

Oakfield Lodge School



Complaints Procedure

Written by: GB
Reviewed by: IS
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We welcome suggestions for improving our work in school. Be assured that, no matter what you want to tell us, our support and respect for your child will not be affected in any way. Please tell us of your concern as soon as possible. It is difficult for us to investigate an incident or problem properly if it took place some time ago. We do appreciate the assistance we receive from parents in addressing any problems that arise.

Introduction

1.1 This complaints procedure is made pursuant to s.29 of the Education Act 2002 which requires governing bodies of all maintained schools (including academies) and maintained nursery schools to have in place a procedure for dealing with all complaints relating to their school and to any community facilities or services that the school provides.

1.2 This policy is based on the Cheshire East Council model complaints policy and procedure which has been produced by the Local Authority following consultation with Cheshire East Association of Primary Heads; Cheshire East Association of Secondary Heads; Cheshire East Association of Special School Heads; Cheshire East Association of Governing Bodies; Cheshire East school workforce Trade Unions; the Diocese Of Chester; and the Diocese of Shrewsbury.

1.3 This policy takes into account current Department for Education guidance.

1.4 All references to working days refer to days when the school is open to pupils

1.5 The Management Committee will publish this procedure on the school website and it is also be available on request from the school office.

Scope of the Procedure

2.1 You can use this procedure if you are a parent/carer of a registered pupil at the school or if you are a member of the wider community or a person representing an ex-pupil of the school. It does not apply to current staff members, or former members of school staff in any matter arising out of their employment at the school.

2.2 Where your complaint makes an allegation of misconduct against members of staff this procedure may be superseded by use of the staff disciplinary procedure or other appropriate staffing procedure at any time or following recommendations at the conclusion of the complaints process.

2.3 If your complaint is about any third party provider on the school site you will normally be expected to use their complaints procedure.

General Principles

3.1 All complaints will be dealt with in a transparent way and as quickly as is reasonably practical. You will be kept informed during the investigation of your complaint and of the outcome except where this is confidential e.g. in the case of a staff disciplinary process.

3.2 It is important that complaints are dealt with as expeditiously as possible. The school will normally expect you to raise your complaint within 12 school weeks of the event/matter complained of unless the Headteacher or the Management Committee agrees there are exceptional reasons for not doing so. All correspondence to the school or Management Committee should be by email or letter addressed to them at the school.

3.3 The timescales for dealing with your complaint within this procedure will be adhered to as far as is reasonably practicable. Where this is not possible you will be informed, within the specified timescale, as to why this is the case, and given a revised timescale for dealing with your complaint.

3.4 The Management Committee recognises that complaints may provide helpful insights and feedback for the Headteacher and staff, as well as the Management Committee, and as such support improvement in processes and practice.

Resolving complaints

4.1 At each stage in the procedure we want to consider the ways in which your complaint can be resolved which may include acknowledging that your complaint is valid in whole or in part. In addition, it may be appropriate to offer one or more of the following:

- an apology;
- an explanation;
- an admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better;
- an assurance that the event complained of will not recur;
- an explanation of the steps that have been taken to ensure that it will not happen again;
- an undertaking to review school policies in light of the complaint.

4.2 At each stage you will be asked to state what action you feel might resolve the issue.

Vexatious complaints

5.1 We define vexatious complaints as follows:

- Complaints which are obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific, repetitious;
- Insistence upon pursuing complaints and/or unrealistic outcomes beyond all reason;
- Insistence upon pursuing complaints in an unreasonable manner;
- Complaints which are designed to cause disruption or annoyance;
- Demands for redress which lack any serious purpose or value.

5.2 We may judge your complaint to be pursued in an 'unreasonable manner' where your frequency of contact with the school hinders the consideration of the complaint and/or impedes the ability of the Headteacher and school to meet the needs of all students equitably.

5.3 Where the Headteacher, and/or the Management Committee, or other nominated governor judges a complaint to be frivolous or vexatious, having considered all the relevant circumstances, s/he will take such actions as they consider appropriate which may include rejecting the complaint and/or restricting contact between you and us.

5.4 Any such decision will be communicated to you in writing with the reasons for it.

5.5 Where you seek to reopen a matter the same as, or similar to, a matter previously considered under the procedure the Chair of the Management Committee may inform you that the procedure has been exhausted and the matter is closed.

Stages of the Procedure

6.1 Many concerns and minor complaints can be resolved quickly and informally 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 you and resolve the issues informally before moving into the formal stages of this procedure.

Stage 1 (Informal) Initial concern

6.2. You should raise your concern/issue by appointment with the [class teacher/form tutor/person complained of] as soon as possible. The purpose of the meeting should be to establish the nature of the concern and to seek a realistic solution to the problem. The staff member may, if they consider it appropriate, or if so directed by their line manager/headteacher, refer you to a more senior or experienced member of staff who will try to resolve your concern informally. Where a particular member of staff is the subject of the complaint you may choose to have your concerns addressed by a different member of staff.

6.3 If your concern is not resolved through such discussion you should seek an appointment with the headteacher or another member of the senior leadership team. The purpose of this meeting is to establish the nature of your ongoing concern and hopefully resolve it to your satisfaction. It is for the Headteacher to determine which staff members should attend any such meeting

6.4 You should note that individual governors are unable to act on a complaint outside of the procedure set out in this document.

