

Preston Primary School

Complaints Procedure

Mission Statement

At Preston Primary School we welcome every child

Children are at the heart of our school and as such we provide a caring environment where everyone is special.

We nurture pupils to achieve fullness of life through discovering and developing their social skills, academic and wider talents and by putting before them challenging and realistic goals.

We attach a high priority to the strong links between school, home, Governors and the wider community.

We promote an attitude of mutual respect and responsibility within a welcoming, attractive and stimulating environment.

The Governing Body of Preston Primary have agreed to adopt the Department for Education and Skills guidance on this procedure issued in 2003. This is detailed in Section 29 of the Education Act 2002 which requires all schools to have in place a procedure to deal with complaints relating to the school and to any community facilities or services that the school provides. The law also requires the procedures to be published.

The formalising of a complaints procedure is not to encourage people to complain but give those small numbers of people who may have genuine reasons for complaint the opportunity to have their complaint investigated and to have appropriate action taken.

The procedure outlined is not to be confused with disciplinary procedures or child protection procedures which will continue to operate separately from this procedure.

Any good mechanism of quality control requires a system of complaints. We constantly strive in school to give the very best education to our children. This system will enable us to do this.

1. GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF COMPLAINTS

Any person may express their concern about events which take place in school, eg about the curriculum content or their child's individual progress. Such concern can take the form of a complaint which should always be taken seriously and investigated thoroughly. In the vast majority of cases the Headteacher and/or class teacher will informally resolve this type of complaint with parents and this should always be encouraged. **Mrs Winters is our nominated 'Complaints Co-ordinator'** and she has responsibility for the operation and management of the school complaints procedure.

In the event that a complaint cannot be resolved informally a set procedure, outlined in the document, will be implemented.

2. WHAT COULD PEOPLE COMPLAIN ABOUT?

Listed below are some of the most common categories of complaint from all schools, which have been made in the past by parents to the Local Authority: -

- Children's progress
- Methods of discipline used in school

- Bullying
- Conduct of teachers and other staff
- Curriculum content
- Religious or cultural education
- Matters relating to sex education
- Lunch time arrangements
- Care of their children at school
- Length of the school day
- Damage to or theft of children's clothing or belongings
- Access to their children by a partner who is divorced or separated
- Quality of subject teaching
- School uniform rules/jewellery policy, etc

3. PHILOSOPHY

At Preston Primary we respond willingly and openly to expressions of concern. By responding positively to complaints we are in a better position to: -

- provide a better service
- know how parents perceive the education service
- know what parents' expectations are
- explain to the parents the changes that are taking place in education and how we are responding to these.

Some complaints will turn out to be unfounded or the result of misunderstanding or poor communication. However, in receiving them and investigating them openly we aim to improve the public perception of our school.

It is imperative in a service which is essentially based on human relationships and partnerships that no-one is made to feel that to complain is an inappropriate action which may jeopardise a person's treatment within the Education Service.

All members of the community should be assisted in the process of participation in, or concern about, their own or others' education by having the opportunity to ask questions, make observations and, if necessary, complain.

Consideration of a complaint will need to be directed towards establishing whether the Local Authority, the governors or the Headteacher are acting reasonably and within the law and meeting their obligations so far as is practical or whether this is not the case and some action is required. In considering that question it may be necessary to consider whether:-

- (a) the Local Authority's/governors policy is consistent with legal requirements;
- (b) their actions are consistent with their policy;
- (c) the actions of staff are consistent with their policy. We promise that all complaints will be investigated fully, fairly and carefully, and complainants will be kept informed of progress during, as well as at the end, of each stage.

4. THE FORMAL COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

There are three school-based stages to the complaints procedure:

- Stage One: complaint or concern heard by staff member (though not the subject of the Complaint)
- Stage Two: complaint or concern heard by Head Teacher
- Stage Three: complaint or concern heard by GB's Complaint Panel

4.1 Stage One: Complaint heard by Staff Member

It is in everyone's interest that complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. The first contact between the complainant and the school will be crucial and to this end all staff will be made aware of procedures.

The school will always respect the views of a complainant who indicates that he/she would have difficulty discussing a complaint with a particular member of staff. In these cases, the Complaint Co-ordinator can deal with the complaint or refer it to another senior member of staff.

Where the complaint concerns the Head Teacher, the complainant will be referred to the Chair of Governors.

In all cases the ability to consider the complaint objectively and impartially is crucial.

Where the first approach is made to a governor, the next step would be to refer the complaint to the appropriate person informing the complainant of the formal complaints procedure.

