

High Green Primary School

COMMENTS, COMPLIMENTS AND COMPLAINTS POLICY

Introduction:

We believe that our school provides a good education for all our children, and that our staff and authorised volunteers work very hard to build positive relationships with all our pupils and parents/carers, we like to celebrate things that 'go well' but also acknowledge that sometimes things may not go so well.

Compliments and Comments

We are always more than happy to receive comments and or compliments from parents/carers of members of our school community, when we do something well. If you would like to make any comments or send a compliment please write to the Head teacher or send them to: enquiries@highgreen.sheffield.sch.uk marked comment/complement alternatively you can complete our compliments and complaints form available from the forms section of the website or school office.

Concerns/Complaints

However when things don't go so well, please come and talk to us, initially on an informal basis about any concerns that you have relating to school, usually we can sort out any issues at this stage. All concerns and complaints are dealt with in strict confidence and most can be sorted out very quickly and easily once we know about them.

We understand that parents sometimes become anxious, and occasionally angry, about issues; however, we expect concerns and complaints to be expressed in a reasonable manner. Staff will not deal with complaints that are expressed in an abusive or unreasonable manner.

In order to investigate complaints as fully as possible, the Governing Body of High Green Primary School have implemented a staged approach. This procedure has been adopted from the Local Authority Model Procedure and it is expected that both parents/carers and the school will follow this process.

1. The First Stage

Dealing with Concerns and Complaints Informally

1.1 Guidelines

1.1.1 It is hoped that all complaints and concerns will be resolved as early and as informally as possible. Parents and carers need not only to be listened to but also to feel that they have been listened to.

The underlying principle is that concerns ought to be handled, if at all possible, without the need for formal procedures. Nevertheless, anyone receiving a complaint should ensure that a record of the complaint and its outcome is maintained.

1.1.2 The vast majority of concerns and complaints can be resolved informally. There are many occasions where concerns are resolved immediately with the class teacher, school business manager or Head Teacher, depending on whom it is parents or carers first approach. Parents must feel able to raise concerns with members of staff without any formality, either in person, by telephone or email. It may, on occasions, be appropriate for someone to act on behalf of the parent or carer.

1.1.3 It may be unclear as to whether a parent or carer is asking a question or expressing an opinion, rather than making a complaint. Similarly, a parent or carer may want a preliminary discussion or be seeking clarification of an issue in order to decide whether he or she wishes to take the matter further.

1.1.4 The school should inform staff that they have the right to advice or representation from their trade union at any stage of the complaints procedure once it becomes clear that a complaint is being made about a member of staff.

1.2. Procedures

1.2.1 Parents and carers should be given an opportunity to discuss their concern with the appropriate member of staff who will clarify the nature of the concern or complaint and reassure them that the school will hear the concern or complaint and attempt to resolve it at the earliest stage. The member of staff may explain how the matter or incident arose and the issues connected with it. It may be helpful at this point for the parent or carer to identify what outcome is expected.

1.2.2 The member of staff will need to respond appropriately, taking into account the status and seriousness of the complaint as well as any data protection issues. Hopefully, the matter can then be resolved immediately.

1.2.3 If the member of staff first approached cannot deal with the matter immediately, then they should make a clear note of the date, the name and contact address or telephone number given by the complainant, giving an indication of what will happen next. The Head Teacher should be informed accordingly.

1.2.4 All members of staff should be aware of the procedure for referring a complaint to the staff member having responsibility for the area about which a particular concern has been raised. They should also ensure that when a referral has been made, this is followed through.

1.2.5 Where the concern relates to the actions of the Head Teacher, the complainant should be advised to contact the Chair of the School Governing Body. In such circumstances, it is recommended that a Governors Complaints Panel comprising three members of the School's Governing Body is convened (this panel should not include both the Chair and VC of Governors).

1.2.6 The member of staff dealing with the concern or complaint should make sure that the parent or carer is clear about what action, if any, or monitoring of the issue has been agreed, putting this in writing if this appears to be the best way of advising the complainant clearly about the resolution of the matter.

1.2.7 In instances where no satisfactory solution has been found within **10 school working** days of the complaint having been made, parents or carers should be given clear information both verbally and in writing about how to progress their complaint and about any independent advice available to them.

2. The Second Stage

Referral to the Head Teacher for Formal Investigation

2.1 Guidelines

2.1.1 At this stage, it will be apparent that a formal complaint has been registered in writing, using the form at appendix 1 helps provide a consistent approach to making a complaint at our school. In some instances, the Head Teacher will already have been involved in looking at the matter; in others, it will be their first involvement. In all instances, it will be helpful for the Head Teacher (or other designated member of senior staff) to use these guidelines to ensure consistency and to ensure that regard is paid to the stages of the complaints procedure.

2.1.2 Head Teachers have responsibility for the day-to-day running of their school. They have responsibility for the implementation of the complaints procedure including decisions concerning their involvement at the various stages. A staged complaints procedure should ensure that more than one individual is involved in hearing and investigating the complaint.

