

## **Complaints Policy**

### **Introduction**

We believe that our school provides a good education for all our children, and that we work very hard to build positive relationships with all parents. However, we have procedures in place in case there are complaints by parents. The following policy sets out the procedure that the school follows in such cases.

### **Aims and objectives**

Our school aims to be fair, open and honest when dealing with any complaint. We give careful consideration to all complaints and deal with them as swiftly as possible. We aim to resolve any complaint through dialogue and mutual understanding and, in all cases, we put the interests of the child above all other issues. We provide sufficient opportunity for any complaint to be fully discussed, and then resolved.

### **Stage one — the informal stage**

One of the main aims is to keep everything as simple and as informal as possible and to ensure that every complainant has been treated reasonably. It is expected that the majority of complaints will be resolved at this early stage through informal communication with the member of staff concerned. It should be remembered that many complaints arise as a result of unresolved concerns. Many of these concerns can be resolved at an early stage by simple clarification, or by the provision of information.

### **Stage two — referral to the Co-Principals – formal stage**

In the case of a serious concern, or when a concern has not been resolved at the informal stage, it may be appropriate to address the complaints directly to the Co-Principals. The procedure now becomes more formal, the complaints must be put in writing and the Co-Principals takes on responsibility for the investigation. If the concern is about an action by the Co-Principals personally, the complaints should be put in writing to the nominated person, Sally Cox, in an envelope marked confidential, to the school.

The Co-Principals will respond with an undertaking to complete the investigation, as far as possible, within five to ten school days. Included with the complaints should be details that might assist the investigation, such as names of potential witnesses, dates and times of events and copies of relevant documents. The Co-Principals may wish to meet with the complainant in order to clarify the complaints. The Co-Principals are free to collect any other evidence deemed necessary. In a situation where this involves an interview with a member of staff who is the subject of a complaint, a friend or representative of the member of staff may be present at the interview if they so wish. The investigation will begin as soon as possible and once it has been concluded, there are a number of possible outcomes.

- The complaint cannot be upheld due to there being insufficient evidence to reach a conclusion.
- The concern was not substantiated by the evidence.

- The concern was substantiated in full or in part and some details will be given of the action the school may be taking to review procedures, etc although details of any disciplinary procedures will not be released.
- The matter has been fully investigated and appropriate procedures are being followed. These are strictly confidential, especially when they involve staff disciplinary procedures.

The complainant will be informed in writing of the outcome of the investigation and told that the Co-Principals' consideration of the complaint has now been concluded. Depending on the outcome, the complainant can receive one of the following.

- An apology.
- An explanation.
- Immediate action to put things right.
- An assurance that the school will do all that it reasonably can to prevent the situation that caused the complaint from ever happening again.
- Reasonable financial compensation from school funds if it is considered appropriate.

If the complainant is satisfied, all well and good, but it could very well be that he or she is not happy with the outcome and the way in which the process was followed. If he or she decides to "take the matter further" the appropriate course of action is to write to the nominated person, Sally Cox, in an envelope marked confidential, to the school.

### **Stage three — referral to the complaints committee**

Complaints rarely reach this formal level, but the school is prepared for the need to create a complaints committee

A complaint committee usually this will have two members of staff and one non-member of staff (who is independent of the management and running of the school) none of whom have previously been involved in dealing with the complaint. The committee elects its own chairperson.

The letter from the complainant to the chairperson is important, because if this has not been received the committee is unable to consider any complaint. The letter should include full details of the complaint, together with any details that might assist the investigation, such as names of potential witnesses, dates and times of events and copies of relevant documents. Receipt of this letter should be acknowledged and if possible the chairperson should write to the complainant with this acknowledgement within five school days, but no more than ten days.

The letter should give a time scale for when the complaint committee will hear the complaint. This will usually be within 15 school days. The chairperson will formally write to the complainant, the Co-Principals and any other relevant staff or witnesses to inform them:

- of the date, time and venue of the hearing

- of the aims and objectives of the hearing and how it will be conducted
- that any documentation they wish the committee to consider should be sent to the chairperson no later than five days before the hearing
- of their rights to be accompanied by a friend or representative
- how and when the committee will reach its decision.

The hearing will enable each party involved to explain their understanding or interpretation of the events that led to the complaint. The parties may also question each other, call witnesses and question witnesses called by other parties.

Following final statements by the Co-Principals and the complainant, the hearing will be concluded by the chairperson who will explain that the committee will consider its decision and write to both parties within, five school days informing them of the outcome. The committee must then reach a decision and decide on any action to be taken. Where appropriate, changes to or requests of review to school systems or procedures should be suggested to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not happen again. It is expected that this will be the end to the matter.

If a complainant believes that the review panel has acted illegally or arbitrarily in handling the complaint, he or she has the right to complain to OFSTED, address below, or to the Secretary of State for Education and Skills.

We keep a written record of all complaints in a book. As well as giving brief details of each complaint, there should be an indication of whether they were resolved at a preliminary informal stage, or whether they proceeded to the more formal stage and the review panel. Parents and prospective parents may request details of the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year.

The complainant is not entitled to access any details of the investigation, except for any statements that may have been provided by their child. Any information relating to the application of disciplinary procedures is strictly confidential.

Confidence should always be respected; it is important that all complaint should be treated confidentially.

OFSTED, current addresses are:-

Foundation Stage

Early Years

Ofsted

1 Temple Square

Bristol

BS1 6HB

Main School

DfES

Mowden Hall

Staindrop Road

Darlington

DL3 9BG

### **Monitoring and review**

This policy is the Co-Principals' ongoing responsibility and they review its effectiveness annually in consultation with the staff.

**Signed:**

**Date:**

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