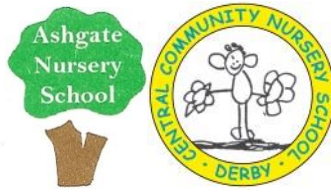


Ashgate Nursery and Central Community Nursery Schools' Federation



Complaints Policy

Procedures For Dealing With Complaints

At Ashgate and Central Nursery Schools, we undertake to provide a friendly and safe environment in which pupils will be helped to achieve their potential, both academically and socially.

We recognise that sometimes things can go wrong and parents, carers and members of the public may need to make a complaint or raise concerns they have with the school.

This policy tells you what to do if that happens.

INFORMAL STAGE

Most complaints/issues can often be resolved informally and quickly by discussion with the member of staff concerned or the Head teacher. Alternatively, parents/carers can write to the member of staff or the Head teacher outlining the complaint.

Any complaint that is put in writing should be written clearly, outlining all the issues and stating the preferred outcome. All complaints will be acknowledged in writing within 3 – 5 working days from the date the complaint is received.

Parents/carers should make an appointment to discuss their concerns with the member of staff who knows about the issue or incident. If the complaint relates to a pupil, ideally the member of staff with whom they discuss their concerns should be directly involved with the pupil – their class teacher or form teacher, for example.

The member of staff may write notes during the meeting. Parents/carers can ask for a copy of these notes.

If a complaint is not from a parent/carer of a pupil of the school (for example, it is from a member of the public), then that complaint should be made directly to the Head teacher, preferably in writing.

FORMAL STAGE

There are three formal stages:

Stage 1

If a parent/carer is still dissatisfied after the informal stage, they, or the member of staff, can refer the matter to the Head teacher. All complaints can be made in person or in writing, though it is preferable for them to be written, as that will often make the situation clearer to all parties involved.

If the subject of the complaint is the Head teacher, the complaint should pass on to Stage Two and the complaint should be addressed to the Chair of Governors.

The Head teacher will offer to meet with the parent/carer or other complainant at a mutually convenient time. The meeting will be an opportunity to discuss and clarify the issues at stake, what the complainant(s) hope to achieve, and how and in what ways the school may or may not be able to respond to the complaint. Together, all parties will agree an acceptable outcome which should be to the satisfaction of all parties. The outcome should be written down and agreed by all parties to avoid misunderstanding. Again, the complainant(s) should be given a copy of this document.

If the issue is complex the Head teacher may need to speak to other staff and pupils to investigate the concerns. This should happen within 10 school days following the Head teacher's receipt of the complaint. If this timescale cannot be met, the Head teacher should inform the parent/carer or complainant that the investigation will take longer, explaining the reasons for this and giving a timescale for completion of the investigation. Following the investigation, the Head teacher will meet with the complainant(s) and deal with the complaint in the manner set out above.

Stage 2

If, after meeting with the Head teacher, the complaint is still not resolved to the parent/carer's or complainant's satisfaction, the complaint can be referred to the Chair of Governors. This can be done in two ways: the parent/carer can write to the Chair at the school address, or they can contact the school and ask the Chair of Governors to contact them. The Head teacher can also refer the complaint to the Chair of Governors.

If the Chair is unable to investigate the complaint or has a good reason for not doing so, he/she may appoint another governor to do so on the understanding that that governor must not be a member of any subsequent complaints committee. In cases where the subject of the complaint is the Head teacher, the Chair will either appoint another governor to investigate the complaint or will investigate it with the assistance of one other appointed governor, who will not be a member of any subsequent complaints committee.

The Chair of Governors or appointed governor may ask for the complaint to be put in writing, assuming this has not already happened. Where a complaint has already been investigated by the Head teacher, the complainant should state the reasons why they were unhappy with the Head teacher's decision.

The Chair of Governors or appointed governor will offer to meet with the parent/carer or other complainant, at a mutually convenient time. Copies of letters and notes of meetings should be kept, including a copy of the letter sent to the complainant about the outcome of any investigation.

The Chair of Governors has 15 school days to investigate the complaint from the day he/she receives it. If it cannot be resolved within this time, the Chair or appointed governor will inform the complainant and explain why it is taking longer. Reasons for this may be that the

complaint is complex and needs more time, or one of the parties involved is absent owing to sickness or leave. The Chair of Governors or appointed governor should, however, give a realistic timescale for when the complaint should be resolved. They should inform the complainant of the date by which he/she expects the investigation to be completed.

Once the investigation is complete, the Chair and/or appointed governor will write to the complainant(s) to inform them of the outcome and, if necessary, will offer to meet with them to explain and discuss the outcome.

Stage 3

If the complaint remains unresolved to the parent/carer's or complainant's satisfaction, a complaints committee can be established to consider the complaint. The Chair of Governors and/or appointed governor may also refer the complaint to a committee if they believe it to be necessary.

