

Complaints - Policy and Procedure

Introduction

We endeavour to provide the best education possible for all pupils in an open and transparent environment. We welcome any feedback that we receive from parents, pupils and third parties, and we accept that not all of this will be positive. Where concerns are raised the school intends for these to be dealt with:

- Fairly
- Openly
- Promptly
- Without Prejudice

In order to do so, the Trust Board has approved the following procedure which explains what you should do if you have any concerns. All members of staff will be familiar with the procedure and will be able to assist you.

Which procedure do I need?

Sometimes, when concerns are more specific, there are alternative and more appropriate policies for dealing with them. The following list details specific topics of complaints, and the correct policy to refer to. You can access these policies on the school website or ask for a copy from the main school reception:

- Pupil admissions; please see the school's admissions policy or contact Swindon Borough Council.
- Pupil exclusions; please see the school's behaviour policy.
- Staff grievance, capability or disciplinary; these are covered by the school's grievance, disciplinary and capability procedures.
- Where the complaint concerns a third party used by the school; please complain directly to the third party themselves (unless it directly effects the safety or welfare of the child).
- Anonymous complaints – please refer to the whistleblowing policy.
- Subject Access Requests and Freedom of Information Requests – please see the school's data protection and freedom of information policy

Raising concerns

The majority of concerns can be dealt with without resorting to the formal complaints procedure. Where you have a concern about any aspect of the school or your child's education or wellbeing, raise this with the class teacher via the telephone, email or in person. Ideally, they will be able to address your concerns on the spot, or can arrange a meeting with you to discuss the issue.

All concerns will be dealt with confidentially, although the staff member may need to take notes if they feel that the matter may need to be taken further or it may arise again in the future. Any such notes will be kept in accordance with the principles of the Data Protection Act 1998. However, such notes would be able to be used to as evidence if further investigation was required, or if the concern became a formal complaint.

Safeguarding

Wherever a complaint indicates that a child's wellbeing or safety is at risk, the school is under a duty to report this immediately to the local authority. Any action taken will be in accordance with the school's safeguarding policy available from the main school reception.

Social Media

In order for complaints to be resolved as quickly and fairly as possible, we request the complainants do not discuss complaints publically via social media such as Facebook and Twitter. Complaints will be dealt with confidentially for those involved, **and we expect complainants to observe confidentiality also.**

Complaints that result in staff capability or disciplinary

If at any formal stage of the complaint it is determined that staff disciplinary or capability proceedings are necessary in order to resolve the issue, the details of this action will remain confidential to the headteacher and/or the individual's line manager. The complainant is entitled to be informed that action is being taken and the eventual outcome of any such action, but they are not entitled to participate in the proceedings or receive any detail about them.

There are 3 stages to our complaints procedure. A complaints co-ordinator will manage the complaints process and the complaints co-ordinator for this school is the Clerk to the Governors who can be contacted via the school office.

The complaints co-ordinator will ensure that a written record is kept of all complaints, whether they are resolved at the initial stage or proceed to a panel hearing.

The complaints co-ordinator will ensure that correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints are kept as confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 162A of the 2002 act requests access to them.

Stages of the Complaint:

Stage 1 – initial investigation by the Head Teacher

Where as a result of raising a concern the complainant still feels that the issue has not been addressed, or where the outcome has been that the complaint needs further investigation than can be resolved briefly, they may progress by making an informal complaint. In doing so, the following steps will be followed:

1. Complainant contacts the Head Teacher
2. The complainant must explain in writing
 - An overview of the complaint so far
 - who has been involved
 - why the complaint remains unresolved
 - action they would like to be taken to put things right.
3. The Head Teacher will respond within 5 working days (excluding those which fall in the school holidays) of having received the written complaint. They will explain what action they intend to take.
4. Where the complaint is about a member of staff or a school governor, the Head Teacher will arrange an informal mediation meeting between the two parties to see if a resolution can be come to.
5. The Head Teacher will provide a written confirmation of the outcome of their investigation within 15 working days (excluding those which fall in the school holidays) of having sent confirmation of the intended action. Where the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome, they are able to progress to Stage 2 of the complaints process, and launch a formal written complaint.
6. The Head Teacher will make a record of the concern and the outcomes of the discussion which will be held centrally for twelve months, in line with the principles of the Data Protection Act 1998

Stage 2 – Formal investigation by the Chair of Governors

1. The complainant may submit a formal complaint form to the Chair of Governors. See the end of the procedure for the Chair of Governors contact details and for a copy of this form.
2. The Chair of Governors will respond in writing within 10 working days (excluding those that fall in the school holidays) of the date of receipt of the complaint to acknowledge receipt of the complaint and explain what action will be taken, giving clear timeframes.
3. A log of all correspondence in relation to the complaint will be kept in accordance with the data protection principles.
4. The Chair of Governors will consider all relevant evidence; this may include but is not limited to:
 - a statement from the complainant,
 - where relevant a statement from an individual who is the subject of the complaint
 - any previous correspondence regarding the complaint
 - any supporting documents in either case
 - interview with anyone related to the complaint.
5. The Chair of Governors may decide to have a meeting with the complainant (and where relevant, the subject of the complaint) if they feel that it would be appropriate for the investigation.
6. After considering the available evidence, the Chair of Governors can:
 - Uphold the complaint and direct that certain action be taken to resolve it
 - Reject the complaint and provide the complainant with details of the stage three appeals process
 - Uphold the complaint in part: in other words, the Chair of Governors may find one aspect of the complaint to be valid, but not another aspect. They may direct for certain action to be taken to resolve the aspect that they find in favour of the complainant.
7. The Chair of Governors must inform the complainant of their decision in writing within 20 working days (excluding those that fall in the school holidays) of having issued written acknowledgement of the receipt of the complaint. They must explain clearly why they have come to the decision that they made. They must detail any agreed actions as a result of the complaint. Finally, they must provide the complainant with details of how to progress the complaint to Stage three if they are not satisfied, providing them with the contact details of the clerk to the governors (see the end of the procedure for these).

