

Grendon CE Primary School
Complaints Procedure

This policy is based on guidance from Northamptonshire County Council

The complaints procedure has three stages:-

1. Initial Approach
2. Formal Complaint (to Head Teacher or Chair of Governors)
3. Appeal (to Governor Committee)

Stage 1 – INITIAL APPROACH

GUIDELINES

The vast majority of concerns and complaints can be resolved informally, often straight away by the class teacher or Head Teacher.

The school will aim to ensure that parents feel able to raise concerns with staff without undue formality, either in person, by telephone or in writing. There may be occasions when it is appropriate or helpful for someone to accompany or act on behalf of a parent.

Parents may not be clear at first that they are making a complaint. They may wish to ask a question or express an opinion. A preliminary discussion with school staff will usually clarify the issue and help parents to decide whether they wish to take the matter further.

PROCEDURE

1. Parents should have an opportunity for informal discussion of their concerns with an appropriate member of staff. This discussion should aim to clarify the nature of the parent's concern and assure them that the school wishes to hear about it. The discussion should also aim to clarify what kind of outcome the parent is seeking.
2. If the member of staff first contacted cannot deal with the matter immediately, s/he should make a firm arrangement to deal with it at a future date or refer the matter to the Head Teacher or another appropriate member of staff. In either case a note of the name, date and contact details of the complainant should be taken. The first contact should check to make sure the referral has been successful.
3. The Head Teacher should ensure that staff have guidelines about when to refer a matter and who to.

Stage 2 - FORMAL COMPLAINT TO HEAD TEACHER OR CHAIR OF GOVERNORS

GUIDELINES

- The Head Teacher needs to determine who has responsibility for responding to a formal complaint, including the decision about his/her own involvement at various stages.
- If the complainant is dissatisfied with the action of the Head Teacher, or the Head Teacher has been very closely involved informally, the chair of governors should carry out all the Stage Two procedures, with support if necessary from another governor.
- Individuals on the governing body should not become involved at this stage to avoid prejudicing their possible future involvement.

PROCEDURE

1. Parents who wish to pursue a formal complaint at Stage Two should be asked to put the complaint and their desired outcome in writing to the chair of governors or Head Teacher. The chair of governors / Head Teacher (or designated member of staff) should acknowledge the complaint orally or in writing within three days of receipt

giving a brief explanation of the complaints procedures and a target date for providing a response. Ideally, this should be within ten days. If it is not possible to deal with the matter in this time, the complainant should be informed of when it is likely to be concluded.

2. The chair of governors / Head Teacher (or a designated member of staff) may offer an opportunity for the complainant to meet him/her. The complainant should, if he/she wishes, be allowed to be accompanied by a friend or relative who can speak on his/her behalf. Interpreting facilities should be made available if required.
3. If necessary, the chair of governors / Head Teacher (or a designated member of staff) should interview any witnesses and take statements from those involved. If the complaint centres around a pupil, the pupil should also be interviewed, normally with parent/guardian present. In some circumstances this may not be possible or appropriate and a senior member of staff with whom the pupil feels comfortable should attend with him/her. If a member of staff is complained against, the needs of that person should be borne in mind. Advice may need to be sought from Schools HR. The chair of governors / Head Teacher (or a designated member of staff) may seek external advice before making a response to the complainant.
4. The chair of governors / Head Teacher (or designated member of staff) should keep written records of meetings, telephone conversations and other documentation.
5. Once all the relevant facts have been established, the chair of governors / Head Teacher (or designated member of staff) should either write to the complainant or arrange a meeting to discuss or resolve the matter. This meeting should be followed up with a letter summarising the outcome of the meeting. The complainant should be advised in this letter that if they remain unhappy with the outcome, he/she may appeal to a panel of governors. The complainant should notify the chair of governors within two weeks of receiving the letter detailing the outcome of the complaint.

Stage 3 – APPEAL TO PANEL OF GOVERNORS

GUIDELINES

- Complaints only rarely reach the appeal stage, but it is important that governing bodies are prepared to deal with them. At this stage, the chair of governors may wish to seek advice from an Education Officer and/or the appropriate diocesan authority and invite them to attend the hearing in an advisory role.
- The aim of the appeal to a panel of governors is to resolve the complaint and achieve a reconciliation between the school and the complainant. However, it may only be possible to establish the facts of a situation and make recommendations about future action, and to satisfy the complainant that their complaint has been taken seriously.
- It is important should a complaint reach the appeal stage, that the governing body is impartial and independent and is seen to be so. Individual complaints should not be considered by the full governing body. The governing body should therefore establish a panel to deal with complaints, by nominating a pool of five governors from which three can be drawn for any hearing.
- Panel members should have had no prior involvement with the complaint. Governors who may have a conflict of interest will not be eligible to be on the panel. Generally, the chair of governors is not on the panel as he/she may be involved at the earlier stage. Governing bodies should have regard to the advantages of having a mix of types of

governor on the panel and be sensitive to issues of equal opportunity in the composition of the panel.

