

Newington Green and Rotherfield Primary Schools



Complaints Policy and Process

Making a Complaint

Like all organisations we are not perfect, although that is our aim. Occasionally we make mistakes which may affect you, or your child. It is important, therefore, that you know how to make a complaint. While many such concerns are resolved informally, the following summary sets out the stages of the school complaints procedure.

Our policy takes account of best practice advice from the Department for Education. All complaints will be treated confidentially and investigations will be conducted with an open mind. The complainant will be kept fully informed at all stages of the process and we will ensure that all people involved are aware of the relevant legislation around complaints.

Frequently asked questions (FAQs)

Who can make a complaint?

The right to make a complaint is not limited to parents or carers of pupils registered at the school. A complaint can be made by a member of the wider community or a person representing an ex-pupil.

What can a person complain about?

A person can make a complaint about most areas of the school including any community facilities or services the school provides. However, the following areas have their own separate procedures which must be used:

- Collective worship
- Staff grievances
- Disciplinary Procedures
- Special Needs (SEND)
- Exclusions

The stages of the complaints process

Informal stage

You can make an appointment to speak to the member(s) of staff concerned. You may also wish to refer your concerns on to the relevant line manager. In many instances, complaints can be resolved at this early, informal stage.

If you feel that your complaint has not been, or cannot be, resolved through informal discussion, you should use the formal complaints process.

Formal stage

Our formal complaints process has four school stages:

STAGE 1 – Head of School

You must complete the **complaints form** and send this to the Head of School.

The Head of School will normally investigate your complaint within **10 school days** of the complaint being received. The timescale for completing any necessary investigations may be extended by notifying you in writing of the extension and the reasons for it.

The Head of School will contact you within **3 school days** of the completed initial investigation to arrange a meeting.

At the meeting, the Head of School will aim to resolve the complaint and agree any necessary actions with the complainant. This will be followed by a letter summarising any agreed outcomes or actions to be taken.

If you are still not satisfied, or your complaint is about the Head of School, you have the right to refer your complaint to the Executive Head.

STAGE 2 – Executive Head

You must complete the **complaints form** and send this to the Executive Head.

The Executive Head will normally investigate your complaint within **10 school days** of the complaint being received. The timescale for completing any necessary investigations may be extended by notifying you in writing of the extension and the reasons for it.

The Executive Head will contact you within **3 school days** of the completed initial investigation to arrange a meeting.

At the meeting, the Executive Head will aim to resolve the complaint and agree any necessary actions with the complainant. This will be followed by a letter summarising any agreed outcomes or actions to be taken.

If you are still not satisfied, or your complaint is about the Executive Head, you have the right to refer your complaint to the Chair of Governors.

STAGE 3 – CHAIR OF GOVERNORS

The Chair of Governors will acknowledge receipt of your complaint. The Chair of Governors will then review your complaint and any initial investigation. The Chair may also carry out a further investigation or commission another person to do so on his/her behalf. In the case of a complaint about the Executive Headteacher, the Chair will carry out an initial investigation or commission an independent person to do so.

If your complaint is about the Chair of Governors, this will be investigated by the Vice-Chair following the same process.

Any investigation at this stage will normally be carried out within **10 school days** of receipt of the complaint by the Chair. As with Stage 1, the timescale for completing the investigation may be extended by notifying you in writing of the extension and the reason for it.

Once the investigation has been completed, the Chair will write to you within **3 school days** with a formal response. If you wish, you may request a meeting to discuss the response.

If you are dissatisfied with the Chair's response, you can write to the Clerk to the Governing Body **within 10 school days** to request that the complaint be referred to the Governing Body Complaints Committee (Stage 4).

STAGE 4 – GOVERNING BODY COMPLAINTS COMMITTEE MEETING

The Clerk will acknowledge receipt of your complaint and confirm that a panel meeting will be convened within **20 school days**. As with Stages 1 and 2, this timescale may be extended if there are good reasons and you will be advised if this is necessary. You will also be advised of the timeframes in which documentation for the meeting and the names of any witnesses you may wish to call must be provided to the Clerk.

The Complaints Committee panel will comprise 3 governors who have not had any prior involvement in the complaint or the circumstances surrounding it. This will ensure that the meeting is independent and impartial. In cases where all members of the Governing Body have prior knowledge, an independent panel will be convened by the Clerk.

The Clerk will liaise with all parties to find a convenient date, time and venue for the meeting and final details will be notified to you in writing at least **10 working days** before the meeting.

If the Committee feels that any further investigation is needed, it may commission this from another person such as a senior member of staff (not involved in the complaint), a governor or an independent person.

