



COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

1. Introduction

The partnership between the parent and the school is integral to the ethos of Marvels Lane and should be characterised by a mutual respect by which parents feel they are able to bring their concerns to the attention of the school, at any time, with the expectation they will be listened to and their concerns addressed.

Not all concerns are complaints. A concern is an issue raised by a parent, pupil or other person that is resolved quickly and informally. Most concerns are resolved by the person to whom the concern is addressed e.g. the class/subject teacher or the subject coordinator/head of department. Every effort should be made to allay concerns at this level and with the least possible formality. The ideal is that no concern should ever become a formal complaint.

Occasionally, however, a concern will be too serious to be handled in this way, perhaps needing greater investigation; or the person concerned may not feel that the answers given so far have been acceptable or adequate. In such circumstances the concern may become a complaint and this document outlines the formal procedure that should be followed in such cases.

General Principles:

- This procedure is intended to guide you in raising a concern or complaint relating to the school, or the services that it provides.
- An anonymous concern or complaint will not be investigated under this procedure, unless there are exceptional circumstances.
- To allow for a proper investigation, concerns or complaints should be brought to the attention of the school as soon as possible. In general, any matter raised more than 3 months after the event, being complained of, will not be considered.

Raising a concern or complaint

1) Informal Stage

The complainant is normally expected to arrange to communicate directly with the member of staff concerned. This may be by letter, by telephone or in person by appointment. Many concerns can be resolved by simple clarification or the provision of information and it is anticipated that most complaints will be resolved by this informal stage. (In the case of serious concerns it may be appropriate to address them directly to the Headteacher). In these cases every effort should be made to resolve the situation informally. Any unreasonable refusal to attempt an informal resolution may result in the procedure being terminated forthwith. (Any dispute in relation to the “reasonableness” may be determined through the review process)

2) Formal Stage

If the complaint is not resolved at the informal stage the complainant must put the complaint in writing and pass it to the Headteacher, who will be responsible for its investigation.

The complainant should include details which might assist the investigation, such as names of potential witnesses, dates and times of events, and copies of relevant documents.

Where the school receives a formal complaint, it should be acknowledged and a commitment made that the complaint will be investigated and the outcome of the investigation notified to the complainant in due course.

The member of staff against whom the complaint has been received, should be notified that a complaint has been received if appropriate, provided with a copy of the complaint and be informed that an investigation will be carried out.

It is essential that there is a clear understanding of the complaint. Where necessary, the Headteacher may meet with the complainant to clarify the complaint, the complainant may wish to be accompanied by a friend at this meeting. It might also be possible for the complaint to be resolved at this time.

The Headteacher will collect such other evidence as is deemed necessary. Where this involves an interview with a member of staff, who is the subject of the complaint, that member of staff may be accompanied by a friend or a professional body representative if they wish.

Where children are potential witnesses, discretion should be exercised over their involvement. Pupils should only be interviewed when the nature of the complaint is sufficiently serious to warrant it and adult witnesses are not available. Only in extreme circumstances will younger pupils be interviewed.

The investigation will begin as soon as possible and when it has been concluded, the complainant, and the member of staff concerned, will be informed in writing of the outcome. This may be to the effect that:

- There is insufficient evidence to reach a conclusion, so the complaint cannot be upheld
- The concern is not substantiated by the evidence
- The concern was substantiated in part or in full. Some details may then be given of action the school may be taking to review procedures etc. but details of the investigation or of any disciplinary procedures will not be released
- The matter has been fully investigated and that appropriate procedures are being followed, which are strictly confidential (e.g. where staff disciplinary procedures are being followed).

The complainant will be told that consideration of their complaint by the Headteacher is now concluded.

If the complainant is not satisfied with the manner in which the process has been followed, the complainant may request that the Governing Body review the process followed by the Headteacher in handling the complaint. Such a request must be made in writing within 2 weeks of receiving notice of the outcome from the Headteacher, and include a statement specifying any perceived failures to follow the procedure. The procedure described in Part 3 will be followed.

