



South Haringay School

Complaints Policy

Member of staff responsible: Mike Gordon

Date to be reviewed: Summer term 2018

INTRODUCTION

Under Section 29 of the [Education Act 2002](#), the School is required to have in place a procedure to deal with complaints relating to it and to any community facilities or services that it provides.

This procedure is made accessible to the public:

- On the school website.

This procedure does not apply to complaints about:

- Admissions;

which are dealt with under separate procedures.

Equally, complaints by employees of the school are usually dealt with via the grievance procedure.

It is the school's intention that this Complaints Procedure will:

- encourage resolution of problems by **informal** means wherever possible;
- be **simple** to understand and use;
- be impartial;
- be non-adversarial;
- allow **swift** handling with established **time-limits** for action and keeping people informed of the progress;
- ensure a full and **fair** investigation by an independent person where necessary;
- respect people's desire for **confidentiality**;
- address all the points at issue and provide an **effective** response and **appropriate** redress, where necessary;
- provide **information** to the school's senior management team so that services can be improved.

The School's Complaints Co-Ordinator is Mike Gordon, School Business Manager.



SPECIFIC PROVISIONS

Changes of Personnel

Where a complaint is lodged concerning the conduct of the Headteacher or a governor (or where a Headteacher or governor has been involved in the issue previously), a single governor will take on the role of the Headteacher as set out below.

If the subject of the complaint is the Headteacher, then Stage 2 will be handled by a single governor and the Complaint Form should be submitted to the Chair of Governors, via the school office.

The School may also in appropriate circumstances adjust or modify this procedure where the particular circumstances of the complaint warrant it.

Exclusions and Exceptional Circumstances

An anonymous complaint will only be investigated in very limited and exceptional circumstances.

A complaint relating to matters more than 3 months in the past will normally only be accepted and investigated in exceptional circumstances.

Exceptional Circumstances typically include:

- Child protection issues;
- Bullying allegations;

In such cases, the school may either involve appropriate external agencies or conduct its own internal review to test whether there is any corroborative evidence which might trigger a formal investigation.

Unreasonable Conduct by a Complainant

Complainants (and/or anyone acting on their behalf) may be deemed by the Headteacher and /or the Chair of Governors to be unreasonable if they have behaved in any of the following ways (this list is not exhaustive):

- The complainant makes such frequent contact with the school that objective consideration of a “live” complaint is hindered;
- The complainant makes a string of further complaints about a “live” investigation or changes aspect of the complaint, during the investigation;
- The complainant exhausts all stages of the school’s complaints procedure but continues to pursue the same matter;



- The complainant seeks an unrealistic outcome and persists in doing so despite being advised that this is the case.

In these examples a “contact” may be in person, in writing, or by telephone or SMS text.

The school may decide to deal with such complaints in one or more of the following ways, for example:

- a. Try to agree with the complainant a code of behaviour for the parties involved if the school is to continue processing the complaint.
- b. To require contact to take place with a named officer only.
- c. To restrict telephone calls to specified days and times.
- d. To restrict contact with the complainant to one form of contact only.

Where a complainant continues to behave in an unacceptable fashion the Chair of Governors may authorise staff to terminate contact with the complainant (except in matters directly related to the education and welfare of their child) and they may discontinue any further investigation being carried out. Any further contacts from the complainant in writing will be read and placed on file. Telephone calls relating to the complaint will be terminated and logged.

Once a complaint has been addressed formally via this procedure, the matter will be closed. Should a complainant remains dissatisfied, despite all stages of the procedures having been followed, and seek to reopen the same issue, the Chair of the Governing Body will simply inform them in writing that the procedure has been exhausted and that the matter is now closed. A sample letter is set out at Annex 2.

Disclosure

The complainant is not entitled to access to documentation generated or collated as part of any investigation, save for any statement provided by their own child.

Removal of a Child

Where a child is not on the school roll, or ceases to be on the school roll during the investigation of a complaint presented on their behalf, the complaint will be closed and no further action taken.

