



Parental Complaints

General Principles

- The school is open to the concerns of parents and pupils.
- Complaints are received in a positive manner.
- Parents and pupils can expect to be taken seriously and can approach any member of staff about their concerns.
- Information about complaints is clear, readily available and allows for complaints to be made and considered initially on an informal basis, if appropriate.
- Concerns are dealt with speedily and those who have raised them are kept informed about progress.
- It is not acceptable for pupils to receive adverse treatment because they or their parents have raised a complaint.
- Clear confidential files and a log are kept.
- Complaints are monitored; a written record is kept of all complaints and of whether they are resolved at the preliminary stage or proceed to a panel hearing. Records are kept for a minimum of three years.
- Confidentiality is respected and maintained so far as is possible, except where inspection under section 163 of the 2002 Education Act requests access to written records.
- This policy applies to all complaints, including those made by parents of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Parents of children in the EYFS can make a complaint to Ofsted or ISI should they wish. Contact details are available on the notice board in the Foundation Stage building.
- Resolution of the matter is sought. The school will normally seek to resolve any complaint within 28 working days.

Response Procedures

- If a member of staff is aware that a parent has any concern or complaint, the Headmistress must be informed immediately so that she has full information in the event that the parent comes to see her.
- All members of staff should be encouraged to deal with parental concerns which lie within their area of responsibility. The Headmistress should be informed in each case.
- If the complaint cannot be resolved informally, the parent will be asked to put their complaint in writing to the Headmistress.
- The nature of the complaint and what is concerning the complainant should be made clear. If this is not clear the parents could be asked to put their complaint in writing.
- It should be explained to the parents that a response may not be possible until consultation with others has taken place.
- Serious complaints should be shared with the Chair of Governors by the Headmistress.
- Information about the complaints procedure should be clear.
- Complaints should be acknowledged immediately or within 5 working days. The issue should be dealt with as quickly as possible.
- Written responses to any complaint should always be seen by the Headmistress before being sent.

Recording

- The school should keep an effective log of complaints and other parental concerns and of whether they are resolved at the preliminary stage or proceed to a panel hearing.
- The log should contain:
 - date when issue raised
 - name of parent and pupil
 - brief statement of issue
 - staff members involved
 - brief statement of outcome and follow up.
- Contact logs should contain simple but clear notes of all conversations with parents about any source of dissatisfaction, including telephone conversations.
- Contact logs must be stored in the confidential administrative files in the office.

Confidentiality

- It is essential to treat any complaint in a confidential manner and with respect.
- Complaints made by parents should never rebound adversely on their child. Those made by a child should never rebound on them or another child.
- The school's policy on confidentiality should be explained to parents who complain.
- Complaints against staff should be made known only to themselves and to those who have to be consulted.
- It may be necessary to provide neutral support for staff against whom a complaint has been made.
- In questions of child safety or a possible situation involving the police, the guidance of the North Somerset Area Child Protection Committee should be followed, as found in 'Procedures and Protocols for Children in Need of Support and/or Protection.'
- Anonymous complaints must be logged.
- All correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints are to be kept confidential.

Resolution of a complaint

- Satisfaction may come from any of the following:
 - acknowledgement by the school that there is an issue or a possible problem.
 - knowing that changes have been made and that in future matters will be different
 - feeling that their concern has been considered seriously
 - a considered letter
 - an apology
- If it has taken some time to consider matters, parents should receive a report letter. This should cover:
 - the issues raised;
 - how the issues were considered;
 - the people consulted;
 - the action that is to be taken;
 - an apology, if appropriate.

Dealing with an intractable complaint

Most complaints can be resolved if approached positively. Nevertheless, all complaints should be treated seriously.

If a complaint becomes intractable, the following stages of action should be followed:

Referral to the Chair of Governors

- The Headmistress will refer the matter to the Chair of Governors and inform the parents that this stage has been reached.
- Where a parent feels that the complaint has been mishandled by the Headmistress they should write directly to the Chair of Governors via the Clerk to the Governors.
- The Chair of Governors will request a full report from the Headmistress with all relevant documents and, if appropriate, a briefing from individual members of staff.
- The Chair of Governors will write to the parents informing them of the action being taken, requesting further information if necessary and giving a date by which a full response may be expected.
- The Chair of Governors' response should be clear and detailed and offer a meeting if the parents remain troubled.

Meeting with the Chair of Governors

- If a meeting is requested, it will be convened at a mutually convenient time. Those involved will be:
 - the Chair of Governors
 - the Headmistress and at most one other member of staff
 - the parents (the parents may bring a supportive friend who is not involved with the complaint.)
- It is hoped that at this stage the Chair of Governors may be able to find a solution. If not, the complaint should be referred to a conciliation panel.

Referral to a Conciliation Committee

- The Conciliation Committee will be appointed by the Governors
- The Convenor will be a governor other than the Chair
- There will be up to 4 members, of whom at least 2 are Governors and of whom at least 3 are not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint
- One person will be independent of the management and running of the school
- Members will keep the proceedings of the Committee confidential and will operate in a fair and objective manner. Their aim is to conciliate.
- The Chair of Governors, in consultation with the Headmistress, will decide when to refer a complaint to the Conciliation Committee.
- The Chair will have no further involvement until the Convenor reports back.