2.1.3 Head Teachers should make arrangements to ensure that their involvement does not predominate at each stage of a particular complaint. Arrangements may be made for other staff to deal with parent and carer concerns at Stage 1, allowing for the Head Teacher's involvement at Stage 2, should this be necessary to be independent of the previous stage. At any stage, the Head Teacher may designate another member of staff to collect information and prepare a response.

2.2 Procedures

2.2.1 Formal complaints should normally be submitted in writing on a school complaints and complaints form (available from the school office or school website forms section). In exceptional circumstances, the school may consider progressing a verbal complaint where there are believed to be sufficient grounds for doing so. The Head Teacher (or designated member of staff) will acknowledge the complaint within **3 working days** of receipt.

2.2.2 Schools should be sensitive to the particular needs of parents or carers who may have difficulty in making a written complaint or for whom English is not their first language.

2.2.3 An acknowledgement should provide a brief outline of the school's complaints procedure and an expected date for the provision of a response. This will normally be within **10 school working days**. If this proves to be unworkable, the complainant should be provided with an explanation for the delay and given a revised date for the provision of a response.

2.2.4 The Advice and Conciliation Service may become involved and enable an agreed way forward. A mediated meeting between the complainant and the school to discuss a solution may be suggested if both parties are in agreement. The aim here is to seek an early resolution to the complaint for the benefit of the child, parents or carers and the school. Prolonging a complaint longer than is necessary is of no benefit to any of the parties involved. Such involvement is not however intended to compromise the formal complaints procedure. A complainant reserves the right to invoke more formal procedures should this be thought necessary to resolve matters.

2.2.5 The Head Teacher should provide an opportunity for a complainant to meet with them in order to supplement any information previously provided. It should be made clear to the complainant that, if they wish, they may be accompanied at any meeting by a friend, relative or representative to speak on their behalf; and that interpreting facilities can be made available should this be necessary.

2.2.6 The Head Teacher will, if necessary, interview witnesses and take statements from those involved. If the complaint concerns a pupil, the pupil should also be interviewed. In some instances, another member of staff with whom the pupil feels comfortable may be asked to attend. It may be appropriate, depending on the circumstances, to invite a parent or carer to be present when the Head Teacher interviews a pupil. The Head Teacher should keep written records of all meetings, telephone conversations and other contacts made during the course of the investigation of a complaint.

2.2.7 Once all relevant information has been gathered, the Head Teacher will then formulate a written response to the complainant. The Head Teacher may, additionally, suggest a meeting to discuss the complaint and seek a resolution. The written response should include a full explanation of the conclusion reached and the reasons for that conclusion. Where appropriate, this will include details of the action taken to resolve the complaint. If the complaint concerns a member of staff and action is to be taken against the member of staff concerned, the phrase 'Appropriate action has or will be taken' should be used.

2.2.8 The complainant should be advised that, should they find the Head Teacher's response inadequate and they wish to take matters further, that they should notify the Chair of the School's Governing Body within **10 school working days of receipt** of the head teachers response. The Chair should arrange for a Governors Complaints Panel to investigate the complaint and would normally chair this panel unless this is not appropriate, where this is not appropriate an alternative chair will be designated by the Governing Body.

2.2.9 Where a complaint has been made against the Head Teacher, arrangements should be made for the initial investigation to be conducted by a single Governor (usually the Vice Chair of the Governing Body) or a suitably constituted Governing Body Complaints panel who will undertake Stage 2 of these procedures.

3. The Third Stage

Appeal to the Chair of the Governing Body or Governing Body Complaints Panel

3. 1 Guidelines

3.1.1 It is anticipated that complaints will rarely reach this stage. It is, however, important that should they do so, any appeal is not only independent and impartial but that it should be seen to be so. All complaints reaching Stage 3 will have done so because the complainant has not been satisfied with the response provided by the Head Teacher (or Chair of Governors if the original complaint had been about the Head Teacher) at an earlier stage of

the procedure. Therefore, governors who have had no prior knowledge of or involvement in the complaint must as far as is possible, handle any appeal.

3.1.2 As this is the last stage at which a resolution may be reached, every effort should be made to either mediate or conciliate. Parents or carers may therefore wish to seek assistance from the Advice and Conciliation Service, particularly if contact has not previously been made.

3.1.3 Appeals should normally be made in writing. In exceptional circumstances, the school may consider progressing a verbal complaint where there are believed to be sufficient grounds for doing so. The appeal should state clearly why it is felt that the complaint has not been resolved satisfactorily and, wherever possible, supported by documentary evidence or witness statements.

3.1.4 In the unlikely event of pupils needing to be interviewed, care will need to be taken to ensure that parental permission is obtained. In all instances a single governor should interview the pupil and parents or carers should be given the opportunity to attend but, if they are unable to do so, a nominated member of staff should accompany the pupil.

