

THE SCHOOL HAS ADOPTED THE CHESHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL  
MODEL SCHOOL COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE  
DECEMBER 2008

**1. Introduction**

The procedure takes into account the principles laid down in the DCSF guidance on school complaints procedures.

All references to working days refer to days on which the school is open to pupils and for staff training days.

**2. Scope of the Procedure**

This procedure covers all complaints against the school by external persons/parties which do not have an alternative statutory avenue of appeal or complaint, i.e. admissions, exclusions, delivery of National Curriculum, some safeguarding children issues, provision of collective worship and religious education and SEN assessments. Where complaints make allegations of misconduct against members of staff this procedure may be superseded by use of the staff disciplinary procedure or other appropriate staffing procedure.

Employees of the school cannot use this procedure but, where necessary, should raise concerns via the appropriate staffing procedure, full details of which are available from the school.

**3. General Principles**

All complaints will be dealt with in a transparent way and as quickly as is reasonably practicable. Complainants will be kept informed during the investigation of their complaint and of the outcome, except where this is confidential, e.g. in the case of a staff disciplinary process. Every effort will be made to resolve complaints in a non-confrontational and informal way.

Where the timescales within this procedure cannot be adhered to, the complainant will be informed as to why this is the case, and given a revised timescale for dealing with the complaint. This will be done within the specified timescale.

Governing Bodies will ensure that they have appropriate arrangements for recording complaints and the way in which they are resolved. Further, that they will regularly (at least once per school year), monitor the nature and level of complaints, so as to best ensure the effectiveness of the procedure, and consider any underlying issues the school may need to

address, including whether specific actions identified by governors' appeal panels have been addressed.

There may be rare occasions when, despite all the stages of the procedure having been followed, a complainant remains dissatisfied. If s/he subsequently seeks to re-open the same issue, the Chair of Governors has the right to inform him/her that the procedure has been exhausted and the matter is closed.

Advice on the operation of the procedure is available from the manager of the School Governance Service, who may also seek the advice and/or involvement of other Local Authority (LA) officers as appropriate. In exceptional cases a LA officer may agree to a request to attend a formal complaint hearing to advise the governors. Such requests should be made via the School Governance Service.

#### **4. Resolving Complaints**

At each stage in the procedure school will want to consider the ways in which a complaint can be resolved. It might be sufficient to acknowledge that the complaint is valid in whole or in part.

Complainants are encouraged to state what actions they feel might resolve the problem at any stage. An admission that the school could have handled the situation better is not the same as an admission of negligence.

#### **5. Stages of the Procedure**

Many concerns and minor complaints can be resolved quickly and informally. There are many occasions where issues are resolved immediately through the class teacher or another member of staff, depending upon the nature of the complaint. Unless there are exceptional circumstances every effort will be made by the school to have a full discussion with the complainant before moving into the stages of this procedure.

##### **Informal Stage**

If the concern/complaint is not resolved through such discussion, the complainant should contact the Headteacher. The complaint should be made in writing by the complainant, or by another person on their behalf, with their consent (by letter or email).

The Headteacher, or other member of staff nominated by him/her, will meet with the complainant to discuss his/her concerns within **ten working days** of receiving the complaint. Where necessary the Headteacher, or other nominated member of staff, will carry out a full investigation into the issues raised. The Headteacher will give a written response to the complainant as soon as possible but, in any case, within ten working days of this meeting. Where the complainant is dissatisfied with this response, the complaint will move to the first formal stage of the procedure.

Where the complaint is against the Headteacher the informal stage should be conducted by the Chair of Governors. If the complaint progresses to the formal stage this will be conducted by the Vice Chair or other nominated governor.

Where the complaint is against the Chair of Governors the informal stage will be conducted by the Vice Chair of Governors, or another governor nominated by him/her. If the complaint progresses to the formal stage this will be conducted by another nominated governor.

### **Formal Stage**

If the complaint cannot satisfactorily be resolved informally, the complainant should put their complaint in writing to the Chair of Governors (or Vice Chair/ nominated governor where the complaint is against the Headteacher/Chair of Governors), which may be by letter or email, via the school. The Chair/Vice Chair/nominated governor will meet with the complainant to discuss his/her concerns within ten working days of receiving the complaint, or as soon as is reasonably practicable after this.

The Chair/Vice Chair/nominated governor will review the investigation and Headteacher's decision and may confirm this decision or reach a different decision. The Chair/Vice Chair/nominated governor may take advice initially from the manager of the School Governance Service, who may consult other LA officers.

The Chair/Vice Chair will communicate his/her response in writing to the complainant as soon as possible but, in any case, within ten working days of receiving the written complaint.

Where the complainant is dissatisfied with this response the complaint should move to the appeal stage of the procedure.

## **Appeal Stage**

The complainant should send a written appeal to the *Chair of Governors*, either by letter or email, or, where the complaint is against the *Chair*, to the *Vice-Chair* or other nominated governor. This should state the original complaint and the reasons for on-going dissatisfaction. The *Chair of Governors*, or nominated governor, may decline to accept a complaint into the Appeal Stage where s/he, acting reasonably, believes that the complaint has been wholly upheld at the Formal Stage and in all the circumstances there is no merit in the matter proceeding further.

