumstances have been ascertained, they will receive a response normally within five school days.

Avoid passing judgement or coming to conclusions before having spoken to any third parties and having considered all the aspects of the complaint.

If the complaint is against a third party, ensure that they have an opportunity to explain the situation as they see it, but not necessarily in the presence of the complainant.

Examine the general context and constraints of the situation and consider if there are any precedents.

When all the facts and circumstances relating to the matter have been ascertained make careful notes summarising your investigation. You should then decide how to respond to the complainant.

The complainant should be clearly informed of the school's response to the complaint/s and of the next stage in the procedure, should s/he wish to proceed further.

## Complaints Policy

From time to time parents, and others connected with the school, will become aware of matters which cause them concern. To encourage resolution of such situations the governing body has adopted a complaints procedure. The governors will involve parents and staff in drafting and regularly reviewing the policy and procedure for complaints, to ensure that the whole school community understand the procedure. The procedure is devised with the intention that it will :

- ◆ usually be possible to resolve problems by informal means;
- ◆ be simple to use and understand;
- ◆ be non-adversarial;
- ◆ treat complaints confidentially;
- ◆ allow problems to be handled swiftly;
- ◆ address all points at issue;
- ◆ inform future practice so that the problem is unlikely to recur;
- ◆ reaffirm the partnership between parents, staff and governors as they work together for the good of the pupils in the school;
- ◆ make clear the times set aside daily/weekly when staff are available for discussion with parents;
- ◆ ensure that the school's attitude to a pupil would never be affected a parental complaint;
- ◆ discourage anonymous complaints;
- ◆ actively encourage strong home-school links;
- ◆ ensure that all staff have opportunities to discuss and understand the school's response to concerns and complaints made by parents;
- ◆ ensure that any person complained against has equal rights with the person making the complaint;
- ◆ regularly review its system for monitoring concerns and complaints received from parents.

*At the end add:*

Full details of the procedure may be obtained from the school office or from the Clerk the Governing Body.

## Annex E

### Outline of the procedure for a Complaints Committee meeting

The Chair:

- welcomes those present and introduces each person by name;
- stresses that the meeting is strictly confidential to those present;
- outlines the procedure to be followed;
- asks all attending the committee, including witnesses, to remain available for approximately half an hour after they withdraw from the hearing, in case the committee needs to clarify a point.

Following this:

- The complainant is invited to present their case and explain their desired outcome and any possibilities of redress.
- The headteacher may question both the complainant and any witnesses.
- The headteacher is invited to explain the school's actions.
- The complainant may question the headteacher and any witnesses.
- Both parties are invited to sum up.

After the complainant, Chair of the governing body and Headteacher have withdrawn, the Committee decides on its recommendations, including any redress measures.

The decision and recommendations of the Complaints Committee are sent within two school days to all parties. The Committee's decision is final.

## MODEL LETTERS

### 1 Acknowledgement letter (sent within 2 school days)

Dear

Thank you for your letter of DATE. The School has a policy to deal with parental concerns as quickly as possible. I will investigate the matters you raise and contact you again by (DATE) to let you know the outcome.

Thank you for bringing this matter to my attention.

Yours sincerely

Headteacher

## 2 Notification of decision regarding general parental complaint

### CONFIDENTIAL

Dear

Further to your letter of (DATE) and our subsequent meeting, I have given careful consideration to your concerns and considered all the available relevant evidence.

We agreed at our meeting that your concerns related to the following:

*(Outline the complaint)*

Following my investigation I have concluded that .....

*Include as appropriate:*

*There is insufficient evidence to reach a conclusion and I cannot therefore uphold your complaint. If you are able to provide additional evidence, I will reconsider this decision.*

Or

*Your complaint is not substantiated by the evidence in that.....(include reasons for this conclusion).*

Or

*Your complaint was substantiated in part/full ..... (include reasons for this conclusion). The School will review its practices/procedures in relation to ..... with the intention of avoiding any recurrence. Parents will be informed in due course of the policy changes.*

Or

*In order to address fully the matters investigated, the school has initiated appropriate internal procedures. Due to the nature of these procedures, their outcome must remain strictly confidential. I am confident however that the circumstance which gave rise to your complaint should not recur.*

I hope that you now feel that your concerns have been addressed by the school and that we can work together in the future to ensure that no other issues reach this level of concern. However, should you feel dissatisfied with this response you may proceed to the next stage of the complaints procedure *(outline the process for this)*. Should you wish to pursue this as I have outlined please write to..... by .... (DATE).

