

Theale Green School

Complaints Policy

Purpose and background

Parents are encouraged to bring all difficulties into the school quickly, and not to let them develop into a major problem.

This policy and procedure apply equally to parents and other members of the community who have a concern or a complaint against the school or a member of the school community.

The vast majority of concerns and complaints can be resolved informally through the class teacher, the administration staff, the Head teacher or Chair of Governors. This policy and procedure are intended to give an opportunity to get things straightened out quickly and efficiently.

Theale Green school also has a separate Bullying Policy to cover concerns involving bullying.

The policy does not cover those aspects of school life where the law sets specific complaints procedures such as admissions or exclusions.

The Complaints policy is available on the school website.

Policy objectives

- To provide a mechanism for handling complaints on an informal and where necessary, a formal basis.
- To understand the complaint and where possible find a resolution which is satisfactory for all parties.
- To handle complaints thoroughly and without unnecessary delay.
- To ensure anyone making a complaint knows how to bring it to the school's attention.
- To maintain a record of all complaints in order to learn from complaints and ensure that recommendations are acted on.

Management of policy

School: This policy is implemented and managed by the Headteacher in respect of informal procedure and stage 2 of the procedure. The Governing Body implement and manage stage 3 of the procedure.

Approval:

Approved by the Audit Risk and Compliance Committee on 05 December 2016.

Next review date:

Autumn 2019

Associated policies and documents: None

Procedure

A complaint is an actual statement of dissatisfaction that requires action. Theale Green believes that when all parties take an open and constructive approach, then the chances of a resolution that meets all parties' interests are significantly improved. Accordingly the Governors have an expectation that all parties to the complaint process will take a courteous approach and listen carefully to what the other party is saying to them and be respectful throughout.

The timings set out in this procedure reflect the need on many occasions to investigate further the detail of the complaint. Where it is possible to deliver the outcome more quickly, the school will do so. In complex cases, it may sometimes be the case that timelines are extended in order to complete an investigation. The school will always keep those with a complaint aware if this is the case.

Stage 1: Informal procedure

- In the first instance parents should seek to resolve their concerns informally by raising it with the class teacher in writing, by email or by making contact by telephone.
- An initial meeting should take place within 5 school days at which the concerns are discussed and actions identified that will improve the situation. A mutually agreed time should be set for a future meeting to review progress. At the conclusion of this second meeting should either party still have concerns the Head teacher should be involved.
- However, should parents feel that the teacher may be part of the problem, or the matter lies more in the realm of the Head they should contact the Head directly. On these occasions the Head would decide whether to involve the teacher.
- The parents or teacher should contact the Head teacher to arrange a meeting. It will save time if the Head is informed of the nature of the concerns prior to the meeting so the Head can investigate beforehand.
- All members of staff are expected to document the way in which they have handled any concerns raised and if they have been resolved, how this has occurred.

Stage 2: Initiation of formal procedure

- If the matter cannot be resolved at through the informal procedure, the parent/carer can make a formal complaint in writing to the Head if they have not already done so.
- The Head may also make the decision to move to the formal procedure
- The Head will reply to the letter within 5 working school days, and after any subsequent meeting she/he will write to summarise the outcome of the meeting and any decisions reached. The Head must keep written records of meetings, telephone conversations and any other relevant documentation.
- Every formal complaint will be kept in the Complaint Log held by the Head.

Stage 3:

- Should the previous stages of consultation fail to resolve the complaint, or the complaint actually involves the Head teacher, then the parent may take their complaint to the Chair of Governors.
- This should start with a letter, addressed to the Chair of Governors at the school. The Chair will investigate the complaint and attempt to resolve the problem in an informal manner.

He/she will report back to the parents in writing, within 20 working school days unless there are exceptional circumstances which will be explained to the complainant.

- If the Chair deems the complaint to be of sufficient severity and substance, he/she will write to the parent offering of a formal meeting of the Governors' Complaints Panel which shall meet within 20 school days of the date of the letter from the Chair unless the parent decides to withdraw the complaint or there are exceptional circumstances which will be explained to the complainant. This is also the next option if the Chair is unable to resolve the matter to the parents' satisfaction.
- All parties involved with the complaint will be given a written report of the conclusions of the Governors Complaints Panel and copies will be retained by the School
- Any actions required of the school in light of the conclusions of the Governors Complaints Panel will be implemented.

Note: Letters should not be copied to any other Governor, since this could affect the impartiality of the Governors' Complaints Panel.

The Complaints Panel consists of three Governors, who will, if at all possible, be unaware of the substance of the complaint before the meeting, in order to be as impartial as possible. Its procedures and powers will be fully explained to the parent before any such meeting. The Clerk to the Governors should arrange to convene a Governors' Complaints Panel.

Note: The complainant may be accompanied to the meeting by a friend or relative and should make the school aware of any special needs.

Guidance

- If the complaint relates to the Head teacher, the parent is advised to contact the Chair of Governors at the school.
- Complaints made informally to governors will be referred to the Head teacher or to the Chair of Governors where appropriate.
- A written statement outlining the decision of the Panel must be sent to the complainant and Head teacher. The letter to the complainant should explain whether a further appeal can be made, and if so, to whom.
- Those with complaints about specific school staff should be careful about confidentiality. Critical comments aired publicly might be subject to the laws of slander and defamation.
- This policy does not cover complaints by staff. Complaints by staff that cannot be resolved informally should be raised under the grievance policy.

Records

All records and correspondence relating to concerns or complaints raised will be held by the school securely and confidentially

Vexatious complaints

In rare circumstances a complainant might, having exhausted the complaints procedure, persist with the complaint. Complaints become vexatious when they are:

- repeatedly and obsessively pursued; or
- unreasonable or seeking unrealistic outcomes; or
- reasonable but pursued in an unreasonable manner.

Governors may need to decide whether all future contacts should be:

- directed to, and only be dealt with by, a named individual;
- restricted, for example, to letter only.

If a conclusion has been reached about a complaint but the complainant continues to pursue it, the school may wish to consider writing:

- to reiterate that the matter is concluded and there will be no further correspondence;
- to say that, if correspondence continues, it will be read and filed but will receive no acknowledgement;
- to give a short response referring to previous documents that have already dealt with the matter.

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;
- reporting the incident to the Police.

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 incidents.

Repeated abusive or aggressive contacts can be considered as harassment and the Headteacher will need to consider reporting them to the police.

If the complainant believes their complaint has been handled improperly, they are able to raise a complaint using the school complaints form:

(<http://local.direct.gov.uk/LDGRedirect/index.jsp?LGSL=630&LGIL=0&ServiceName=Make+a+complaint+about+a+school>) provided by the Education Funding Agency (EFA)