

Complaints procedures

Approved		Responsibility	Resources Committee
Review	3 years		



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Policy review July 2020

Procedures

The school has adopted a staged approach to dealing with complaints, as detailed in Appendix A. It is not usually appropriate for any stage to be omitted, except in cases where a complaint concerns the actions of the Headteacher, in which case complainants may proceed directly to Stage 2 and put their complaint in writing to the Chair of Governors.

Stage One - The Informal Stage

The first point of contact should be the child's class teacher. At Greenfields we believe that most concerns can be resolved at this stage. Normally a teacher is available after school or during the lunch hour, or before school by appointment.

If a parent remains uncomfortable about the effectiveness of a discussion with the class teacher, we recommend an informal telephone call to the Headteacher whereupon an informal meeting/discussion may be arranged.

If the concern is about the Headteacher, then the parent should feel able to have a preliminary discussion with the Headteacher. However, depending on the circumstances, parents may wish to take the matter further with the Chair of the Governors. (See Stage 3)

Stage Two – Headteacher

If a parent's complaint is not satisfied by an informal discussion with the class teacher, the next step is to write to the Headteacher giving details of their concerns and enclosing any appropriate paperwork.

The Headteacher will then respond in writing as soon as possible. The initial complaint should be acknowledged or a full response offered within 5 school working days.

If the complaint requires an in-depth investigation the Headteacher should acknowledge the complainant's letter informing the parent that a full response will take longer than usual and the complaint investigated and a response prepared within 20 school working days.

Following any meeting between the Headteacher and a parent, a follow-up letter may be sent to summarise the main points. This may prevent any misunderstandings and ensure that all parties have a clear record of progress or agreements.

If a parent remains dissatisfied by this process, they should be invited to make contact with the Governing Body.

Stage Three – The Governing Body

If, following stages one and two, the grievance remains unresolved or there is any grievance about the effectiveness of the procedure, a parent may wish to contact the Chair of Governors, via the school office. At this stage the parent should send a letter outlining the complaint, explaining the reasons for pursuing it beyond the Headteacher's response and enclosing any relevant paperwork. Should a parent need support in making this written complaint, the school will be willing to provide assistance. The timescale for acknowledging the complaint and making a response at this stage will be the same as those outlined for the Headteacher.

This stage offers an opportunity for achieving conciliation between all parties. Informal discussions between the Chair of Governors and the Headteacher are key to resolving the complaint and agreeing a way forward. This should prevent any further escalation of the disagreement.

Should this not be the case the Chair of the Governors will need to refer the matter to a panel of Governors. At Greenfields this is made up of three Governors drawn from the full Governing Body who have no prior involvement in the matter. This will then ensure that there is no vested interest and that no Governor on the panel is already tainted by personal knowledge of the situation. The Chair will be designated prior to any meeting. The Clerk should arrange and facilitate any meeting which should be held within 10 working days from the date of the meeting with the Chair and in an informal atmosphere but should follow a formal agenda.

It is important that the complainant understands that Governors' powers are limited and that the complaint will only be reviewed rather than reconsidered.

If the matter falls within the Headteacher's decision-making remit by virtue of his or her terms and conditions of employment, then the panel will only have the power to review the decision, not to consider the matter afresh.

If the matter relates to responsibilities that are delegated to the Headteacher by the Governing Body, the panel can reconsider the matter, that is, look at the matter afresh, with any new information that the Headteacher may not have been aware of at the time of the original response or action. In the light of additional information or discussion the panel may decide to write and ask the Headteacher to give the matter further consideration.

The Clerk will inform the complainant in writing of the panel's decision within 2 school working days following the meeting. The letter should include:

- A summary of the issues
- An outline of the main points of discussion
- The reasons for the decision
- Proposed actions or outcomes

For general complaints this is the final stage of the school's complaints procedure. If a parent believes that the Headteacher's and Governors' actions have been unreasonable or the correct process has not been adhered to, the only recourse is to the Secretary of State.

Vexatious or anonymous complaints

A vexatious complaint is one that is repeatedly or obsessively pursued, is seeking unrealistic outcomes, or is pursued in an unreasonable manner. In such cases, the Chair of Governors may use their discretion to write to the complainant informing them that the matter is considered closed.

Anonymous complaints will not normally be responded to, but the Headteacher or Chair of Governors will need to consider whether the issue is one of child protection, or if the fear of identification is genuine, and act accordingly.

Abusive complaints

Verbal aggression can be as intimidating as physical aggression. All parties have a right to be treated courteously and with respect. If staff feel threatened, they should report their fears to the Headteacher, who will consider:

- Writing to the complainant requesting that the behaviour cease;
- Setting restrictions for further contact with staff; and/or
- Reporting the incident to the police.
- Consideration will be given to filing a Violent Incident Report form and seeking advice from the Local Authority. If a telephone caller becomes aggressive or offensive, the person taking the call should explain that they will end the call if the behaviour persists. If they need to hang up, they should record this action and any further incidence. Repeated abusive or aggressive contacts can be considered as harassment and the Headteacher will consider reporting them to the police. The Headteacher may seek further advice from Legal Services in the Chief Executive's Department.