THE PROCEDURE

Stage One (informal): Complaint Heard by Staff Member

Where an individual has a concern regarding a member of staff, it should in most cases be raised with that member of staff directly. This should generally enable a concern to be resolved at the earliest possible stage and avoid any need for it to escalate into a formal complaint.



Members of staff dealing with such concerns should keep a record of the concern and the steps taken to deal with it. This is particularly important where the concern is raised (and resolved) verbally.

If an acceptable resolution is not reached, the member of staff should direct the individual to this procedure.

If an individual presents a formal complaint to the school without having initially sought to resolve it informally, this may affect how the school deals with their concern, including that it may lead the school to reject the complaint.

The school does however recognise that there may be circumstances in which:-

- it would be difficult for a particular complainant to discuss a complaint with a particular member of staff; or
- the member of staff directly involved feels too compromised to deal with the complaint.

In these cases, the Complaints Co-ordinator can refer the complainant to another staff member (or, in the case of a complaint concerning the Headteacher, the chair of governors) for informal resolution. Such alternative member of staff may be more senior, but does not have to be, and they are simply required to consider the complaint objectively and impartially.

Where a complaint is received which does not appear to have explored this stage of the procedure (such as where the first approach is made to a governor) and which does not indicate that there is good reason (as indicated above) why this has not been done, the usual next step would be to refer the complainant to the appropriate person and advise them about the procedure.

Stage Two (formal): Complaint Heard by Headteacher

A formal complaint should be issued to the school in the form set out at Annex 1, or at least including all the matters covered in that form.

The school will promptly acknowledge the complaint (usually within five term time days) and the Headteacher will be the person to consider it and reach the decision upon any action to be taken.

The Headteacher will usually also investigate the complaint; however, the Headteacher may if appropriate appoint another suitable person to investigate the complaint and produce a report which the Headteacher will consider in reaching their decision.

The Headteacher will confirm his/her decision in writing.

At this point, the complainant may be dissatisfied with the way the complaint was handled at Stage one as well as pursuing their initial complaint, and such concerns should be addressed within the Headteacher's outcome.

Stage Three (formal): Complaint Heard by Governing Body

If the complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 2, they should write to the Chair of Governors giving details of the complaint and the reasons why they



disagree with the Headteacher's decision at Stage 2, no later than 10 working days from the date of the Headteacher's decision letter.

The Chair will convene a Governing Body complaints panel (usually made up of three Governors) and a letter will be sent to the complainant inviting them to attend the hearing.

In order for them to prepare for the hearing, the Panel should receive in advance (in particular but not exclusively):-

- A summary of the steps taken at Stage 1;
- The formal complaint lodged at Stage 2;
- The investigation steps taken by the school;
- The Headteacher's decision; and
- The complainant's appeal correspondence and any supporting documentation.

In most cases, the Stage 3 Hearing will be attended by:-

- The panel (with one governor chosen to act as Chair of the panel);
- The complainant;
- An appropriate individual to advise the panel;
- A clerk.

The Headteacher may attend, if it is considered appropriate, to explain his/her actions and/or decision at Stage 2. However, it will not normally be expected for the subject of the original complaint to attend, nor for witnesses to attend and give evidence in person.

CONDUCT OF THE PANEL HEARING

At the hearing, the complainant will be given a full and fair opportunity to present the grounds of their complaint and any supporting evidence, together with their reasons for rejecting the decision of the Headteacher's decision at Stage 2. It should be made clear what resolution is sought by the complainant and why this is considered appropriate.

The Panel's decision will usually be reached on the basis of the documentary evidence available, although the panel may adjourn the hearing if necessary to conduct further investigation. The Panel's role is not to re-investigate the case, but to review the steps taken to date.

In order to retain the non-adversarial approach recommended by the DfE, the following principles will apply to the hearing:

- The Panel will act independently and impartially, and will not therefore have had any previous involvement in the process;
- The hearing will be as informal as possible and the Panel will endeavour to put and keep the complainant at their ease.



