



Complaints

How to complain about a school

Any person can complain to a school if they are not satisfied with the treatment they receive from the school or the provision of community facilities or services provided at the school. Some complaints are dealt with under separate statutory procedures (such as appeals relating to exclusions or admissions) rather than the school complaints procedure.

Definitions

A **complaint** may be defined as 'an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action'. These tend to focus on the past – a decision or action that has already occurred, that is affecting or is going to impact the near future.

A **concern** may be defined as 'an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought'. These tend to focus on the present and future, with an implied message: "Isn't there something we can do about this (to keep negative results from occurring)?" These may include actions and decisions that have already happened.

How to complain

The vast majority of complaints and concerns can be resolved informally. It is best to see if matters can be sorted out in school, even if this may feel awkward at first. Complainants should be able to say what they feel, know they will be dealt with fairly and not worry that having a concern or making a complaint will have a bad effect on, for example, their child.

We believe that the parent-school relationship is key to resolving differences.

It is important that you speak with the school (this can be either the class teacher or Headteacher) in the first instance - as soon as you have a concern or complaint so that the issue causing worry or doubt can be resolved early. It is worth thinking about communication and tone.

A complaint can be withdrawn at any stage.

What to do first?

Take a few minutes to read this paper. Remember there is often more than one view about the incident or situation. For example, your child may well be telling the truth, but it may not be the whole story. It is important that the school checks all the facts so they can find the best solution.

You will need to be clear about:

- What is it you are concerned or complaining about?
- Is it having any effect on your child?
- If appropriate, when and where did the incident happen; who else was involved; did anyone see it happen; who have you spoken to already?
- What you think needs to happen to resolve your concern or complaint.

If your complaint or concern is about processes, policies and actions or decisions, please be aware that these are a matter for school leaders, including governors. They should have the opportunity to hear your concern and to make a response.

Informal or Formal Complaint?

It is in everyone's interest that concerns and complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. Many issues can be resolved informally, without the need to use the formal stages.

Informal route

There are a number of ways in which you can express and discuss your concerns. In the first instance, we would recommend contacting your child's form tutor, class teacher or head of year via email or calling the school's office to arrange a meeting. This can also be done in writing.

Please check the school's website to find contact details of staff and/or to see if there is a link that allows feedback and callbacks to be made. Some schools offer surgeries where the headteacher is available for feedback without an appointment being needed.

It is important, following any discussion, that all parties are clear about any agreed action.

The informal route aims to allow matters to be dealt with quickly without affecting relationships. It is important that written notes or summaries are given.

Formal route

After going through informal channels, if you are not satisfied, you can take your complaint further. By law, school governing bodies are required to have a procedure in place to deal with complaints and you may choose to follow this more formal process.

Most schools and academies will have a staged process published on their websites. This is designed to allow investigation and the collecting of evidence. This route will take longer.

An example is set out on the next page. Please note that some academies use procedures developed by their trusts.

Formal complaints must be made to the headteacher (unless they are about the headteacher), via the school office. This may be done in person, in writing (preferably on the Complaint Form), or by telephone. Complaints about the headteacher must be made to the Chair of Governors.

Special circumstances

Any complaint or other notice that suggests that a child has been at risk of significant harm through violence, emotional abuse, sexual interference or neglect may be referred without further notice to Hackney Children's Social Care or the Children's Social Care team where the child lives. Hackney Children's Social Care can be contacted by email at MASH@hackney.gov.uk or by telephone on **020 8356 5500**. If a Social Care Team decides to investigate a situation this may delay or avoid the need for an investigation by the headteacher or Governing Body.

Is it in scope of the Complaints Procedure?

If your complaint relates to the matters below, then it may also be directed to the Local Authority.

- Admissions to schools
- Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs
- School reorganisation proposals
- Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation

Stage 1

Formal complaints must be made to the headteacher.

The headteacher may delegate the investigation to another member of the school's senior leadership team but not the decision to be taken. The headteacher will advise you of how to escalate your complaint should you remain dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 1. If the complaint is about the headteacher, or a member of the governing body (including the Chair or Vice-Chair), a suitably skilled governor will be appointed to complete all the actions at Stage 1.

Stage 2

If you are dissatisfied with the outcome at Stage 1 and wish to take the matter further, you can escalate the complaint to Stage 2 – a meeting with members of the governing body's complaints committee, which will be formed of the first three, impartial, governors available. This is the final stage of the complaints procedure.

Next Steps

If the complainant believes the school did not handle their complaint in accordance with the published complaints procedure or they acted unlawfully or unreasonably in the exercise of their duties under education law, they can contact the Department for Education after they have completed Stage 2.

The Gov.UK website has information on how to complaint about a school – go to

www.gov.uk/complain-about-school

Schools and academies are required by law to have procedures for handling complaints. You should check with your school first and request a copy of their complaints policy and any guidance they may have which may differ from the procedures outlined in this leaflet.