Yours sincerely

Headteacher or Chair of Governing Body

### 3 Letter to parent re formal hearing of the Complaints Committee

#### CONFIDENTIAL

Dear

Thank you for your letter of (DATE) indicating your wish to make a formal complaint to the Governors' Complaints Committee. I have been instructed to convene a meeting of the Committee in order to hear your complaint. The Committee will consist of three governors who have had no prior involvement in the complaint.

I write to invite you to a meeting of the Complaints Committee which will be held at ..... (time) on .....(date) at ..... (location). You are welcome to be accompanied by a friend and/or, if necessary, an interpreter. I would be grateful if you could confirm whether you intend to attend the meeting and bring a friend, and whether we should be aware of any issues regarding access for the disabled.

I enclose copies of the paperwork relating to your complaint. If there is any additional written information in support of your complaint, please send this to me by (DATE) (7 days before the meeting) so that I may circulate this to the Committee and the headteacher. Please note that the Committee will be discussing the issues raised in the attached papers and any further information you submit by the deadline. It will not be possible for you to raise any new issues at the meeting.

I enclose an explanatory sheet summarising the procedure at the meeting. The Committee will consider carefully both your views and those of the school and will make every effort to find a mutually acceptable solution to the situation which has led to your complaint.

Yours sincerely

Clerk to the Governors

#### 4 Outcome of hearing of the Complaints Committee

### CONFIDENTIAL

Dear

Thank you for meeting with me and my fellow governors on the Complaints Committee on (DATE) to discuss your complaint. I am grateful to you for the time and effort you put into presenting your complaint.

I am writing to let you know (or confirm, if outcome announced at end of hearing) the outcome of our consideration of your complaint.

*Include here a brief summary of the nature of the complaint and the conclusions reached by the Committee, including particulars of any evidence that was pertinent to reaching a conclusion. It is important that due weight is given to both the complainant's evidence and that of the school. Outcomes will vary, see letter two for possible options).*

I and my fellow Committee members hope that you will feel your complaint has been fairly heard and that all the issues you raised have been investigated appropriately. The Governors Committee is the last stage in the School's complaints procedure and the Governors consider that this matter is now closed. *(The wording of this final paragraph will largely depend on the outcome and the wording may need to change appropriately).*

Yours sincerely

Chair of Complaints Committee

Cc Headteacher  
Chair of Governors

**SCHOOL (NAME OF)**

**HOME SCHOOL AGREEMENT**

(Name of school) is a Church of England school which is part of a wider Christian family. The School benefits from strong links with the local parish church (name) and the support of the Southwark Diocesan Board of Education/ London Diocesan Board for Schools.

As set out in the Mission Statement in the School Prospectus, Christian values are at the heart of all that we do. At (name of school) we believe that successful partnership between the School, the church, the parents and the children help each pupil to take full advantage of all that the School has to offer. The following agreement supports this partnership in the interests of our children.

**TOGETHER WE WILL.....**

- Promote high standards of work and behaviour.
- Support the values of the School.

**AS A SCHOOL WE WILL.....**

- Provide a balanced and appropriate curriculum.
- Provide work suitable for children's ages and abilities which helps them progress.
- Establish a code of behaviour to ensure a safe and caring environment.
- Provide effective means of communication between home and school.
- Monitor the progress of children and provide advice and guidance over their work.
- Provide homework in accordance with the School Homework Policy.

**AS PARENT/GUARDIAN I WILL.....**

- Let the School know of any concerns about my child.
- Regularly attend parents' meetings to review my child's progress.
- Support the School's rules and expectations as set out in the Behaviour Policy.
- Ensure that my child attends school regularly, on time and with everything s/he needs.\*
- Ensure that homework is completed and returned on time.
- Encourage my child to take part in the full life of the Church School.

Headteacher's signature..... Parent/Guardian's signature.....

Date.....

(\*Some schools may want to add: 'Parents do not have the right to take pupils on holiday in term time' as a reminder which reflects DfES guidance)