

School Complaints A Brief Guide for Parents and Carers

Children Young People and Families

Revised Edition Autumn 2013



School Complaints

Advice to Parents/Carers about making a complaint

If you have comments or concerns please let your school know. We welcome suggestions for improving our work in schools. We understand a common fear is that the school's relationship with you and your child/children will be affected if you express dissatisfaction. We wish to assure you that by having an effective complaints procedure, we would hope to be able to minimise problems, provide the school with helpful information and to treat complaints as constructive suggestions to improve standards and prevent cause for further complaint. For schools, the definition of a complaint within the terms of the procedures referred to here is an expression of dissatisfaction by parents or carers of children who attend a Sheffield school, or from neighbours of the school or school community affected by the services the school provides.

1. What to do first

Many concerns arise from misunderstandings and are best dealt with positively in discussion with the staff at the school. This is best done by speaking with your child's class or form teacher. All staff will make every effort to resolve your concern quickly and 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 necessarily mean that in every instance they will agree with your point of view but the response should help both you and the school to understand both viewpoints. It may also prevent a similar problem arising in the future.

2. What to do next

Should you remain dissatisfied with the teacher's initial response, you can make a complaint to the Head Teacher. This is best done in writing or by making an appointment to discuss the problem. You may find it helpful at this stage to have a copy of the full School Complaints Procedure as this explains in detail what procedures should be followed. (This is available from the School Office). The Head Teacher will ask to meet with you for a discussion of the problem and you may take a friend or someone else with you if you wish.

The Head Teacher will conduct a full investigation of your complaint and may interview members of staff or pupils involved. You will then receive a written response to your complaint. This will hopefully resolve the matter. However, should you remain dissatisfied, the Head Teacher should give you detail and of ways to take matters further.

3. If you are still unhappy

If you are still not satisfied, you may wish to contact the Chair of Governors and request that they look again at your complaint and the Head Teacher's

response. The Chair of Governors will seek to clarify your concerns and undertake their own independent investigation; this may well involve speaking with members of staff and others. Once their investigation has been concluded, you will then receive a written response to your complaint. This will hopefully resolve the matter.

Should you remain dissatisfied with the response from the Chair of Governors, you can ask for your complaint to be referred to a Governing Body Complaints Review Panel. This will comprise a group of three governors from the school who, as far as is possible, have no previous knowledge of the problem and who will therefore be able to give it fresh assessment. You will be invited to attend a meeting and speak to the Panel in person. The full School Complaints procedure explains how these meetings operate.

4. Further Action

The Advice and Conciliation Service

Before any action is considered it is essential that you discuss your concerns with the Advice and Conciliation Service. The Advice and Conciliation Service is an impartial Service based within Children and Young People's Services and aims to help all sections of the Service in Sheffield become more responsive to comments, complaints, criticisms and suggestions from parents and carers, young people and other service users. The Advice and Conciliation Officer can be contacted on Sheffield 0114 2053938/2053939.

The Department for Education

Complaints about school are almost always settled within school but, complaints about maintained schools not resolved by the school can be referred to the Secretary of State for Education.

Should you believe that either the Local Authority or Governing Body has acted unreasonably you can take your complaint to the Secretary of State for Education. 'Unreasonably' for these purposes means that you believe the school has acted in such a way that no reasonable school would act. This is a high threshold to overcome.

If your complaint is about a local authority maintained school, that is, it is not an academy or Free School, and you feel your complaint has not been resolved satisfactorily by the school's governors, you can refer your complaint to the Secretary of State for Education. You must do this in writing, either by post to:

School Complaints Team
Department for Education
Castle View House
East Lane
Runcorn. WA7 2GJ

Or, by using the online School Complaints form. This can be accessed at:

<http://www.education.gov.uk/b00212240/guidance-on-making-a-complaint-about-a-school/how-to-complain-to-the-department-about-a-school>

Before submitting your complaint, please read the guidance section on making a complaint about a school. This can be accessed at:

<http://www.education.gov.uk/b00212240/guidance-on-making-a-complaint-about-a-school>

Academies

If your complaint is about an academy and you feel it has not been resolved satisfactorily by the academy's governors or trustees, you can also make your complaint to the School Complaints Team, who will refer it to the Education Funding Agency. The Education Funding Agency is the arm of the Department for Education which oversees academies. However, you must make your complaint in writing in the first instance to the Department for Education as above.

Is there a time limit for complaining?

You should complain to the school as soon as possible and certainly within three months. If you do not contact the school within that time, normally no further action will be taken in respect of your complaint. However, any exceptional reasons you may give for not meeting this time limit will always be taken into account and any decision to hear a complaint after this time will be at the discretion of the Chair of Governors.

Dealing with Unreasonably Persistent Complainants and Vexatious Complaints

The Headteacher and Governing Body are fully committed to the improvement of the school. Feedback from parents and carers is welcomed and schools will always do their utmost to resolve any that are brought to their attention as quickly as possible. The formal procedure for parents and carers should always be followed should you wish to make a complaint.

Occasionally, however, parents and carers in raising issues with staff or others do so in a way that is unacceptable. Whilst it is recognised that some complaints may well relate to what are considered serious and distressing incidents, threatening or harassing behaviour towards any members of the school community, be this staff, school governors, parents, pupils or others will not be tolerated.