4.2 Stage Two: Complaints Heard by the Head Teacher

If the complaint is not resolved at stage one the complainant may pursue their initial complaint with the Head Teacher.

At this stage the Head Teacher / Complaints Co-ordinator will:

- 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 further information is necessary)
- clarify what the complainant feels would put things right
- interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish
- conduct the interview with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning
- keep notes of the interview

It is hoped that the Headteacher will be able to deal with the complaint informally in a quick and efficient manner. However, the complainant may decide that he/she wishes to pursue the complaint further. If this is the case the Headteacher would initially refer the complainant to the Governing Body.

4.3 Stage Three: Complaints Heard by the Governing Body Complaints Committee

At this stage the complainant will write to the Chair of Governors giving details of the complaint. The Chair of Governors will then convene the Complaint's Panel.

The Governing Body will consider allowing the complainant to attend any meeting of the Complaints Panel which considers any complaint they have made, to make an oral statement if they wish. The complainant should be allowed to be accompanied if desired, by a friend, representative or interpreter.

The Remit of the Complaints Panel

The panel can:

- dismiss the complaint in whole or in part
- uphold the complaint in whole or part
- decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint
- recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures too ensure that problems of a similar nature do not recur.

It is important that the appeal hearing is independent and impartial therefore no governor may sit on the panel if they have prior involvement in the complaint or in circumstances surrounding it.

Having examined a complaint the governors will notify the complainant in writing of the outcome of their deliberations. Where a complaint regarding a member of staff is upheld, the Governing Body could, if appropriate, invoke the statutory disciplinary procedures. In accordance with employment practice, the outcome of any such disciplinary procedures would be regarded as confidential. Officers in the Governor Support Section will provide advice for governors who need to reassure a complainant that appropriate action has been taken without breaching confidentiality.

4.4 Complaints about the school received by the Local Authority

The Local Authority will investigate any complaint relating to an area for which it, or another department of the Borough Council, has responsibility, or where the complainant has indicated dissatisfaction with a response received from a Governing Body. Wherever possible, the complaint will then be acknowledged immediately and be investigated with a written response sent to the complainant within 15 working days. The governors will aim to respond to complaints within a similar timescale.

4.5 Complaints to other bodies

A complainant may write in the first instance to individuals or groups other than the Headteacher, the governors, or the Local Authority. These might include Borough Councillors, MPs, the Secretary of State for Education or the Ombudsman. A complainant may also decide to refer their complaint to the above if he/she is not satisfied with the response they have received from the school or Local Education Authority. Where the complainant decides to follow such a route, the Local Education Authority will undertake to liaise with the recipient of the complaint on behalf of the Headteacher and governors.

5. HANDLING DIFFICULT SITUATIONS

There may be a small number of parents who inappropriately express their dissatisfaction through verbal and physical abuse and intimidation of staff. In the event of persistent problems like this the Headteacher or the LA may decide to write to the person or persons concerned warning them as to

their future conduct and, if necessary, banning them from the school site without an appointment. The LA will provide guidance for Headteachers if required.

When considering complaints it is important that both parents and teachers should listen carefully to both sides of the discussion and that a climate of mutual respect for teachers and parents be maintained at all times.

6. A DIFFERENCE IN PHILOSOPHY BETWEEN PARENT AND THE SCHOOL WHICH CANNOT BE RESOLVED

Occasionally, parents visit the Local Authority because they wish to pursue a complaint about the school where there is no legitimate grounds to press a complaint. In this situation the complaint is usually about the difference in philosophy of the parent and school.

One would always hope that these issues could be resolved at school level through negotiation and compromise. However, in a very few circumstances, and as a last resort, parents may wish to consider transferring their child to another school. The parent should be asked to contact the Local Education Authority regarding such an issue.

7. MANAGING AND RECORDING COMPLAINTS or CONCERNS

7.1 Recording of Complaints

A complaint form will be completed which records the progress of the complaint and the final outcome. A brief note of meetings and telephone calls will be kept and a copy of any written response added to the record.

The Complaints Co-ordinator will be responsible for the records which will be held centrally.

7.2 Governing Body Review

The Governing Body will monitor the level and nature of complaints and review the outcomes each year to ensure the effectiveness of the procedure and make changes where necessary. No individuals will be named.

7.3 Publicising the Procedure

There is a legal requirement for the Complaints Procedures to be publicised. Our procedures will be included in:

- the school prospectus
- the governors report to parents
- the information given to new parents when their children join the school
- a complaints procedure booklet sent out at the beginning of each academic year
- the school website

This policy was approved by the Governing Body June 2005

Kerry Stockley
Shirley Winters

To be reviewed June 2007