

## SHERINGDALE PRIMARY SCHOOL COMPLAINTS POLICY



### PRINCIPLES

The right to highlight an issue or make a complaint is considered to be very important at Sheringdale Primary School. Every complaint is a matter of concern to the school and will be investigated with due urgency and thoroughness. Whenever a complaint is upheld, every effort will be made to rectify the issue and, if necessary, action will be taken to try to prevent a reoccurrence of the problem. The school will not, in general, investigate anonymous complaints or allegations. We will be forthright in dealing with vexatious, abusive, malicious and anonymous complaints.

Initial concerns will be resolved informally with the school (usually the class teacher) in the first instance and escalated to senior leaders should they not be resolved. Complaints unresolved at the school level may be referred to governors. The school complaint procedure is in line with Wandsworth Borough Council Policy.

### PURPOSE

The purpose of our complaint procedure is to ensure that:

- The parent, student, staff or community member complaining has an easy, accessible, straightforward means of making representations to us, which offers prompt action and a speedy resolution.
- All complainants are confident that their complaint is being dealt with effectively and fairly, even if the outcome is not to their satisfaction.
- We use complaints positively and take subsequent action to maintain and improve service quality and responsiveness.

### PRACTICE

General

Formal complaints (those unresolved by the informal stage) will be reported to Governors by the Headteacher. If the complaint is about the head teacher it will be logged with the chair of governors.

- The Headteacher will make a decision about whether or not to inform the Chair of Governors.
- The 'party' making the complaint will be notified within five working days that the complaint has been received and a time scale of how the complaint will be dealt with.
- The school will use the Wandsworth complaints procedure.
- If the complaint is made in relation to a member of staff, then the

Headteacher will discuss the matter with the member of staff or delegate to a line manager if appropriate.

- If the complaint is connected with practice of procedures then every opportunity will be taken to meet with the complainant at the earliest opportunity and discuss the issue directly. If a satisfactory solution cannot be found then it may be necessary to review the policy if said complaint is seen to warrant this. Any change in policy will obviously require Governing Body involvement at an appropriate time.
- If policy change is not deemed appropriate the complainant will be informed and conciliation attempted.
- In the absence of the Headteacher a Deputy may take action.

### **A Staged Approach for dealing with complaints**

#### **Informal stage**

- Most concerns and issues raised by parents will be dealt with by the class teacher or office team.
- Beyond that parents and others who have concerns will contact an appropriate member of staff to discuss the issues informally. This may mean further contact is made with the class teacher, Assistant Headteacher or Deputy Headteacher.
- Concerns may be raised personally or by telephone, complaints must be put in writing.
- The member of staff will attempt to address the issue as soon as possible.
- A complainant will be kept informed of progress regarding their complaint and every attempt will be made to resolve the issue within 5 working days. A complainant can expect a telephone call or holding letter/ email from the school regarding their complaint within 5 working days.
- If an in-depth investigation is necessary every attempt will be made to respond within 20 working days.
- Most concerns are dealt with informally to everyone's satisfaction. However, failing this, the next stages of the procedure may be used.

#### **Stage 1 – Headteacher**

- Complainants should write to the Headteacher, giving details of the concern and enclose any appropriate paperwork.
- A response from the Headteacher or designated senior member of staff will be made within 5 working days.
- If an in-depth investigation is necessary every attempt will be made to respond within 20 working days.
- If a complainant remains dissatisfied after the final response from the Headteacher then Stage 2 of the practice will be used.

## **Stage 2 – Chair of Governors**

- The complainant should write to the Chair of Governors, outlining their complaint, explaining their reasons for pursuing it beyond the Headteacher's response and enclosing any relevant paperwork.
- Response times will be the same as those outlined previously.
- Discussions between the Chair of Governors and the Headteacher will aim to resolve the complaint and agree a way forward at this stage.
- If this does not happen the next step will require the Chair of Governors to make a decision about who is responsible for the issues involved in accordance with the Local Authority.
- For delegated responsibilities and matters within the remit of the governing body the Chair may look at the whole issue afresh and ask for any new information to be considered by the Headteacher.
- If the matter relates to the Headteacher's conduct the Chair of Governors will need to decide whether the matter should be dealt with through the complaints procedure or staff disciplinary procedure. Advice can be sought from the Local Authority Complaints Adviser or educational personnel services.
- For matters that are the Headteacher's responsibility, the Chair of Governors is only empowered to look at whether the Headteacher's decision or action was reasonable in the light of the information available at the time.
- In the rare circumstance that a parent is unhappy with the outcome, the Chair of Governors may offer a right of appeal to the Governing Body's Complaints Panel.