- Witnesses will not normally be required to attend to give evidence in person, and the written evidence (as recorded in notes of any investigation interview) will usually be taken as read.
- Should the complainant want a particular witness to attend in person, this request should be justified with reasons and the Panel should make the decision as to whether to proceed in this way. In such cases, the witness will only be required to attend for the part of the hearing in which they give their evidence and can afterwards be excused.
- The focus of the hearing will be on hearing from the complainant. The Headteacher, if attending, can respond to points raised by the complainant.
- The panel may ask questions at any point.
- The complainant will not be present whilst the Panel deliberates.
- The Panel's decision will be confirmed in writing following the hearing.

THE PANEL'S DECISION

The Panel will have to consider the issues raised by the complainant and the evidence supporting their complaint.

It will often be the case that the evidence of two or more witnesses conflict, and in such cases, the Panel will have to make a finding of whose evidence to prefer and for what reasons they have reached this decision.

The Panel will consider the complainant's appeal and may:-

- dismiss the complaint in whole or in part;
- uphold the complaint in whole or in part;
- decide on 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.

Dismissal of a complaint may be done where (without limitation):-

- There is insufficient evidence to reach a conclusion, so the complaint cannot be upheld.
- The concern is not substantiated by the evidence.
- The matter has been fully investigated and that appropriate procedures are being followed, which are strictly confidential.

Where a complaint is substantiated in part or in full, some details may then be given of action the school may be taking to review procedures etc. but details of the investigation or of any disciplinary procedures will not be released.

This will be confirmed in writing to the complainant as soon as reasonably practicable (usually within 10 term time days).

The Panel's review is the last stage of the School's complaints process.

The final stage of appeal is to the Secretary of State for Education. Complainants should write to:

The Schools Complaints Unit (SCU) at:



Department for Education
2nd Floor
Piccadilly Gate
Manchester
M1 2WD

MONITORING AND REVIEW

The Headteacher will report on the operation of the Complaints Procedure to the Governing Body once a year. This report will include:

- the number of formal complaints that have been made.
- the number that have been satisfactorily dealt with at the point of the original investigation.
- the number of occasions on which the Appeal Panel has met.
- any significant amendments to school policy or practice as a result of the complaints made.
- any issues that have arisen in the operation of the Complaints Procedure.

The Headteacher's report will respect the confidentiality of the individual. In the light of the Headteacher's report, the Governing Body will consider whether or not the complaints procedure should be amended in any way.



Annex 1 Complaint form

This is a Complaint Form intended to instigate Stage 2 of the Complaints Procedure, after attempts to resolve the concern informally under Stage 1 have not provided you with a resolution you consider satisfactory.

Stage 1 should only be omitted in exceptional circumstances (and in such cases the reasons why should be set out below). If the school does not consider that Stage 1 has been appropriately omitted, it reserves the right to refer your complaint back to that stage.

Please complete and return to Mike Gordon (Complaints Co-ordinator) who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

Your name:		Pupil's name:	
Address:		Your relationship to the pupil:	
		Daytime telephone number:	
		Evening telephone number:	
<p>Please give concise details of your complaint.</p> <p>Please include, where possible, dates, names of witnesses, etc. as this will enable the school to properly investigate your complaint.</p>			
<p>What action, if any, have you already taken to try and resolve your complaint.</p> <p>(Who did you speak to and what was the response)?</p>			



If you have not taken such action, please set out here your reasons.	
What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?	
Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details.	
Signed:	
Dated:	
Official Use	
Date acknowledgement sent:	
By who:	
Complaint referred to:	
Date:	



Annex 2 Example Rejection Letter

Dear

Following receipt of your communications and careful consideration of the same, I regret that I am unable to deal with this matter under the School's Complaints Procedure as:

Please select appropriate wording from the following:

- You have not identified any specific actions of which you might complain
- Your concerns are presented as conclusions rather than specific actions of which you complain.
- The concerns that you identify relate to historical actions and any evidence which might have enabled an objective investigation of your complaint is no longer available.
- The substance of your complaint has been addressed under this procedure already.
- You have not identified any potential sources of evidence which might allow the matter to be investigated.
- The school offered to resolve the matter informally and in my judgement you refused unreasonably to take advantage of this.

If you wish my decision to be reviewed then you may write to the Clerk to the Governing Body.

Yours sincerely,