Any new investigation report should be available for circulation **7 working days** before the meeting. You may also submit a written statement or additional documents for circulation **7 working days** before the meeting. If either party wishes witnesses to be called, they must notify the Clerk **7 working days** before the meeting.

All papers and details of witnesses to be called will be made available to the Committee, the complainant and the Executive Headteacher at least **3 working days** before the meeting. The Clerk will also advise you of the structure of the meeting.

Members of the Committee will not discuss the meeting papers or details of the complaint with any other people prior to the meeting. The meeting will be held in private bearing in mind your right to confidentiality.

At the meeting, all parties will be treated with respect and care will be taken to ensure that the setting is not confrontational or adversarial. If a child is the complainant or is giving evidence, the Committee will give particularly careful consideration to the atmosphere and proceedings to ensure that the child does not feel intimidated. The views of children will be given equal consideration to those of adults.

The meeting may be adjourned if new evidence or witnesses are brought to allow for additional time to consider this new information. Where the complaint is complex, the committee may also decide to adjourn and reconvene at a later date to give sufficient time to review the evidence.

The Committee can decide:

- To dismiss the complaint in whole or in part;
- To uphold the complaint in whole or in part;
- To decide on appropriate action to resolve the complaint;
- To recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to ensure that similar problems do not recur.

Following the meeting, the Chair of the Committee will write to inform the complainant of its decision within **5 working days** of the end of the meeting. As with earlier stages, this timescale may be extended if there is a good reason to do so.

The Clerk will produce and circulate draft minutes of the proceedings within **20 school days** after the meeting to provide both parties with the opportunity to agree or challenge this record.

The Clerk will ensure that all final records are stored centrally and the outcome of the complaint and any changes to systems or procedures are communicated to the Governing Body.

This is the final stage of the school's formal complaints process.

APPEAL STAGE – DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION

If you believe that the **school's complaints procedure was not followed appropriately**, the final stage of appeal is to the Secretary of State for Education through the School Complaints Unit at the Department for Education. Complainants should note that **the Department will not re-investigate the substance of the complaint** as this remains the responsibility of schools.

The School Complaints Unit will:

- examine if the complaints policy and any other relevant policies were followed in accordance with the provisions set out; and
- examine policies to determine if they adhere to education legislation.

If a Complainant feels that relevant school policies do not adhere to education legislation or that the school did not properly follow the complaints policy and procedure, the complainant can write to:

The School Complaints Unit
Department for Education

2nd Floor, Piccadilly Gate
Manchester
M1 2WD.

Unreasonably persistent or frivolous complaints

Most complaints raised will be valid, and therefore we will treat them seriously. However, a complaint may become unreasonable if the person:

- Has made the same complaint before, and it's already been resolved by following the school's complaints procedure
- Makes a complaint that is obsessive, frivolous, persistent, harassing, prolific, defamatory or repetitive
- Insists on pursuing a complaint that is unfounded, or out of scope of the complaints procedure, beyond all reason
- Pursues a valid complaint, but in an unreasonable manner, e.g. refuses to articulate the complaint, refuses to co-operate with this complaints procedure, or insists that the complaint is dealt with in ways that are incompatible with this procedure and the timeframes it sets out
- Makes a complaint designed to cause disruption, annoyance or excessive demands on school time
- Seeks unrealistic outcomes, or a solution that lacks any serious purpose or value

Steps we will take

We will take every reasonable step to address the complainant's concerns, and give them a clear statement of our position and their options. We will maintain our role as an objective arbiter throughout the process, including when we meet with individuals. We will follow our complaints procedure as normal (as outlined above) wherever possible.

If the complainant continues to contact the school in a disruptive way, we may put communications strategies in place.

We may:

- Give the complainant a single point of contact via an email address
- Limit the number of times the complainant can make contact, such as a fixed number per term
- Ask the complainant to engage a third party to act on their behalf, such as [Citizens Advice](#)
- Put any other strategy in place as necessary

Stopping responding

We may stop responding to the complainant when all of these factors are met:

- We believe we have taken all reasonable steps to help address their concerns
- We have provided a clear statement of our position and their options
- The complainant contacts us repeatedly, and we believe their intention is to cause disruption or inconvenience

Where we stop responding, we will inform the individual that we intend to do so. We will also explain that we will still consider any new complaints they make.

In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, we will immediately inform the police and communicate our actions in writing. This may include barring an individual from our school site.

Duplicate complaints

If we have resolved a complaint under this procedure and receive a duplicate complaint on the same subject from a partner, family member or other individual, we will assess whether

there are aspects that we hadn't previously considered, or any new information we need to take into account.

