

Barnes Primary School

Complaints Policy

Statement on school website

We hope that your child is happy at our school. Occasionally, however, a problem may arise. We hope that we will be able to resolve any concern speedily, in a helpful, informal manner. We accept that on occasions our initial attempts to resolve an issue may be unsuccessful and the person raising the concern remains dissatisfied and wishes to take the matter further. A staged procedure is outlined below. This has been created to ensure that all problems and difficulties can be resolved.

The general procedure for dealing with complaints of any kind, is summed up as follows:

- 1) In the majority of circumstances the matter should be raised with the classteacher.
- 2) If a satisfactory conclusion is not felt to have been achieved, then an appointment should be made with the Deputy Headteacher or Headteacher. This meeting should take place as soon as possible and normally within three working days.
- 3) Occasionally the person complaining may be of the view that the complaint should go directly to one of the senior professionals at the school. If this is the case the matter should be raised in the first instance with the Deputy Headteacher or the Headteacher.
- 4) If a satisfactory conclusion is not reached after a meeting with the Deputy Headteacher or the Headteacher a second follow up meeting can be requested.
- 5) If the matter remains unresolved following this a formal letter should be made to the school's Chair of Governors. The letter should be addressed to the Chair of Governors, sealed and left at one of the school offices.

Overview

This complaints policy is concerned with the actions of the school. It covers complaints by parents, carers or members of the general public about the actions (or inaction) of individual members of staff, including the Headteacher. It does not cover complaints by employees about other colleagues. Employees wishing to complain about other colleagues should follow the employee grievance procedure. The general procedure for dealing with complaints of any kind is summed up as follows:

Principles

Our procedures will:

- whenever possible encourage resolution of problems by informal means
- be simple, easily accessible and publicised
- be impartial and non-adversarial
- allow swift handling with established time limits for action and ensuring people are kept informed of progress
- ensure a full and fair investigation by independent persons where necessary
- respect people's wish for confidentiality.

- address all the points at issue and provide an effective response and appropriate redress, where necessary
- provide information to the school's Leadership Team so that services can be improved.

Informal

In the majority of cases the matter should be raised with the classteacher. If it is felt that a satisfactory conclusion has not been achieved, then an appointment should be made with the Deputy Headteacher, or the Headteacher. This meeting should take place as soon as possible, and normally within three working days. If following this meeting it is still felt that a satisfactory conclusion has not been reached then the person making the complaint may either:

- request a second meeting with the Deputy Headteacher or Headteacher
- make a formal complaint in writing.

Formal

Complaints should be in writing to either the Headteacher or the Chair of Governors

- Complaints about the actions of individual staff should, in the first instance, be taken up with the Headteacher.
- Complaints about the actions of the Headteacher should be taken up with the Chair of Governors.
- Complaints about the actions of a school governor or the Governing body should be taken up with the Chair of Governors, or the Headteacher

If complainants are in any doubt about where to direct their complaint they should ask the office staff, who will then make the necessary arrangements or advise the complainant about what steps to take.

Dealing with Complaints: formal procedures

The Headteacher is responsible for the day-to-day operation and management of the school complaints procedure.

Investigating Complaints

At each stage, the person investigating the complaint will:

- 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
- clarify what the complainant feels would put things right
- interview those involved and/or those complained about and allow them to be accompanied if they wish
- conduct the interview with an open mind and be prepared to be persistent in the questioning
- keep notes of the interview.

Resolving Complaints

At each stage all parties should keep in mind how a complaint might be resolved. Complainants should be encouraged to state what actions they feel might resolve the problem. It is often helpful if both parties state the areas of agreement that exist between them.

It is of equal importance to clarify any misunderstandings that may have occurred, as this can create a positive atmosphere in which to discuss any outstanding issues.

Vexatious Complaints

If properly followed this complaints procedure should limit the number of protracted complaints. However, there may be occasions when, despite all stages of the procedures having been followed, the complainant remains dissatisfied. If the complainant tries to reopen the same issue, the Chair of the Governors is able to give notice in writing that the procedure has been exhausted and that the matter is now closed.

Time Limits

Complaints need to be considered, and resolved, as quickly and efficiently as possible. The initial meeting with the class teacher or Headteacher will be arranged as soon as possible. If a written response if necessary this will be made within seven working days. However, where further investigations are necessary, new time limits should be set and explanations offered in writing.