If the complainant considers that the decision of the Headteacher is perverse, or that the Headteacher has acted unreasonably in considering the complaint, then the complainant may bring a complaint against the Headteacher under part 2 of this procedure. This will provide an opportunity for the evidence to support such a complaint to be investigated.

Part 2. Raising a concern or complaint about the Headteacher

1) Informal stage

The complainant is usually expected to arrange to speak directly with the Headteacher. Many concerns can be resolved by simple clarification or the provision of information. If the matter is not resolved, and if both parties agree, then a third party may be invited to act as a mediator at a further meeting. In some circumstances, a complainant may feel unable to speak directly to the Headteacher, in which case they may make a written request for the concern / complaint to be addressed informally by the Chair of the Governing Body. In extreme circumstances, however, the Chair might decide that it is appropriate for the initial complaint to be dealt with at the Formal Stage. A refusal, unreasonably, to attempt an informal resolution may result in the procedure being terminated forthwith.

2) Formal Stage

If the complaint is a) not resolved at the informal stage or b) deemed too serious to be dealt with informally the complainant must put the complaint in writing and pass it to the Chair of the Governing Body.

The complainant should include details which might assist the investigation, such as names of potential witnesses, dates and times of events, copies of relevant documents etc. In addition the complainant will be invited to meet with the Chair to present oral evidence or to clarify the complaint. The complainant may wish to be accompanied by a friend at this meeting.

The Chair will collect such other evidence as is deemed necessary. This may include the interviewing of witnesses and others who may provide relevant information.

The Headteacher will be provided with a copy of the complaint and any additional evidence presented by the complainant or collected by the Chair. Once there has been an opportunity for this to be considered, the Headteacher will be invited to meet separately with the Chair, in order to present written and oral evidence in response. The Headteacher may be accompanied at this meeting by a friend or professional body representative.

When the investigation has been concluded, the complainant and the Headteacher will be informed in writing of the outcome. The complainant will not be informed of any disciplinary/capability action.

The complainant will be told that consideration of their complaint by the Chair is now concluded.

If the complainant is not satisfied with the manner in which the process has been followed, or considers that the decision of the Chair is perverse, or that the Chair has acted unreasonably in considering the complaint, then the complainant may request that the Governing Body review the

handling of the complaint by the Chair. Any such request must be made in writing within 2 weeks of receiving notice of the outcome from the Chair, and include a statement specifying any perceived failures.

Part 3. Review Process

Any review of the process followed by the Headteacher or the Chair shall be conducted by a panel of 3 members of the Governing Body.

The review will normally be conducted through a consideration of written submissions, but reasonable requests to make oral representations should be considered sympathetically.

The panel will first receive written evidence from the complainant.

The panel will then invite the Headteacher or the Chair, as appropriate, to make a response to the complaint. The panel may also have access to the records kept of the process followed.

The complainant, and the Headteacher or the Chair, as appropriate, will be informed in writing of the outcome. This may be to the effect that:

- There is insufficient evidence to reach a conclusion, so the complaint cannot be upheld
- The concern is not substantiated by the evidence
- The concern was substantiated in part or in full but that the procedural failure did not affect the outcome significantly so the matter is now closed.
- The concern was substantiated in part or in full and the Governing Body will take steps to prevent a recurrence or to rectify the situation (where this is practicable)

Notes

The complainant is not entitled to access to any details of the investigation except for any statements that may have been provided by their child. Any information relating to the application of disciplinary procedures is strictly confidential.

If a complainant believes that the Governing Body has acted illegally or arbitrarily in handling the complaint, then the complainant may make representations to the Secretary of State for Education.

If the school believes the complainant to be unreasonably vexatious, persistent, harassing or abusive, then the policy for handling unreasonable complaints will be followed.

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