3.2 Procedures

3.2.1 Upon receipt of a written request by a complainant for the complaint to proceed to Stage 3, the procedures outlined below should be followed:

1. The Chair of the Governing Body should write to the complainant acknowledging receipt of the written request within 3 working days.

2. The acknowledgment should inform the complainant that the Chair or Vice Chair of Governors or three members of the school's Governing Body (complaints panel), as appropriate, will investigate the complaint within **20 school working days** of receipt of the request.

3.2.2 The acknowledgement should also explain that the complainant has the right to submit any further information or documentation relevant to the complaint. Any such documentation must, however, be received in sufficient time for this to be sent to the Chair or Panel members charged with conducting the investigation.

3.2.3 If a Governors Complaints Panel is conducting the investigation, the Chair of Governors should convene a panel elected from members of the school's Governing Body. Panel members should be governors who have had no prior involvement with the complaint. Generally speaking, it is not appropriate for the Head Teacher or other staff members to have a place on the panel. Governors may wish to bear in mind the advantages of having a parent or carer (who is also a governor) on the panel. Governors should be sensitive of issues of race, gender and religious affiliation and the make-up of the panel should, if possible, reflect the three categories of LA, Parent and Community governors.

3.2.4 The Chair should ensure that the Panel hears the complaint within **20 school working days** of receiving the request. All relevant correspondence regarding the complaint should be given to each Panel member as soon as the composition of the Panel has been determined, and in plenty of time before the panel meets.

3.2.5 The Chair should write and inform the complainant, Head Teacher, relevant witnesses and Panel members of the date, time and venue of the meeting, **at least 10 school working days** in advance. The details of the complaint available at that time should also be sent in writing to the Head Teacher.

3.2.6 Notice of the Panel meeting sent to the complainant should also inform him/her of their right to be accompanied to the meeting by a friend, advocate or interpreter. This notice should also explain how the Panel meeting will be conducted and of the complainant's right to submit further written evidence to the Panel at least **5 school working days in advance** of the meeting. The Chair (who may not be the Chair of Governors) should also invite the Head Teacher to attend and prepare a written report for the Panel in response to the complaint.

3.2.7 The Head Teacher may invite members of staff who have been directly involved in matters or issues raised by the complainant to respond in writing or, at the discretion of the Panel Chair, to attend the meeting in person. All concerned, including the complainant, should receive all relevant documentation, including the Head Teacher's report, **at least 5 school working days** in advance of the meeting.

3.2.8 It is the responsibility of the panel Chair to ensure that the meeting is properly minuted.

3.2.9 The aim of the Panel meeting shall be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant. It has to be recognised, however, that whilst the intention is to ensure that any complaint, which reaches this stage, is seen to have been treated seriously, it may not be possible to make recommendations that fully satisfy the complainant.

3.2.10 The Panel should be sympathetic to the fact that some parents and carers will not be used to dealing with groups of people in formal situations such as this and may, therefore, feel intimidated by the setting. It is suggested therefore that the Chair ensures proceedings are as informal as the circumstances allow.

3.2.11 Should either party wish to produce previously undisclosed or uncirculated documentation, it is in the interests of natural justice to adjourn the meeting to allow sufficient time for each party to consider and respond to this.

3.2.12 At Stage 3, the complainant and the Head Teacher, together with and other staff who are involved with the complaint should be interviewed separately in order that the Panel can form a clear and independent view of the complaint. The interviews, which can be arranged to run consecutively, should allow for:

- The complainant to explain the nature of their complaint(s)
- The Head Teacher to explain the school's response to the complaint
- Panel members to have an opportunity to question both complainant and Head Teacher
- All parties to have a right to call witnesses (subject to the approval of the Chair) and the Panel to have the opportunity of questioning all witnesses
- Parents and carers, Head Teacher and staff to have the right of representation at the meeting if they so wish

3.2.13 The Chair should explain to the complainant and the Head Teacher that the Panel will consider its decision and a written response sent to both parties within **15 school working days**.

3.2.14 The Panel will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented and

- a) Reach a unanimous decision on the complaint;
- b) Decide upon the most appropriate course of action to be taken to resolve the complaint and,
- c) Where appropriate, suggest recommended changes to the school's systems or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not arise in future

3.2.15 Recommendations should be reported to the Governing Body at an appropriate time and a written statement outlining the decision of the Panel should be sent to the Head Teacher and complainant. Should any action need to be taken against a member of staff, in order to protect their rights, the phrase 'Appropriate action has or will be taken' should be used.

3.2.16 Governors should ensure that a copy of all correspondence and accompanying notes are kept on file. These records should be kept separately from the staff and or pupil's personal records.

Is there a time limit for complaining?

You should complain to the school as soon as possible and certainly within **three months** of the issue or incident you wish to complain about. 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.

4. Further recourse

4.1 The Secretary of State for Education

Complaints about school are almost always settled within school but, from 1 August 2012 complaints about maintained schools not resolved by the school should be addressed to the Secretary of State for Education. Further information is available on the DfE website at www.education.gov.uk