Stage One: Complaint heard by staff member

It is in everyone's interest that complaints are resolved as quickly as possible. The sensitive handling of the initial concern will be crucial in determining whether the complaint will escalate. It might be sufficient to acknowledge that the complaint is valid in whole or in part. In addition, it might be appropriate to offer one or more of the following:

- an apology
- an explanation
- an admission that the situation could have been handled differently
- an assurance that the school will do everything in its power to ensure that the issue complained about will not reoccur
- An explanation of the steps that will be taken to avoid it happening again
- An undertaking to review any relevant school policies in the light of the complaint

If a member of staff directly involved feels unable to deal with the complaint objectively the matter may be referred to another member of staff. The ability to consider the complaint impartially is crucial.

Stage Two: Complaint heard by the Headteacher

At this point the complainant may be dissatisfied with the way in which the matter was handled at stage one. The Headteacher may delegate the task of collating any additional information to another staff member but not the decision on the action to be taken.

Stage Three: Complaint heard by Governing Bodies Complaints Appeal Panel

The complainant needs to write to the Chair of Governors giving details. The Chair, or a nominated governor, will convene a complaints panel. The panel will consist of three governors, not including the Headteacher. They will chose their own chair and have delegated powers to hear complaints, and make recommendations on policy as a result of complaints.

The governors' appeal hearing is the last school-based stage of the complaints process and is not convened merely to rubber-stamp previous decisions.

Individual complaints should not be heard by the whole Governing Body at any stage, as this could compromise the impartiality of any panel set up for a disciplinary hearing against a member of staff following a serious complaint.

The Remit of the Complaints Appeal Panel

The panel can:

- dismiss the complaint in whole or in part
- uphold the complaint in whole or in part
- decide upon the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint
- recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not recur

Governors should remember:

The appeal hearing must be seen to be independent and impartial. No governor can sit on the panel if they have been involved in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it. The panel should be a cross-section of the governing body and sensitive to the issues of race, gender and religious affiliation.

The aim of the hearing, which must be held in private, is to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant. However it is possible that the complainant may not be satisfied if the hearing does not find in favour. It may only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations, which will satisfy the complainant that the matter has been taken seriously.

The panel should be aware that many complainants feel nervous and inhibited in front of strangers and parents are often emotional when discussing issues affecting their children. The proceedings should be as welcoming and informal as possible and in no way deemed adversarial.

Extra care needs to be taken when the complaint is from a child. Careful consideration of the atmosphere will ensure that the child does not feel intimidated. Adequate weight should be given to the views expressed by the child.

Roles and Responsibilities

The Role of the Clerk

A formal meeting of a Panel should be properly clerked. The clerk would be the contact point for the complainant and required to:

- set the date, time and place of the hearing, ensuring that the dates are convenient to all parties and the venue and proceedings accessible
- collate any written material and send it to the parties before the hearing
- meet and welcome the parties as they arrive
- record the proceedings
- notify the parties of the panel's decision.

Nominated Governor

The nominated governor role:

- check that the correct procedure has been followed
- if a hearing is appropriate, notify the clerk to arrange the panel

The Role of the Chair of the Panel

The Chair has a key role in ensuring that:

- the remit of the panel to the parties and allowing each party the opportunity to put their case without interruption.
- the issues are addressed
- key findings of fact are made
- parents and others not used to such proceedings are put at ease
- the hearing is conducted in an informal manner with each party treating the other with courtesy and respect
- the panel is open minded and acts independently
- no member of the panel has a vested interest in the outcome or any involvement in an earlier stage of the procedure
- each side is given an opportunity to state their case and ask questions
- written material is seen by all parties. If a new issue arises all parties should have the opportunity to consider and comment on it.

Notification of the Panel's decision

The Chair of the panel needs to ensure that the complainant is notified of the panel's decision, in writing, with the panel's response: this is usually within a set deadline which is publicised in the procedure. The letter needs to explain if there are any further rights of appeal and, if so, to whom they need to be addressed.

Managing and recording Complaints

Recording Complaints

The progress of complaints and the final outcome will be recorded. At the end of a meeting or telephone call the member of staff should ensure that the complainant and the school have the same understanding of what was discussed and agreed. Written notes should be taken and all correspondence retained and added to the record.

Governing Body Review

The Governors should be aware of the level and nature of complaints and review the outcomes regularly to ensure the effectiveness of the procedures. Information shared with the whole governing body will not normally name individuals.

The process of listening to, and resolving, complaints may well identify underlying issues which need to be addressed and will help evaluate our performance and contribute to school improvement.

Publicising the Procedure

There is a legal requirement for the Complaints Procedure to be publicised. Details of where to access the Complaints Policy are included:

- on the school website
- cyclically, in school newsletters

Mark Hartley