



Hindhayes Infant School
Concerns / Complaints Policy
September 2023

At Hindhayes, we believe success is based on the partnerships between pupils, staff and the parent community. We endeavour to enrich and develop each child to be a successful individual that will become an active community citizen of the future.

Approved on: _____
Signed: _____
Role: _____

The Law

Section 29 of the Education Act 2002 requires that all LA maintained schools must have and make available a procedure to deal with all complaints relating to their school and that this will also apply to any community facilities or services that the school provides.

Concern or a Complaint

We should be clear about the difference between a concern and a complaint. Informal concerns, taken seriously at the earliest stage, will reduce the numbers that develop into formal complaints.

Concern – defined as ‘an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought’.

Complaint – defined as ‘an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action’.

The underlying principle is that concerns ought to be handled, if at all possible, without the need for formal procedures. In most cases classroom teachers will receive the first approach and it would therefore be beneficial if staff were able to resolve issues on the spot, including apologising where necessary, so that concerns do not develop into formal complaints. In other cases, where the complaint is about the school but not from a parent/carer, it may be the headteacher that will receive an approach.

Formal procedures should only be invoked when initial attempts to resolve the issue are unsuccessful and the person raising the concern remains dissatisfied and wishes to take the matter further.

Anyone can make a complaint about any provision or services that the school provides. Our complaints procedure is not limited to parents or carers of children in our school but will also include members of the general public. Those complaints not in the scope of the procedure and that are covered by a separate statutory procedure are shown in the table in Annex A.

Resolving Complaints

At each stage in the procedure we will want to keep in mind ways in which a complaint can be resolved. It might be sufficient to acknowledge that the 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.

Framework of Principles

Our complaints procedure will encourage the resolution of problems by informal means wherever possible;

- Be clear on the issues that will be dealt with under the formal complaints process
- Be easily accessible and publicised;
- Be simple to understand and use;
- Be impartial;
- Be non-adversarial;
- Allow swift handling with established time-limits for action and keeping people informed of the progress;
- Ensure a full and fair investigation by an independent person where necessary;
- Respect people’s desire for confidentiality;
- Address all the points at issue 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 will ensure 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 unsure or further information is necessary);
- Clarify what the complainant feels would put things right;
- Consider interviewing those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish;
- Conduct any interviews with an open mind;
- Keep notes of any interviews.

Time-Limits

Complaints need to be considered, and resolved, as quickly and efficiently as possible with the expectation being that complaints will be made as soon as possible after the incident arises but no later than 3 months (although the school will consider exceptions). The complainant will be informed about the expected timescales associated with dealing with the complaint within each stage. Where further investigations are necessary, the complainant will be sent details of the new deadline and an explanation for the delay.

Serious and Persistent Complainants

If properly followed, our complaints procedure is expected to limit the number of complaints that become protracted. However, there will be occasions when, despite all stages of the procedure having been followed, the complainant remains dissatisfied. If the complainant tries to reopen the same issue, the chair of the Governing body will inform them in writing that the procedure has been completed/exhausted and that the matter is now closed. If the complainant contacts the school again, and the complainant has completed the procedure, the school will view the correspondence as 'serial' or 'persistent' and will not respond.

We will only take the decision to stop responding if:-

- We have taken every reasonable step to address a complainant's needs;
- The complainant has been given a clear statement of the school's position and their options (if there are any);
- The complainant is contacting the school repeatedly but making substantially the same points each time;
- The school has reason to believe the individual is contacting them with the intention of causing disruption or inconvenience as confirmed in a letter, email or telephone call;
- Letters, emails and telephone calls are often or always abusive or aggressive; or
- They make insulting personal comments about or threats towards staff.

We have a separate policy for dealing with Unreasonable Complaints provided in Annex D.

Formal complaints Procedure

There are 3 formal stages to our complaints procedure:

- Stage one – complaint heard by the Headteacher or delegated to a member of staff (though not the subject of the complaint).
- Stage two – complaint heard by the Chair of Governors
- Stage three – complaint heard by the board of governors complaints appeal panel.

There may, on occasion, be the need for some flexibility; for example, the possibility of further meetings between the complainant and the member of staff directly involved and further investigations may be required by the headteacher after a meeting with the complainant.

A complaints co-ordinator (could be the Headteacher but would more typically be a member of the school office staff, who would be bound by confidentiality) will manage the whole process of the complaint; further details are given within the procedure as to their role.

Complaints about the headteacher will be dealt with initially by the chair of governors.

An unsatisfied complainant can always take a complaint to the next stage and will always be given the opportunity to complete the complaints procedure in full.

The complaints procedure can be found in Annex B.

Managing and Recording Complaints

Recording Complaints – We recognise that it is useful for us to record the progress of the complaint and the final outcome. A complaint may be made in person, by telephone, or in writing and our complaint form can be found at Annex C. At the end of a meeting, or telephone call, a brief note of the conversation will be made to make sure that all parties have the same understanding of what was discussed and agreed and a copy of any written response will be retained for the record. This will avoid any later challenge or disagreement over what was said. The progress of the complaint and the final outcome will be recorded and held centrally within the school. Complainants will have a right to copies of these records.

Review by the Board of Governors – Complaints will not be shared with the whole board of governors except in general terms in case an appeal panel needs to be organised. If the whole board is made aware of the substance of a complaint, prior to the final stage being completed, an independent panel will be arranged to hear the complaint comprising of governors from another school and/or members of the governor services team. Complainants can request an independent panel if they believe there is likely to be bias in the proceedings and the board will consider the request but the decision will be made by the governors.

As well as addressing an individual's complaint, the process of listening to and resolving complaints will contribute to our school improvement. The monitoring and review of complaints by the school and the Governing body is a useful tool in evaluating our school's performance. We can monitor the level and nature of complaints and review the outcomes on a regular basis to ensure the effectiveness of our procedure making changes where necessary. Complaint information shared with the whole governing body will not name individuals.

Publicising the Procedure – There is a legal requirement for the complaints procedure to be publicised. As a governing body we include details of our procedure in:

- Information given to new parents when their children join the school;
- On our website

Who it appeal to next:

If any parent is still not content that the complaint has been dealt with properly, then s/he is entitled to appeal to the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) who acts on behalf of the Secretary of State for Education. A complaints form can be sent to the EFA via the Department of Education, which can be found on www.education.gov.uk.