The full School Complaints Procedure available from the school gives further details about how the school will always seek to work in a positive way with parents, carers and others to resolve complaints at the earliest opportunity. It also gives information about what action may be taken in respect of those complaints which appear unreasonably persistent and instances where the behaviour of the complainant gives cause for concern.

Model School Complaints Form

Your name:

Pupil's name:

Your relationship to the pupil:

School:

Address:

Postcode:

Day time telephone number:

Evening telephone number:

Please give details of your complaint.

**What action, if any, have you already taken to try and resolve your complaint.
(Who did you speak to and what was the response)?**

What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?

Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details.

Signature:

Date:

For Official use by the school

Date acknowledgement sent:

By whom:

Complaint referred to:

Date:

Guidance on Making a Complaint

Try to resolve issues with the school informally at first. If matters are not resolved to your satisfaction you can make a formal complaint, however, at all times, please remember that matters can often be dealt with more easily if you bear in mind the following:

- **Speak to the right person**

Try to speak with the member of staff best able to advise you and best able to deal with your concerns. This is often your child's class teacher in the first instance. If they are unable to deal with an issue immediately they may suggest making an appointment at a more convenient time for both parties to discuss matters more thoroughly.

- **Be courteous**

Conduct yourself in a professional manner and try to discuss your concerns in a calm but firm manner. Try to understand the other's point of view and do not present yourself in an aggressive manner.

- **Say who you are**

If you are unknown to the member of staff, introduce yourself.

- **Ask for the member of staff's name and use it**

If the member of staff you first approach is unable to deal with the matter ask for the name of the member of the school's staff who will be able to assist you.

- **Take your time to explain exactly what the issues are**

It is often easy to forget to give all the details of your concern, particularly if you are upset or annoyed. You may wish to write a list of the issues you need to discuss before you approach school.

- **Stay cool and calm**

Do not argue with the member of staff who receives your complaint. Be polite and respectful. Try to be clear about exactly what it is that you believe the issue to be.

- **Check you are being understood**

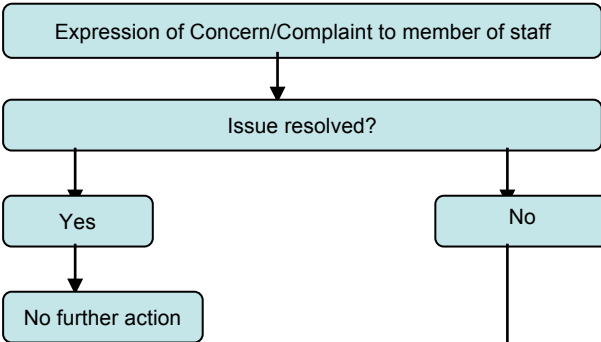
Make certain that the member of staff understands what you are saying and what the issue is that has given rise to your concerns.

- **Don't rush**

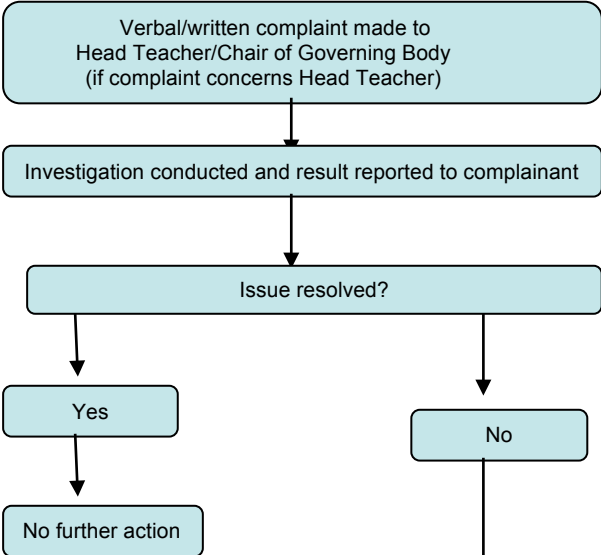
Take your time. Try to explain to school what your concern is and more importantly what you would like school to do to resolve this. Try to ensure the school understand your viewpoint before demanding a solution or suggesting the next step.

Flowchart Summary of Stages of Complaints Procedure

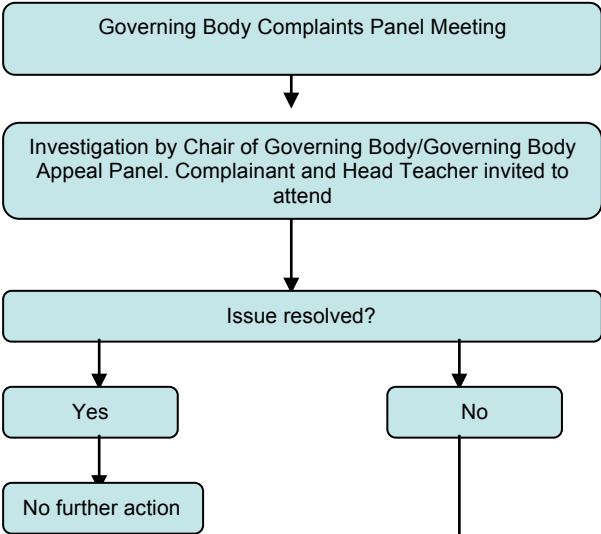
Stage 1:
Informal



Stage 2:
Head Teacher/Chair of Governing Body Investigation



Stage 3:
Governing Body Appeal Panel



Beyond the Local Authority

Referral to the Department for Education