6.5 If initial attempts to resolve your issues informally are unsuccessful and you remain dissatisfied you may wish to invoke the formal complaints procedure set out below.

7. Stage 2 (formal) Complaint heard by the head teacher/or senior member of staff

7.1 If you remain dissatisfied either with the way in which your concerns have been handled or your issue remains unresolved you may wish to ask the head teacher/or senior member of staff, or an appropriate third party as decided by the headteacher to hear your complaint.

7.2 The head teacher/or senior member of staff may ask another member of staff to assist with collating information as part of the investigation but the decision on the action to be taken will be made by the head teacher/senior member of staff.

7.3 Your complaint should be made in writing on the school's complaint form which you may download and print from the school website or obtain from and return to the school office addressed to the head teacher or senior member of staff.

7.4 The head teacher/senior member of staff, or other member of staff nominated by him/her, will contact you within 10 working days of receiving your complaint, or as soon as is reasonably practical to arrange a meeting with you at a mutually convenient time. You may bring a friend or representative to you at this stage. Where necessary the head teacher/senior member of staff, or other nominated member of staff, will carry out a full investigation into the issues raised. At our sole discretion the school may appoint an external person to impartially investigate the complaint. The head teacher/senior member of staff will give a written response to you within 10 working days of this meeting or as soon as is reasonably practical thereafter. Where you decline the offer of a meeting this response will be made as soon as possible after you notify the school that you do not wish to meet. Normally this will be within 10 working days. Where you remain dissatisfied with this response, the complaint should move to the third stage of the procedure.

7.5 Where your complaint is against the head teacher, the Management Committee, another governor or the Management Committee as a whole, the complaint will move straight to the third stage of the procedure.

Stage 3 (formal) Complaint heard by the Management Committee/other governor

8.1 If you are not satisfied with the response of the head teacher/senior member of staff or where paragraph 7.5 applies, you should write to the Management Committee. Complaints against the Chair of the Management Committee or any individual governor should be made in writing to the Clerk to the Management Committee. You may write by letter or email via the school office. You must not contact individual governors at their home address.

8.2 The Chair/Vice Chair/nominated governor should contact you within 10 working days to offer to meet with you as soon as possible to discuss your concerns.

8.3 The Chair/Vice Chair/nominated governor will review the investigation and head teacher/senior member of staff decision and may confirm this decision or reach a different decision. The governor may choose to reinvestigate the complaint in whole or in part or commission an independent investigation.

8.4 Where paragraph 7.5 applies the Chair/Vice Chair/nominated governor will conduct an investigation into the complaint. S/he should take appropriate advice in doing so.

8.5 The Chair/Vice Chair/nominated governor will communicate his/her response in writing to you as soon as possible but, in any case, within 10 working days of the meeting referred to in paragraph 4.2. If this is not reasonably practicable, you will be informed in writing, with reason(s) for the delay.

8.6 Where you decline the offer of such a meeting the governor will inform you of the outcome of the investigation within 10 working days of your notification that you do not wish to meet or as soon as is reasonably practicable afterwards.

8.7 Where you are dissatisfied with this response the complaint should move to the appeal stage of the procedure.

Appeal to the Governing Body Stage

9.1 If you wish to appeal against the decision made at the formal stage you must indicate your intention to do so within 10 working days of receipt of the outcome of the formal stage.

9.2 You must do this by sending a written appeal to the Clerk to the Governing Body, either by letter or email to the school office. This should state the original complaint and your reasons for appealing the outcome of the previous stages.

9.3 An appeal panel will be convened, consisting of three governors who, where possible, have had no previous involvement in consideration of the complaint. The school may appoint one or more independent people on the panel at its sole discretion. A complaints appeal meeting will then be held

9.4 The meeting of the appeal panel will take place as soon as possible, but in any case a date and time should be set and communicated to you within 20 working days of receipt of your request for an appeal. Every reasonable effort will be made by the clerk to agree the date and time with you. Normally the appeal hearing will take place at the school, but for practical reasons an alternative venue may be arranged by the clerk. The panel's decision will be communicated in writing to you as soon as possible but, in any case, within 5 working days of the meeting. The Panel can

- Dismiss your complaint in whole or in part;
- Uphold your 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 problems of a similar nature do not happen again.

You have no further right to appeal this decision within the school although you may be able to seek a review of the appeal panel's decision in certain circumstances to the external bodies listed below.

Opportunities to Request a Review

Complaining to the Secretary of State

10.1 If you believe that the Management Committee has acted unreasonably you can complain in writing to the Secretary of State for Education. You should write to The Schools Complaints Unit (SCU) Department for Education, 2nd Floor, Piccadilly Gate, Manchester, M1 2WD.

Complaining to Ofsted

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

10.3 Before complaining to an external body it would usually be expected that all stages of this procedure had been exhausted.

The Role of the Cheshire East Information Advice and Support Service

11.1 The Cheshire East Information, Advice & Support Service (CEIAS) helps parents/carers whose children have difficulties with learning, medical needs or mental health problems, from 0 to 25. 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.

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

11.3 Contact details for the service are 03001235166

The Service can be contacted at:

CEIAS, Floor 4, c/o Municipal Buildings, Earle Street, Crewe, Cheshire CW1 2BJ