



Policy and Procedure for Complaints Columbia Primary School

Introduction

At Columbia, we strive to provide a good education for all our children. The Headteacher and staff work hard to build positive relationships with all parents and carers.

Since 1st September 2003, Governing Bodies (GBs) of all maintained schools and maintained nursery schools in England were required, under Section 29 of the Education Act 2002, to have in place a procedure to deal with complaints relating to the school and to any community facilities that or services that the school provides. The law also requires the procedure to be published.

Policy Statement

Our school aims to be fair, open and honest when dealing with any complaint. We give careful consideration to all concerns and complaints and deal with them as swiftly as possible. We aim to resolve any complaint through dialogue and mutual understanding. In all cases, we put the interests of the child above else.

We welcome feedback on what parents and carers feel we do well or not so well, as a school. We carefully consider all feedback, whether positive or otherwise, and will review our policies and procedures accordingly.

We treat all concerns and complaints seriously and courteously and will advise parents and others of the school's procedures for dealing with their concerns. A person does not have to be a parent or carer to make a complaint. In return, we expect parents and other complainants to behave respectfully towards all members of the school community. In particular, any disagreement with the school should not be expressed inappropriately or in front of pupils.

The policy is available on request to parents from the school reception or via the school website: www.columbiaprimarieschool.org

The school's procedures will be reviewed regularly and updated as necessary.

Staff and governors will receive training in handling parental concerns and complaints as appropriate. This may be on an individual basis, or as a group activity for all staff, or for specific groups, such as the office staff or members of the governing body.

This policy does not cover complaints relating to the following areas, which are covered by separate procedures:

- Admissions
- National Curriculum matters
- Religious Worship
- Special Educational Needs

- Allegations of abuse by staff
- Safeguarding issues
- Staff grievances
- Pupil exclusions

Definition of complaint

A complaint is an expression of significant dissatisfaction, however made, by a person or persons with a legitimate interest in the school about the practices or policies of the school, the conduct, action or omissions of members of staff employed at the school or the quality of education received by a child.

Complaints may be written or oral. It is not always appropriate for complaints to be put in writing as this might unnecessarily formalise the situation, resulting in the complainant taking a more defensive or entrenched position and making the conflict more difficult to resolve.

For a complaint to be dealt with formally it should meet at least one of the following criteria:

- it is first hand
- it relates to recent events
- the events in question can be dated
- there is independent corroboration of the allegations.

It is important to bear in mind that every expression of concern is not a complaint. Discretion needs to be applied in determining whether action over and above the normal day-to-day discussions on parental concerns is needed. All senior managers are expected to exercise such discretion before referring matters to the Head Teacher.

Problems and expressions of concern should be dealt with as far as is possible, at the point of first contact. This is usually the class teacher. If it cannot be resolved at this stage then the teacher should refer the matter to a senior member of staff (usually the Phase Leader/Assistant Headteacher /Deputy Headteacher.)

The complaints procedure

Key Responsibilities

The Headteacher is responsible for making operational decisions on a daily basis about the school's internal management and organisation. The school should make it clear that parents and others should direct concerns or complaints to the Headteacher in most circumstances.

The Governing Body has overall responsibility for the school and for ensuring that all pupils receive an appropriate and high standard of education. Given that school sites are now becoming places of service provision, it is important that the governing body ensures that any third party providers offering community facilities or services through the school premises have their own complaints procedure in place.

There are regulations that prescribe the role of governors in dealing with complaints. In general, the need to maintain a strategic overview, rather than a day-to-day

operational involvement, is paramount, as is the need to provide an objective approach in the interest of the whole school community, i.e. parents as well as staff.

Parent and Staff Governors in particular should not be drawn into the detail of specific complaints as this may prejudice their role in any further stages of the complaints procedure. However, they can help to refer more general concerns about school policy to the headteacher and the governing body.

The procedure is divided into three stages:

The **Informal stage** aims to resolve the concern through informal contact at the appropriate level in school.

Stage one is the first formal stage at which written complaints are considered by the head teacher and governors

Stage two is the next stage once stage one has been worked through. It involves a complaints appeal panel of governors.

Informally

- If a parent is concerned about anything to do with the education that we are providing at our school, they should, in the first instance, discuss the matter with their child's class teacher. In our experience, most matters of concern can be resolved positively in this way. All teachers work very hard to ensure that each child is happy at school, and is making good progress; they naturally want to know if there is a problem, so that they can take action before it seriously affects the child's progress.
- Where parents feel that a situation has not been resolved through contact with the class teacher or senior member of staff, or that their concern is of a sufficiently serious nature, they should make an appointment to discuss it with the Headteacher.
- The Headteacher will consider any such complaint and investigate each case thoroughly. Most complaints are normally resolved by this stage.
- If this fails to resolve the matter then a formal complaint should be made. This complaint must be made in writing, stating the nature of the complaint, and how the school has handled it so far.