It is recommended that Complaints Committees are established only as a last resort.

The Chair of Governors can appoint an investigating officer from the governing body to gather evidence and conduct preliminary interviews on the Chair's behalf. The investigating officer will provide a detailed report of his/her investigation of the complaint to the Chair of Governors and to the parents/carers who have made the complaint. It is important that the investigating officer is impartial. So whilst the investigating officer will be another governor, s/he cannot be a member of the associated complaints committee.

The complaints committee is made up of three members of the school's governing body. If the school governors have prior knowledge of the complaint, governors may be brought in from other schools' governing bodies as the former's objectivity may be said to be compromised.

The complaints committee should meet at a time convenient to all parties. The complainant, the Head teacher, the Chair of Governors and any member of staff concerned in the complaint will be invited to the meeting. Any person invited can bring a friend or supporter if they wish. The complaints committee will consider any written material, which all parties should receive at least five working days before the meeting. The committee will also give the complainant, the Head teacher, the Chair of Governors and members of staff an opportunity to state their case and to question others present. If any party declines to attend, the committee will consider the documentary evidence relating to any investigation carried out. The committee will ensure that all present are treated fairly. The meeting will be minuted by the clerk to governors and everyone present will be given a copy of the minutes.

The Complaints Committee will consider 2 questions only:

1. Whether the investigation(s) were conducted properly and reasonably within this procedure.
2. Whether the outcome was reasonable and appropriate

If the Complaints Committee decides that the answer to the second question is 'no', it should decide an alternative outcome to the complaint.

The Complaints Committee can:

- Dismiss the complaint in whole or in part.
- Uphold the 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 that problems of a similar nature do not recur.

The committee will give its decision, in writing, within five school days after the meeting, along with the reasons for their decision.

UNRESOLVED COMPLAINTS

If, after this school based process, the complaint is still not resolved to the parent/carer's or complainant's satisfaction, they should write to the Secretary of State if it is a general complaint, or to the Local Authority if the complaint is about the curriculum and is a curriculum related matter.

All complaints will be recorded formally by the school in a central log.

It should be noted that schools do not need to consider complaints made more than one year after the incident/situation.

If a complaint is made about an issue that is over a year old the school will write to the complainant explaining its response.

APPENDIX ON COMPLAINT MANAGEMENT

Principles

An effective Complaints Procedure will:

- Encourage **informal** resolution wherever possible and practicable.
- Be easily **accessible** and **publicised**.
- Be **simple** to understand and use.
- Be **impartial**.
- Be **non-confrontational**.
- Allow **swift** handling with established **time-limits** for action and keeping people informed of progress.
- Ensure a full and **fair** investigation.
- Respect and ensure **confidentiality**.
- Address all the issues and provide an **effective** response and **appropriate** redress where necessary.
- Provide **information** to the school's senior management team so that services can be improved.

Investigating Complaints

At each stage the person investigating the complaint should make sure that they:

- Establish what has happened so far, and who has been involved.
- Clarify the nature of the complaint and what remains unresolved.
- Meet with the complainant or contact them if clarification or further information is needed.
- Ascertain what the complainant feels would put things right.
- Interview the person who is the subject of the complaint and any other people involved. They should be allowed to be accompanied if they wish.
- Conduct interviews with an open mind to find out facts not judgements and be prepared to persist in the questioning.
- Keep notes of all interviews.

Resolving Complaints

It is important to be aware from the outset of 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 and an admission that the school could have handled the situation better is not the same as an admission of negligence. 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.

It is useful to encourage complainants to indicate what actions they feel might resolve the problem. In this respect it should be noted that complainants' views on this may be unreasonable and they should be made aware of what are reasonable and appropriate outcomes in relation to the specific nature of their complaint.

Identify areas of agreement and clarifying any issues can also create a positive atmosphere in which to discuss any outstanding issues.

Time-Limits

Complaints need to be considered, and resolved, as quickly and efficiently as possible. An effective complaints procedure will have realistic time limits for each action at each stage. In circumstances where further investigations are necessary new time limits can be set and the complainant should be sent details of, and reasons for, the new timescale.

Recording Complaints

The Head teacher should arrange for a confidential record of the nature and progress of all complaints to be kept in a complaints file, detailing when they were made and their final outcome. The record should include notes of all meetings and what was discussed and agreed. Notes of telephone calls and conversations should be kept along with a copy of any verbal or written response included in the record.

The purpose of the Record is for monitoring purposes only and is not a source of information for future references or other issues.

Vexatious Complaints

A good complaints procedure which has been properly followed will limit the number of protracted complaints. There will, however, be occasions when the complainant remains dissatisfied even though all stages of the Complaints Procedure have been completed. **If the complainant continues to raise the same issue it is reasonable for the Chair of Governors to inform them in writing that the procedure has been exhausted and that the matter is now closed.**

Complaints Process
Flowchart for Schools