Meeting with the Conciliation Committee

- Those involved in the meeting will be:
 - the Conciliation Committee members, including the Convenor.
 - the Headmistress and possibly a key member of staff.
 - the parents, who are invited to bring a supportive friend.
- The parents and Headmistress may present papers to the meeting; they will be copied and distributed before the meeting.
- The Convenor's role will be to reach a positive conclusion. The parents and then the Headmistress will be invited to speak. The Convenor will then encourage questions and general discussion.
- If necessary the Convenor may invite the Headmistress, the parents and friend to withdraw, leaving the

Committee alone.

- If more time is needed a second meeting will be convened.
- The panel should make findings and recommendations.
- The Convenor will summarise and agree the outcome. The agreement (findings and recommendations) will be recorded, copied and circulated, either by electronic mail or otherwise given, as soon as possible, to the complainant, Chair of Governors, Headmistress and where relevant the person complained about. A copy will be available for inspection on the school premises by the Chair of Governors and Headmistress.
- The Convenor will make a full report to the Chair of the Governors and inform the parents that this is being done (The Chair of Governors would be expected to endorse the Committee's decision).

A copy of this policy is available on the school website and in the school office.

A leaflet for parents

- Fairfield School welcomes suggestions and comments from parents, and takes seriously concerns they may raise. This leaflet will show you the systems which are in place to deal with these concerns.
- A complaint will be treated as an expression of genuine dissatisfaction which needs a response.
- We wish to ensure that:
 - parents wishing to raise an issue know how to do so
 - we respond to issues raised within a reasonable time and in a courteous and efficient way
 - parents realise that we listen and take their concerns seriously
 - we take action where appropriate.

‘How should I complain?’

You can talk directly to a member of staff, write a letter, or telephone. Be as clear as possible about what is troubling you.

Any member of staff will be happy to help. If it is a minor concern it may be best to start with the person most closely concerned with the issue, for example, the class teacher. She may be able to sort things out quickly, with the minimum of fuss. However, you may prefer to take the matter to the Headmistress.

‘I don’t want to complain as such, but there is something bothering me’

The school is here for you and your child, and it is helpful for us to hear your views and your ideas. Your concerns can be shared and considered initially on an informal basis if appropriate. Contact a member of staff, as described above.

‘I am not sure whether to complain or not’

If as parents you have concerns, we hope that you will let us know about them. If in doubt, you should contact the school as we are here to help.

‘What will happen next?’

If you raise something face-to-face or by telephone, it may be possible to resolve the matter immediately and to your satisfaction.

If you have raised an issue or made a complaint in writing, we will contact you within five working days to respond to your concerns and explain how we propose to proceed.

In some circumstances, the person you contact will need to discuss the matter with a colleague and consider it further before responding. You will be given a date by which time you will receive a response. If a detailed exploration of the issues is needed, the outcome will be communicated to you as quickly as possible. We will explain the conclusion, the reasons for it, and any action taken or proposed.

‘What happens about confidentiality?’

Your concern will be treated in a confidential manner and with respect. Knowledge of it will be limited to the Headmistress and those directly involved. The Chair of Governors may also need to be informed. It is the school’s policy that complaints made by parents should not rebound adversely on their children.

We cannot entirely rule out the need to make third parties outside the school aware of the issue and possibly also the identity of those involved. This would only be likely to happen where, for example, a child’s safety was at risk or it became necessary to refer matters to the police. You would be fully informed.

While information relating to specific complaints will be kept confidentially on file, we would point out that anonymous complaints may not be pursued.

Action which needed to be taken under staff disciplinary procedures as a result of complaints will be handled confidentially within the school.

‘What if I am not satisfied with the outcome?’

We hope that you will feel satisfied with the outcome, or at least that your concerns have been fully and fairly considered.

If you are not satisfied, the Headmistress will offer to refer the matter to the Chair of the Governors. Alternatively, you may wish to write direct to the Chair. Letters should be addressed to the school and marked ‘Private and Confidential’. The Chair will call for a full report from the Headmistress, and will examine matters thoroughly before responding. This may result in a positive solution, but if it does not, the Chair will invite you to a meeting. You may wish to be supported by a friend.

If the meeting does not bring about a resolution, the matter would be referred to the school’s Conciliation Committee. It is their task to look at the issues in an impartial and confidential manner. The Committee Convenor will invite you to a meeting. You will be asked if there are any papers you would like to have circulated beforehand. As with the Chair’s meeting, you will be invited to bring a friend with you.

You will be made aware of the panel’s findings and all parties concerned in the complaints procedure will receive a copy of the findings and recommendations.

Correspondence, statements and records of complaints will be kept confidential except for a request for access to records from a body conducting an inspection of the school or from the Secretary of State for Education.

The school recognises and acknowledges your entitlement to express your concerns and we hope to work with you in the best interests of the children in our care.