Stage 3 – Appeal – review by a panel of the governing body:

If the complainant wishes to appeal a decision by the Chair of Governors at Stage 2 of the procedure, or they are not satisfied with the action that the Chair of Governors took in relation to the complaint, the complainant is able to appeal this decision.

They must write to the clerk to the governors (see the contact details at the end of the procedure) as soon as possible after receiving notice of the decision, briefly outlining the content of the complaint and requesting that a complaints appeal panel is convened.

The clerk to the governors will fulfil the role of organising the time and date of the appeal hearing, inviting all the attendees, collating all the relevant documentation and distributing this 5 working days in advance of the meeting, recording the proceedings in the form of minutes, and circulating these and the outcome of the meeting.

The complainant must request an appeal panel within 4 weeks of receiving the decision or it will not be considered, except for in exceptional circumstances. On receipt of this written notification, the following steps will be followed:

1. The clerk to the governors will write to the complainant within five working days (not including the school holidays) to confirm receipt of the appeal request and detail further action to be taken.
2. The clerk to the governors will convene a panel of three governors/academy trustees. All three panel members will have no prior knowledge of the content of the complaint. One of the Panel must be independent of the school.
3. The appeal hearing will take place within 20 working days (excluding those which fall in the school holidays) of receipt of the date of the confirmation letter from the clerk to the governors to the complainant, confirming the appeal.
4. In addition to the panel, the following parties will be invited, where applicable:
 - the complainant
 - the Chair of Governors who dealt with the complaint at Stage 2
 - where the complaint regards a member of staff, the staff member who is the subject of the complaint.

The complainant is also able to bring a companion with them to the hearing if they wish. Where the subject of the complaint is a member of staff, that staff member is also able to bring a companion with them.

The companion will be a friend or a colleague. Neither party is able to bring legal representation with them. If after the hearing any party feels that legal action is necessary, please see the contact details at the end of the procedure.

5. If the attendance of any pupils is required at the hearing, parental permission will be sought if they are under the age of 18. Extra care will be taken to consider the vulnerability of children where they are present at a complaints hearing.
6. Where the complaint is about a governor, the complainant may request that the appeal is heard by an entirely independent panel. It is at the discretion of the governing board who will notify the clerk to the governors of their decision. Where an entirely independent panel is required, timescales may be affected while the school source appropriate individuals for the review.
7. The panel can make the following decisions:
 - Dismiss the complaint in whole or in part
 - Uphold the complaint in whole or in part
 - Decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint
 - Recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not recur.
8. All parties who attended the meeting will be informed in writing of the outcome of the appeal within 5 working days (excluding those which fall in the school holidays).

This is the final stage at which the school will consider the complaint.

If the complainant remains dissatisfied and wishes to take the complaint further, please see the link to make a complaint to the DfE, at the end of this page.

Unreasonable (vexatious) complaints:

Where a complainant raises an issue that has already been dealt with via the school's complaints procedure, and that procedure has been exhausted, the school will not reinvestigate the complaint except in exceptional circumstances, for example where new evidence has come to light. If a complainant persists in raising the same issue, the headteacher will write to them explaining that the matter has been dealt with fully in line with the school complaints procedure, and therefore the case is now closed. The complainant will be provided with the contact details of the Department for Education (see the end of this document) if they wish to take the matter further.

Unreasonable complaints include the following scenarios:

- The complainant refuses to co-operate with the school's relevant procedures.
- The complainant changes the basis of the complaint as the complaint progresses.
- The complainant seeks an unrealistic outcome
- Excessive demands are made on the time of staff and school governors and it is clearly intended to aggravate.
- The complainant acts in a way that is abusive or offensive.

- A copy of the panel’s findings and recommendations will be made available for inspection on the school premises.

Contact details for Seven Fields Primary School

The Head of School,
 The Chair of Governors via the school office
 The Clerk to the Governors, via the school office or bhawkins@sevenfields.swindon.sch.uk

Contact details for external organisations if not satisfied with the outcomes of the complaints procedure in full:

- If you have any queries regarding any aspect of the complaints procedure, please direct these to the clerk to the governors, via the School office or bhawkins@sevenfields.swindon.sch.uk
- If the complainant feels that the governing board acted ‘unreasonably’ in the handling of the complaint, they can complain to the Department for Education after the complaints procedure has been exhausted. Please note that unreasonable is used in a legal sense and means acting in a way that no reasonable school or authority would act in the same circumstances. <https://www.gov.uk/complain-about-school>
- [Ofsted will also consider complaints about schools.](#)

If you wish to make a formal complaint - please use the form below:

Date

Signed (Chair of Governors)

.....Headteacher

Formal Complaint Form

Name	
Name of pupil, year group and your relationship to them (where applicable)	
Contact address	
Contact telephone day	
Contact telephone mobile	
Contact email address	
Details of the complaint	
Action taken so far (including staff member who has dealt with it so far) or solutions offered	
The reason that this was not a satisfactory resolution for you	
What action would you like to be taken to resolve the problem?	

Signed:

Date:

<i>Official use</i> Date received:	Signed:
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