Recording

All written complaints received by the school will be logged by the Headteacher and filed in the Headteacher's office, noting the date and details of the complaint. Records of the subsequent investigations, any correspondence and the outcomes of each stage of the proceedings will be kept on file for six years.

Monitoring

The Headteacher will report general details about any written complaints termly to the next available Resources Committee meeting. The committee will review the policy biannually or sooner if the need arises to ensure that the procedures are effective in resolving complaints, and to ensure that any underlying issues are addressed.

Attached:-

Appendix A: Staged approach to handling complaints

Flow Chart

Appendix B: Guidance notes for parents

Appendix C: Guidance notes for staff and governors

Greenfields Junior School Complaints Policy

APPENDIX A – STAGED APPROACH TO HANDLING COMPLAINTS

Please note that in this document the word 'parent' is used to assume anyone with parental responsibility or daily care of a child.

The Stages of Complaint Handling

What you can do -

What we will do -

STAGE One

The Informal Stage

Talk to relevant teacher
or other member of
staff.

Arrange meeting as soon as possible.
Listen to you.
Discuss the matter.
Decide who should deal with the matter.
Make a record of your meeting.
Try and resolve the matter.

Not
Resolved

STAGE Two

Headteacher

Write to the
Headteacher.

Acknowledge your letter within 5 working
days.
Investigate the matter.
Arrange meetings where appropriate.
Try to resolve the matter.
Confirm outcome within 20 working days.

Not
Resolved

STAGE Three

The Governing Body

Write to the Chair of
Governors.

Chair of Governors

Acknowledge your letter within 5
working days.
Investigate the matter.
Speak with the Headteacher.
Arrange meetings where appropriate.
Try to resolve the matter.

Not
Resolved

Panel of Governors

Form a panel of Governors from the
Governing body within 10 working days.
Investigate the matter.
Invite parties to meet with the panel.
Try to resolve the matter.

APPENDIX B: Guidance Notes for Parents :

If you have a concern or complaint

We would like you to tell us about it. We welcome suggestions for improving our work in the school. Be assured that, no matter what your complaint, our support and respect for you and your child will not be affected in any way. Please tell us of your concern as soon as possible as it is difficult for us to investigate properly an incident or problem that has happened some time ago.

What to do first

Most concerns and complaints can be sorted out quickly by speaking with an appropriate member of staff. If you have a complaint that you feel should be looked at by the Headteacher in the first instance you can contact them straightaway. It is usually best to discuss the problem face to face. You may need an appointment to do this, and can make one by ringing or calling in to the school office. You can take an appropriate person or representative to the appointment with you if you want to. All staff will make every effort to resolve your problem informally. They will make sure that they understand what you feel went wrong, and they will explain their own actions to you. They will ask what you would like the school to do to put things right. Of course, this does not mean that in every case they will come round to your point of view but it will help both you and the school to understand both sides of the problem. It may also help to prevent a similar problem arising again.

What to do next

If you are dissatisfied with the designated member of staff's response you can make a complaint to the Headteacher in writing. Help with this is available from one of our governors or the Children's Services. At this point the complaint is now considered confidential and should only be discussed with relevant persons. If your complaint is about an action of the Headteacher personally, then you should refer it to the Chair of Governors. You can contact the Chair via the School Office. You may also find it helpful at this stage to have a copy of the Complaints Policy as this explains what procedures are followed. This is available on the school website. The Headteacher will ask to meet you for a discussion of the problem. Again you may take an appropriate person or representative with you if you wish. The Headteacher will conduct a full investigation of the complaint and may interview any members of staff or pupils involved. You will receive a written response to your complaint.

The next stage

If you are not happy with the response that you receive from the Headteacher, you may then write to the Chair of Governors to ask them to review your complaint and the Headteacher's response. The Chair of Governors will discuss the matter with the Headteacher and may arrange a meeting between you, the Chair and the Headteacher to try and resolve the situation.

If you are still unhappy

The problem will normally be solved by this stage. However, if you are still not satisfied you may wish to contact the Chair of the Governing Body to ask for referral of your complaint to a Governors' Complaints Panel. It will then be heard by a group of three governors who have no previous knowledge of the problem and so will be able to give it a fresh assessment. You will be invited to attend and speak to the panel at a meeting that the Headteacher will also attend.

Further action

Complaints about school problems are almost always settled within schools but in exceptional cases it may be possible to refer the problem to an outside body such as the Local Education Authority or the Secretary of State for Education and Skills.