



Responding to your concerns in relation to schools

A guide for parents, carers, pupils and members of the local community

This leaflet should be read in conjunction with the school's complaints procedure which the school can provide upon request.

If concerns become complaints

Introduction

Your views are welcomed. In the spirit of true partnership between home, school and the community, you are encouraged to say what you think should go on within the school. Schools aim for high standards but sometimes things can go wrong or expectations are not met.

What is a complaint?

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction or disquiet which may be about an event that has happened, failed to happen or the way in which something was handled.

The vast majority of concerns can be resolved informally. It is in everyone's best interests that complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. This can usually be achieved through discussion and good communication. However, if you are not satisfied with the outcome, a formal procedure (as outlined in this leaflet) would then need to be followed when attempts to resolve the issue are unsuccessful.

The procedure described does not include complaints covered by a separate statutory procedure, for example complaints about the National Curriculum, school admission decisions, special educational needs (SEN) statements and pupil exclusions decisions.

Schools have their own policies that have been agreed by their governing body. You should check which policy is relevant to your concern before proceeding with a complaint.

For complaints to be investigated fully you need to give full information and not make them anonymously.

What can you expect?

- Every school must have its own complaints procedure. It must be clear and easily accessible. If you need the procedure to be available in a different format or another language please ask the school.
- There are set response times for each stage of the complaints procedure (see over).
- A complaint register will be maintained for formal complaints.
- Conversations and correspondence will be handled with discretion, but you need to be aware that some information may have to be shared with others involved in the complaint procedure.
- Raising a concern or making a complaint will not affect the relationship between the school, you or your child.
- When investigating your complaint the school will talk to your child, witnesses and others involved quickly.
- The school and the governors have a duty to act properly and investigate complaints impartially. Once investigations are complete the person making the complaint should receive a written response from the school within 20 school days.

Advice for you

- Many concerns can be resolved quickly with goodwill, often by making early contact with the class teacher or head of year.
- Remember the more information you have the better able you will be to discuss the matter. Fact find by asking the school for information. Obtain copies of relevant policies from the school e.g. policy against bullying and harassment, behaviour and discipline policy (this also relates to exclusion), home school agreement, homework policy, special educational needs policy, health and safety policy etc.
- Seek further information by visiting **www.direct.gov.uk: www.direct.gov.uk/en/Parents/Schoollearninganddevelopment/index.htm**
- You can seek support from independent bodies such as Citizens Advice Bureaux, community relations centres and Advisory Centre for Education (**www.ace-ed.org.uk**) etc.
- Schools are very busy so please make an appointment for discussion through the school office. It helps to outline the purpose and how long you think you may need with the staff member/head teacher.

- Cover all the relevant points, but be as brief as you can. Avoid writing long letters or emails. Make it easy to read by using bullet points or headings. Include dates, times, names etc and explain clearly what your complaint is, what effect the issue is having on your child or you and what you would like to see happen. Keep it factual and avoid making judgements or hearsay. If more information is needed from you the person investigating your complaint will contact you.
- Sometimes it helps to take a friend with you. You may forget something if you are doing all the talking, they can do the listening for you and record main points and agreed action.
- Try to keep calm! Avoid confrontation – it will cloud the issue.
- Remember to ask “what happens next?”.

Complaint against a member of staff

- The complaint procedure is distinct from any formal disciplinary proceedings for staff. If a complaint did result in a disciplinary procedure, then the complaint would be put on hold and you will be advised of the delay and updated every three weeks.
- If a complaint is made against a member of staff or governor they will be informed and have the opportunity to respond.

In Croydon governing bodies are recommended to form a governing body complaints panel as described below:

- Parents, carers, pupils who wish to pursue a complaint regarding a school issue can refer the complaint to a review committee of governors, known as a complaints panel. This will be formed from at least three people who have had no prior involvement with the complaint.
- A majority of the committee must be governors, at least one member must be a parent of a pupil at the school, and in addition a person must be selected from a panel of non-governors of the school.
- The head teacher should not be a member of the panel.
- Governors will be mindful of equality issues when looking at the composition of a complaints panel.
- The governors review hearing is the last school based stage of the complaints process.

Complaint procedure

Stage 1: Informal

Your expression of concern should be made to the school at the earliest opportunity.

First talk to the teacher most closely concerned to clarify the facts and resolve through discussion. A request for discussion with the head teacher or senior staff member may also be desirable before making a formal complaint.

Stage 2: Complaint

If you are not satisfied with the outcome at Stage 1 you may wish to make a formal complaint. This should be done in writing to the head teacher. Your complaint should be acknowledged within three school days.

The investigation should be carried out and the outcome communicated to you within **20 school days**. The written response should include a full explanation of the decision and the reasons for it (if additional time is required to formulate a response this will be explained to you). Where appropriate the response should include what action the school will take to resolve it.

The head teacher may delegate the task of collating the information to another member of staff but not the decision on the action to be taken.

Once a decision has been reached, the head teacher should ensure that you are clear about the action taken and what to do if you remain dissatisfied (see below).

When the head teacher receives your written complaint, they may decide to refer the matter immediately to a governing body complaint panel.

If the complaint is about the head teacher, the matter should be referred to the Chair of governors of the school.

Stage 3: Governing body

Complaints rarely reach this formal level but should you need to, you should make a formal complaint to the governing body complaints panel within **10 school days** of the decision from the school.

Your letter to the governing body needs to set out why you remain dissatisfied and what outcomes you are seeking.

A governing body complaints panel will normally consist of three people, none of whom will have been previously involved in your complaint. They will let you know when your complaint is to be considered. If a meeting with you and others involved is considered appropriate, you should be given seven days notice. The complaints panel will make their decision in private and write to you with their findings and any recommendations within seven school days.

Stage 4: Final complaint stage

If all attempts to resolve the complaint have been unsuccessful, for most schools you may refer your complaint to the Secretary of State for Education at the Department for Education (DfE), Sanctuary Buildings, Great Smith Street, London, SW1P 3BT. For more information, please visit: www.education.gov.uk

The Secretary of State is unlikely to investigate individual issues but can inspect the school's policies and procedures and make sure these have been followed.

Any complaint regarding an academy should be made to the Education Funding Agency (an executive agency of the DfE) at 53-55 Butts Road, Earlesdon Park, Coventry, CV1 3BH or visit: www.education.gov.uk