- Individual governors should not get involved in looking into complaints before this stage to avoid prejudicing their potential involvement. If individual governors are approached by parents or others with complaints, they should refer the complainant to the schools complaints procedure, making the necessary introduction to a member of staff or Head Teacher if appropriate.
- Complaints that reach the appeal stage will do so because the complainant is not satisfied with the response so far. In this situation it is perhaps helpful for the panel of governors to view any complaint as being against the school rather than an individual staff member whose actions may have lead to the original complaint.

PROCEDURE

Upon receipt of a written request from the complainant for the complaint to proceed to Stage Three, the following procedure should be followed:

1. The Chair of the Panel should be agreed by the full governing body wherever possible.
2. A suitable clerk to the panel should be appointed
3. The clerk should write acknowledging receipt of the written request, informing the complainant that it will be heard by a committee of the governing body within 15 working days of receipt.
4. The clerk should convene a meeting of the complaints committee at a time which is convenient for the complainant and the school.
5. The clerk should ensure that the complainant, Head Teacher and any other witnesses are given at least five working days notice in writing of the date, time and place of the hearing or otherwise are in full agreement of a shorter timescale. The letter of notification to the complainant should include a copy of the Complaint Pro-forma and also inform him/her of their right to be accompanied by a friend/relative who can act as an advocate. The chair should ensure that interpretation facilities are offered and made available if required. The letter should set out the procedure for the conduct of the hearing (see annex A) and the complainant's right to submit further written evidence to the committee.
6. The Complainant will be required to complete a Complain Pro-forma which will clearly state the nature of the original complaint and if the complainant has a further complaint about the way in which the original complaint had been handled during Stage 1 and Stage 2 procedures. The Pro-forma to be returned to the Clerk within 2 days of the hearing.
7. The clerk should invite the Head Teacher to attend the hearing and to submit a written report for the committee in response to the complaint. The Head Teacher may request that the Clerk also invite the chair of governors or any other members of staff directly involved in matters raised by the complainant to respond in writing and/or in person to the complaint. Any involvement of other staff should be at the discretion of the chair of the committee.

8. All relevant documents should be received by all parties, (including the complainant) at least five days before the meeting of the panel. This provides adequate opportunity to read them prior to the start of the meeting.
9. An Education Officer or member of Governor Services may be invited to attend the meeting to advise the committee (see below).
10. The panel should elect a chairperson who should ensure that proper minutes of the meeting are taken.
11. The chair of the panel should try to ensure that the proceedings are sufficiently informal as possible and that the complainant and other participants feel at ease.
12. At the conclusion of the representations and questions, the chair should explain that the panel will consider the issues and write to both parties with their decision or judgement within 5 working days.
13. All except for the governors panel and any advisers should then withdraw and the panel should consider the evidence. This should include: a judgement about the validity of the complaint; appropriate action to be taken by the school and/or the parent and where appropriate, recommendations on changes to the school's systems or procedures to ensure similar problems do not arise in the future.
14. The panel, in upholding a complaint will make recommendations to the full governing body. The complainants will be informed of the recommendations emphasizing that they are recommendations and need ratification by the governing body.
15. The school should ensure that a copy of all correspondence and notes is kept confidentially on file in the school. This should be separate from pupils' personal records.
16. The broad outcomes recommended by the panel can be reported to the next full governing body or appropriate committee with the identity of all those taking part kept confidential. The governing body must discuss the recommendations at the first opportunity and report back to the complainants via the panel clerk of decisions and actions to be taken. The governing body should monitor implementation of any recommendations made.

THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOLS SERVICE

- The primary responsibility for resolving complaints rests with the governing body. (1998 Education Act, Part II, Chapter 3, Para. 39[1]). The Schools Service's role in school complaints is to provide advice to all parties.
- When the Schools Service receives a general complaint which does not come under one of the areas covered by statutory requirements, nor is obviously concerned with child abuse or staff disciplinary matters the complainant will be referred to the school's complaints procedure. The complainant will be advised to contact the Head Teacher to take the matter further. If the complaint has already involved the Head Teacher but has not achieved a satisfactory resolution from the perspective of the complainant, the complainant will be referred to the chair of governors. In this situation the Head Teacher will be notified of the referral and details of the complaint.
- Schools Service staff will give advice to Head Teachers, governors and parents on the use of complaints procedures.
- A representative of the local authority can be invited to attend a Stage 3 hearing in order to provide advice and guidance to all parties. The cost of this service will be charged at the hourly rate for a Governor Services consultant. A service level agreement with the Governors Service may cover all or part of these costs.