## **Stage 3 – Governing Body's Complaints Panel – Reconsideration of Review**

- A panel of three governors will be assembled to hear complaints at this stage.
- Parents who wish to appeal to the governors should request this in writing to the clerk to the Governing Body. Parents should describe the issues in detail and say why they are dissatisfied with the outcomes of the previous stages.
- A panel of 3 governors with no prior involvement will be convened to look at either reconsideration or review. (Parents should not, therefore, write to all governors individually as this may make it difficult to set up a panel that have had no prior involvement in the case.)
- Reconsideration (considering afresh)
- When the issues relate to delegated responsibilities, the panel can reconsider the matter that is look at the matter afresh, with any new information that the Headteacher may not have been aware of at the time of the original response or action. In the light of additional information, the panel may decide to write and ask the Headteacher to give the matter further consideration.

- Complaints about a governor will also be subject to a reconsideration of the issues.

## **Review**

If the matter falls within the Headteacher's decision-making remit by virtue of his or her terms and conditions of employment, then the panel will only have the power to review the decision not to consider the matter afresh. It may look at whether the decision or action was unreasonable. An unreasonable decision might be one that is irrational: a decision that no reasonable Headteacher, properly aware of their duties and properly taking into account the facts of the case before them, would make.

The panel will need to consider the facts as they were known to the Headteacher at the time and then consider whether the Headteacher:

- 1) failed to take account of a relevant consideration ; and/or
- 2) took into account an irrelevant consideration; and/or
- 3) made a `perverse` decision in the light of the evidence available at the time.

If new evidence does come to light, the panel should refer it back to the Headteacher, who may consider amending the decision in the light of that new information.

In deciding whether the Headteacher's decision was pertinent, the panel will need to judge whether the decision was one that, on the facts, was open to the Headteacher to make; that is, within a reasonable range of responses in the light of the evidence available.

The clerk should arrange and facilitate the meeting.

The panel will consist of three governors with no prior involvement in the matter and the Chair will be designated before the meeting. The meeting will be held in an informal atmosphere but should follow a formal agenda.

The clerk will inform the complainant in writing of the panel's decision, preferably within two school days following the meeting. The letter should include:

- a summary of the issues
- an outline of the main points of discussion
- the reasons for the decision
- proposed actions or outcomes

The panel's letter may suggest that the parents meet the Headteacher again to agree a way forward.

For issues related to the national curriculum or the provision of religious education, parents will be told that they can appeal further to the Local Authority.

For general complaints: this is the final stage of the school's complaints procedure. If a parent believes that the Headteacher's and governors' actions have been unreasonable or the correct process has not been adhered to, the only recourse is to contact the Secretary of State. Complainants may seek advice from Local Authority Complaints Adviser at this point.

#### **Stage 4 – Local Authority**

The local authority offers a further right of appeal for parents who have exhausted the school's procedures, if the complaint is about:

- the national curriculum and related matters
- provision of collective worship and religious education

#### Secretary of State

If a parent wishes to pursue a complaint because they feel a school has acted unreasonably, they can write to the Secretary of State.

The Secretary of State will contact the governing body and the local authority for more detailed information. The Secretary of State has the power to direct the school to revise an action using the same criteria as applied by the governors.

#### **Vexatious or Unreasonable Complaints**

In some circumstances a complainant might, having exhausted the complaints procedure or not being satisfied with the outcome unreasonably or vexatiously persist with the complaint.

- Complaints become vexatious or unreasonable when they are:
- repeatedly and obsessively pursued
- unreasonable or seeking unrealistic outcomes
- reasonable but pursued in an unreasonable manner
- Make excessive demands on the time and resources of staff with lengthy phone calls, emails to numerous council staff, or detailed letters every few days, and expecting immediate responses.
- By submitting repeat complaints with minor additions/variations the complainant insists make these 'new' complaints.
- By refusing to accept the decision; repeatedly arguing points with no new evidence.

Governors may need to decide whether all future contacts should be:

- directed to, and only be dealt with, a named individual restricted, for example, to letter only.

If a conclusion has been reached about a complaint but the complainant continues to pursue it, the school may consider writing:

- to reiterate that the matter is concluded and there will be no further correspondence
- to say that, if correspondence continues, it will be read and filed but will receive no acknowledgment
- to give a short response referring to previous documents that have already dealt with the matter.

### **Abusive Complaints**

Verbal aggression can be as intimidating as physical aggression. All parties have a right to be treated courteously and with respect. If staff feel threatened, they should report their fears to the Headteacher who will consider:

- writing to the complainant requesting that the behaviour cease
- setting restrictions for further contact with staff
- reporting the incident to the police.

If a telephone caller becomes aggressive or offensive, the person taking the call should explain that they will end the call if the behaviour persists. If they need to hang up, they should record this action and any further incidents.

Repeated abusive or aggressive contacts can be considered as harassment and Headteachers will need to consider reporting them to police.

### **Anonymous Complaints**

Generally, schools should not respond to anonymous complaints, nevertheless, the Headteacher or Chair of governors will need to consider whether:

- the issue and the fear of identification are genuine
- the issue is one of child protection.

If you would like to report an issue, please contact the school.

Headteacher: SJones

Chair of Governors:

Reviewed: Autumn 2024

**To be reviewed Autumn 2025**