



Complaints Policy

Heygarth Primary School Complaints Policy

School Complaints Procedures - General Information

The School Standards and Framework Act 1998 requires schools to establish a formal complaints procedure. The procedure must make provision for complaints from different categories of person i.e. Governors, parents, guardians, pupils and the general public. The suggestion is that a four stage complaints procedure should be used to manage complaints from parents, guardians and members of the general public starting with an informal stage for concerns and ending with an appeal to the Governing Board. Stage 1 deals with concerns which have the potential to be managed by the majority of the staff during the course of their duties. Complaints dealt with at Stage 2 should either be managed by the Headteacher or a senior member of staff. When a formal complaint arises and is not dealt with to the satisfaction of the complainant, it will first be addressed by the Headteacher at Stage 3, if they have not been involved at Stage 2, then subsequently by the Complaints Committee of the Governing Board at Stage 4.

General principles of the procedure

Parents and guardians need to know how they can raise a concern or lodge a formal complaint. Heygarth Primary School's Complaints Procedure can be provided via the school office and can also be found on the website.

Timescale

The school's procedure will allow any complaints to be addressed as speedily as possible and be consistent with fairness to all concerned. In many cases, at the first stage many concerns can be dealt with and resolved immediately. Where a concern cannot be dealt with immediately, the staff member dealing with the issue will note a response date for the complainant and should record it to ensure a reply is communicated.

Support for Complainant

We feel that it is important that any complainant should know where they can go for information, advice and advocacy. Support can be offered from individuals and

organisations who are clearly separate from those complained against, such as Parents' Partnership, Citizens Advice Bureaux, Community Relations Councils, refugee support organisations etc. Information about many of these organisations can be found in the School Office. Any person wishing to make a complaint can, if they consider it appropriate, be accompanied by a friend, a relative or a representative at any stage of the procedure.

Support for a person complained against

Staff who may be questioned as part of a complaints procedure investigation will always be treated in a fair way and they will have an opportunity to put their case. They will always be told about the procedure and be kept informed of progress. The school understands that is a crucial balance to be maintained between supporting the individual so that his/her rights and reputation are protected, and investigating a complaint thoroughly and impartially. The complaints procedure is distinct from formal disciplinary proceedings for staff and this needs to be made clear to all concerned. There may be occasions where a complaint launches a disciplinary procedure which puts the complaints procedure on hold. If so, the complainant should be informed of this and any non-disciplinary aspects of the complaint should be dealt with by the usual complaints procedures; the complainant should be "up-dated" on likely further delays to a response. It may be clear after the disciplinary procedures have been completed that particular responses to the complainant are required.

Confidentiality

It is very important to treat conversations and correspondence with discretion. It is vitally important that complainants feel confident that their complaint will not penalise their child. However, from the outset all parties to a complaint will need to be aware that some information may have to be shared with others involved in the operation of the complaints procedure. The Headteacher and members of the Senior Leadership Team may feel it appropriate to be accompanied by another member of staff when dealing with some complaints. Complainants should be aware that a written record will be maintained of all meetings as part of the procedure.

Anonymous Complaints

It is usually proper to disregard anonymous complaints unless somebody is prepared to substantiate them, but the danger in this is that they may relate to something quite serious. If the unforeseen eventuality occurs, to the detriment of the school, the complainant may subsequently make themselves known and say that s/he alerted the school even though the complaint was unsigned. It should be at the Headteacher or Governing Board's discretion to decide whether the gravity of an anonymous complaint warrants an investigation.

Redress

If the outcome of the complaint procedure shows the school is at fault, it is often sufficient to provide redress in the form of an acknowledgement that the complaint is valid. Alternatively, it may be appropriate to offer one or more of: an apology, an explanation, a promise that the event complained of will not recur, an undertaking to review school policies or practices in the light of the complaint, or, in appropriate circumstances, financial compensation. Fear of litigation should not prevent a school from admitting when mistakes have been made, but advice should be sought from the Authority's Risk and Insurance Section if financial compensation is being sought or if litigation is a possibility.

Staff Awareness and Training

School staff, including non-teaching staff, should be familiar with the procedures so that they can advise complainants about the process. There are often a great many staff involved in handling complaints. Their confidence in doing so depends on their having clear information about the procedures, reassurances that senior staff are committed to the procedures and some basic training in the practical interpersonal skills needed in dealing with people who are upset or angry. However should the complainant act aggressively or in an unreasonable manner the complaints procedure should be delayed. All staff should be aware of the advice contained in the LA policy and guidance document.

Withdrawal of Complaints

Formal complaints may be withdrawn at any stage by notice in writing.

Complaints Register – Record Keeping

If complaints are to contribute to raising the quality of education, then good practice would suggest they need to be recorded and monitored termly by senior staff and reported to the Governors where appropriate. Recording should begin at the point when a concern has become a complaint that cannot be resolved on the spot but needs investigation and/or consultation with others in the school and will require a later report back (either orally, or in writing) to the complainant. Recording at the earliest stage needs only be a very basic record of the complaint, giving the date, name of complainant and general nature of the complaint. A pro forma for comments and complaints could be used.

Complaints Register

A register of all formal complaints made under the complaints procedure should be maintained.

The register should include the following:

- a) name and address of the complainant
- b) a brief description of the complaint
- c) a record of the time taken to resolve the matter
- d) the outcome of the complaint.

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