Appendix A

Model Procedure for the Conduct of a Stage 3 Governors Panel Hearing

1. The chair of the committee should invite all parties (except any witnesses) into the room, introduce them and explain the role of each person.
2. The chair should explain to all present that the purpose of the hearing is to review the complaint and try to resolve it and achieve a reconciliation between the school and the complainant. However, it may only be possible to establish the facts of a situation and make recommendations about future action.
3. The chair should then ascertain whether the proposed procedure is acceptable . If so, the meeting will proceed along the following lines:
 - i. The complainant confirms his/her complaint as set out in the pro-forma and then may call witnesses.
 - ii. The Head Teacher may seek clarification from the complainant and any witnesses.
 - iii. The governors' panel or its advisers may seek clarification from the complainant and any witnesses.
 - iv. The Head Teacher will respond to the complaint and may call witnesses.
 - v. The complainant may seek clarification from the Head Teacher and any witnesses.
 - vi. The governors' panel (including any Advisers) may seek clarification from the Head Teacher and any witnesses.
 - vii. The complainant will be given the opportunity to sum up.
 - viii. The Head Teacher will be given the opportunity to sum up.
 - ix. Both parties will leave the room to allow the panel to deliberate but any advisers may remain to offer technical and procedural advice.
4. The panel should make a decision or judgement on:-
the validity of the complaint; take appropriate immediate action and recommend appropriate further action to be taken by the school and/or parent and where appropriate. Recommendations on changes to the school's systems or procedures to ensure similar problems do not arise in the future.
5. The decision or judgement will be confirmed in writing within 5 working days.

NB If there is more than one complainant this procedure should be followed for each one in turn, unless the complainants agree to the complaint being heard with all present in one sitting.

Appendix B

Dealing with Complaints about Racism in Schools

1. **Racist Behaviour to a Child or Student**
The procedures to be followed are contained in the Schools Service's guidance "Notification of Racist Incidents"
2. **Racist Incident Alleged Against School Staff**
 - i. The report/complaint should be made to the head teacher, or if the head teacher is the subject of the report/complaint, to the Chair of Governors;
 - ii. As racism is a disciplinary offence, the normal disciplinary procedures are followed.
3. **Institutional Racism**
Parents who perceive that racist practice or policies are operated by the school should pursue these through the General Complaints Procedure

Appendix C

Grendon C.E. Primary School
Raising concerns and resolving problems at your child's school

A Guide for Parents and Carers

The Head Teacher, School Staff and Governors are committed to maintaining a positive partnership with parents and carers. Sometimes things happen which make children or their parents and carers discontented. It is important that parents and carers feel able to raise concerns, ask questions or express an opinion and do this in the best way. Parents and carers should always remember that the school welcomes feedback.

In most cases, concerns and complaints can be resolved by talking to staff at the school. Some times parents and carers may wish to raise a more formal complaint.

This leaflet describes the procedure used by the school for dealing with general complaints. You may ask the school for a copy of the complaints procedure.

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Typically there are three main stages involved in raising concerns or making a complaint.

Stage 1 – Initial Informal Approach

It is important that parents and carers contact the school with their concerns and talk to a teacher or the head teacher. Most problems can be sorted out in this way easily and informally.

Stage 2 – Formal complaint to Head Teacher or Chair of Governors

If you are still unhappy the next stage is to raise a formal complaint by writing to the head teacher, (or chair of the Governing Body if you have already spoken to the head teacher). The head teacher (or nominated member of staff), or chair of governors will investigate your complaint. After they have looked into the issues, you may be asked to meet with the head teacher or chair of governors or you may get a letter explaining the school's response.

Stage 3 – Appeal to Governors

If you are still unhappy after raising the complaint at Stage 2, you would need to inform the Chair of Governors in writing and request a hearing. The school's complaints procedure offers the opportunity for your complaint to be heard by a panel of the governing body. You will be asked to meet with the panel and explain your case. The panel will listen to you and the head teacher, and will inform you in writing of their decision. The panel may seek advice from beyond the school if they feel it necessary and an adviser may be invited to sit in on the hearing.

Timescales for dealing with your complaint

Ideally, complaints should be dealt with quickly, but if your complaint is complicated or requires detailed investigation, it may take a longer time to sort out. The school will let you know how a complaint is being addressed and when you can expect to hear from them.

The role of Education Services

Education Services can provide information on the school's responsibilities and give advice to parents and carers on how best to resolve their complaint. We expect that you would have first of all raised the issues with the school.