If we are satisfied that there are no new aspects, we will:

- Tell the new complainant that we have already investigated and responded to this issue, and that the local process is complete
- Direct them to the DfE if they are dissatisfied with our original handling of the complaint

If there are new aspects, we will follow this procedure again.

APPENDIX A INVESTIGATION

Procedure for Person Investigating a Complaint

Any person investigating a complaint should adhere to the following procedure:

- establish what has happened so far, and who has been involved;
- clarify the nature of the complaint and what remains unresolved;
- meet with the complainant or contact them (if unsure or further information is necessary);
- clarify what the complainant feels would put things right;
- interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish;
- conduct the interview with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning;
- keep notes of the interview or arrange for an independent note taker to record minutes of the meeting.

APPENDIX B RESOLUTION PRINCIPLES

- Identify areas of agreement
- Clarify any misunderstandings
- Encourage complainants to state what actions they feel might resolve the problem at any stage
- Offering one or more of the following may result in a resolution of the matter:
 - an acknowledgment that the complaint is valid in whole or in part;
 - an apology;
 - an explanation;
 - an admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better (this is not the same as an admission of negligence);
 - an assurance that the event complained of will not recur;
 - an explanation of the steps that have been taken to ensure that it will not happen again;
 - an undertaking to review school policies in light of the complaint.

APPENDIX C

PROCEDURES FOR CONDUCT OF THE MEETING

Set out below is a procedure that the Committee can follow for the conduct of the meeting:

- a) Prior to the meeting, the Committee will:
 - nominate a Committee Chair
 - consider whether the setting is sufficiently informal and whether every effort has been made to put complainants and witnesses at ease; and
 - consider any issues with children being involved in the proceedings.
- b) At the beginning of the meeting the Committee Chair will:
 - welcome the parties to the meeting;
 - confirm that no committee member has had any previous involvement in the matter;
 - explain the remit of the committee to the parties;
 - explain that the aim of the meeting is to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant;
 - explain that Stage 3 is the final school based stage of the procedure and no further consideration of the substance of the complaint will be possible; and
 - ensure that all written material has been received and seen by all parties.
- c) The complainant shall explain the nature of her/his complaint and may submit a written statement, to the meeting.
- d) The Executive Head and the Committee may question the complainant about the complaint and why it has been made. The Executive Head and the Committee should bear in mind the Resolution Principles in **Appendix B** and in particular the consideration of what actions the complainant feels may resolve the complaint.
- e) If any investigation report has been produced at the request of the Chair of Governors by the Executive Head (or another person) it will be considered. If the report is produced by a person other than the Executive Head, the person may be present at the meeting and answer questions of clarification for the complainant, the Executive Head and Committee. Otherwise the Executive Head will respond to the complaint.
- f) The complainant and the Committee may question the Executive Head about her/his response to the complaint.
- g) The Committee, the Executive Head and the complainant shall have the right to call witnesses where there are disputes as to the fact. Witnesses are only required to attend for the part of the meeting in which they give their evidence.
- h) The Committee, the Executive Head and the complainant shall have the right to question any such witnesses.
- i) If a new issue arises the Committee Chair should ensure that all parties are given the opportunity to consider and comment on it.

- j) The complainant may make a final statement.
- k) The Executive Head may make a final statement.
- l) The Chair of the Committee shall explain that the complaint will now be considered and a decision reached which will be notified to the complainant and the Executive Head in writing.
- m) The complainant and the Executive Head will then leave the meeting.
- n) The Committee will consider the complaint and the cases made by the complainant and Executive Head and:
 - decide whether to uphold or dismiss the complaint in whole or in part and the reasons for that decision ensuring that all issues are addressed;
 - make any key findings of fact;
 - decide on any appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint; and
 - recommend any changes to the school's systems or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not recur.
- o) Notification of the decision will be sent to the complainant and to the Executive Head in writing.
- p) The letter sent to the complainant informing her/him of the decision concludes this stage of the procedure.

APPENDIX D

COMPLAINT FORM:

Please complete and return to the School Office in an enveloped marked 'Private & Confidential' to the relevant person listed below:

- a) General complaints are referred to the Head of School and begin at Stage 1 of the complaints process;
- b) Complaints against the Head of School are referred to the Executive Head and start at stage 2

If there is insufficient space for any items, please attach additional pages, as required.

Your name:
Pupil's name (if relevant):
Your relationship to the pupil (if relevant):
Address:
Postcode:
Email:
Daytime 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:

Official use only

Date acknowledgement sent:

By whom:

Complaint referred to:

Date:

Policy	Lead drafter	Date of review by Governors
Complaints	Abi Misselbrook-Lovejoy	Annual