A governors' panel should be convened, consisting of three governors who have had no previous involvement in consideration of the complaint. Where the complainant is a parent, governors will consider the possible advantages of this panel including a parent governor. A complaints appeal meeting will be held in accordance with the procedure attached as Appendix A.

The meeting of the governors' panel should take place as soon as possible, but in any case a date will be set and communicated to the complainant within twenty working days of receipt of the appeal. The governors' decision should be communicated in writing to the complainant as soon as possible but, in any case, within five working days of the meeting. The complainant will have no further right to appeal this decision.

## **6. Opportunities to Request a Review**

### **Review by the Local Authority**

Where the complainant can provide written grounds that demonstrate that the *Governing Body* may have acted unreasonably or failed to follow this procedure, s/he may request that the situation be reviewed by the *Director of Children's Services* or his/her nominee. This will be an officer of the LA.

It is anticipated that the LA would intervene only in very rare cases where the reviewing officer believed that the *Governing Body* may have acted procedurally incorrectly or arrived at an outcome which appeared, in all the circumstances, to be unreasonable.

### **Complaining to the Secretary of State**

If a complainant believes that the Governing Body has acted unreasonably s/he can complain in writing to the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families. Complaints to the Secretary of State are handled by the government's Department for Children, Schools and Families.

### **Complaining to Ofsted**

Ofsted has powers to investigate certain types of complaint from parents to help them to decide whether to inspect a school.

**Before complaining to the Local Authority, the Secretary of State or Ofsted, it would usually be expected that all stages of this procedure had been exhausted.**

### **7. The Role of the Parent Partnership Service**

The Parent Partnership Service helps parents/carers whose children have difficulties with learning, medical needs or mental health problems, from pre-school age to school leavers. The service is confidential and offers impartial advice and information to enable parents and carers to make decisions about their child's education. This includes supporting parents with complaints to schools or the Local Authority.

The service can help parents consider what their complaint is about and the options available to them to resolve it, including more informal measures that can be explored in the first instance. If a parent wishes, the service can explain how to put a letter/case together to take the matter forward. Someone from the service can attend meetings with the parent to offer support but doesn't speak on behalf of or make decisions for the parent. The service also offers support after meetings have taken place to consider the conclusions of the meeting and if the parent feels a satisfactory outcome was achieved. If not the parent may have further options to consider.

Contact details for the service are 01829 742997

[Parentpartnership@cheshire.gov.uk](mailto:Parentpartnership@cheshire.gov.uk)

Name of School \_\_\_\_\_

Date of adoption by Governing Body \_\_\_\_\_

**APPENDIX A**  
**Conduct of Complaints Appeal Meetings**

- 1 Although this procedure may appear formal, the hearing should be conducted in as informal as way as possible, and the Chair of the panel should make every effort to make all parties feel comfortable.
- 2 The date of the meeting must be agreed with all parties and witnesses and all relevant documentation must be circulated to all parties at least five working days in advance of the meeting.
- 3 The meeting should be minuted.
- 4 The meeting will be attended by:
  - the complainant, with a companion if desired;
  - the Headteacher and/or Chair of *Governors*, as appropriate;
  - the members of the *Governors' Complaints Panel*;
  - a minute taker, appointed by the governors;
  - a LA Officer to advise the *Governors' Panel*, where this has been requested and agreed to under paragraph 3 of the procedure.

Members of staff who have been involved in the issue, or other witnesses, may be called upon by either side to attend part of the meeting to provide information to the governors.

- 5 The governors will select a Chair from amongst their number.
- 6 The Chair of the panel will introduce all the parties present and explain the procedure to be followed, and that every effort will be made to keep the process as informal as possible.
- 7 The complainant (or his/her companion) will outline his/her complaint and explain why s/he is dissatisfied with the school's response to date. The complainant may call any witnesses in support of his/her complaint who will attend the meeting only for the time that they are providing information, and may be questioned by all parties.
- 8 The Headteacher and the governors will have the opportunity to ask questions of the complainant.
- 9 The Headteacher and/or the Chair of *Governors* will explain their involvement in the complaint and the reasons for their decisions at the informal and first formal stage. The Headteacher and/or Chair of *Governors* may call any witnesses in support of his/her statement

who will attend the meeting only for the time that they are providing information, and may be questioned by all parties

- 10 The complainant and the governors will have the opportunity to ask questions of the Headteacher and/or Chair of Governors.
- 11 The governors may decide to adjourn the hearing pending further investigation at any stage, if this seems necessary.
- 12 Both parties will leave the meeting and the governors will consider the information that has been put to them.
- 13 The governors' panel must reach a unanimous or majority decision as to whether or not to uphold the complaint wholly or in part, and what action (if any) the school needs to take to resolve the complaint. This may include referring the matter to another formal process, whether in relation to a complaint against a governor or a member of the school staff. Normally the governors will reach a decision at this point but they may feel the need to take further advice. Where this is the case they should endeavour to reach a decision as soon as possible.
- 14 The governors will communicate their response to both parties in writing as soon as possible but, in any case, within five working days of reaching their decision. The governors' response should detail whether the complaint is upheld wholly or in part and briefly summarise the basis on which governors arrived at this conclusion. The response should also include any lessons learnt and specify any action to be taken by the school as a result of the complaint and within what timescales.