Stage 1 Formally

This stage in our procedures deals with written complaints. It applies where you are not happy with the informal approach to dealing with your concern, as outlined above.

- Normally, your written complaint should be addressed to the Headteacher. If, however, your complaint concerns the Headteacher personally, it should be sent to the school marked "For the attention of the Chair of Governors."
- We will acknowledge your complaint in writing as soon as possible after receiving it. This will be within three school days.
- We will enclose a copy of these procedures with the acknowledgement.
- Normally we would expect to respond in full within 15 school days but if this is not possible we will write to explain the reason for the delay and let you know when we hope to be able to provide a full response.

- As part of our consideration of your complaint, we may invite you to a meeting to discuss the complaint and fill in any details required. If you wish, you can ask someone to accompany you to help you explain the reasons for your complaint.
- The Headteacher, or Chair of Governors, may also be accompanied by a suitable person if they wish.
- Following the meeting, the Headteacher, investigating officer or Chair of Governors will, where necessary, talk to witnesses and take statements from others involved. If the complaint centres on a pupil, we will talk to the pupil concerned and, where appropriate, others present at the time of the incident in question.
- We will normally talk to pupils with a parent or carer present, unless this would delay the investigation of a serious or urgent complaint, or where a pupil has specifically said that he or she would prefer the parent or carer not to be involved. In such circumstances, we will ensure that another member of staff, with whom the pupil feels comfortable, is present.
- If the complaint is against a member of staff, it will be dealt with under the school's internal confidential procedures, as required by law.
- The Headteacher or Chair of Governors will keep written/typed, signed and dated records of all meetings and telephone conversations, and other related documentation.
- Once we have established all the relevant facts, we will send you a written response to your complaint. This will give an explanation of the Headteacher's or Chair of Governors' decision and the reasons for it. If follow-up action is needed, we will indicate what we are proposing to do. We may invite you to a meeting to discuss the outcome as part of our commitment to building and maintaining good relations with you.
- The person investigating your complaint may decide that we have done all we can to resolve the complaint, in which case we may use our discretion to close the complaint at this point.
- If you are unhappy with the way in which we reached our conclusions, you may wish to proceed to stage two, as described below.

Stage 2 Formally - Appeals Process

- The governing body must consider all written formal complaints within twenty school days of receipt.
- Receipt of the complaint will be acknowledged in writing by the Chair of Governors, the Vice-Chair if the Chair is not available or the Clerk. A copy of this Complaints Policy will be enclosed with the acknowledgement.
- The Governing Body will arrange for the complaint to be heard by a panel of three Governors who have not had involvement with the matter at an earlier stage. The panel will, where possible, reflect a cross section of Governors, who have no direct interest or involvement in the case.
- The panel will be provided with copies of the complaint and all other relevant documentation.
- At least five school days' notice of the hearing by the panel will be given to all concerned.
- All parties involved in the dispute may be accompanied, if desired, by a friend, representative or interpreter and may call witnesses.

- The Headteacher (or Chair of Governors if the complaint is against the Headteacher) will explain what has already been done to attempt to resolve the complaint and the outcome of any investigation.
- The complainant will present his or her case and call any witnesses.
- The panel and Headteacher will have an opportunity to question the complainant and witnesses.
- The Headteacher will have the opportunity to respond to the complainant and call witnesses if appropriate.
- The panel and complainant will have the opportunity to question the Headteacher and witnesses.
- The Headteacher, followed by the complainant, will summarise their positions.
- All but the members of the panel will withdraw while a panel decision is reached.
- After hearing all the evidence, the governors will consider their decision and inform the complainant about it in writing. The governors do all they can at this stage to resolve the complaint to the parent's satisfaction.
- When the evidence has been fully considered and a decision made, the panel will notify, in writing, the complainant and the Headteacher of the outcome, giving an explanation of the conclusion, the reason for it, and any action taken, including details of any request made of those complained against to take particular actions in respect of the complaint. This will be done as quickly as possible, but within a maximum of five school days.
- The Governing Body should be informed at their next meeting that a complaint has been received and dealt with. Details should not be divulged to the full Governing Body, nor to any other party not directly involved, as to do so would violate confidentiality.

Closure of complaints

- Very occasionally, a school will feel that it needs, regretfully, to close a complaint where the complainant is still dissatisfied.
- We will do all we can to help to resolve a complaint against the school but sometimes it is simply not possible to meet all of the complainant's wishes. Sometimes it is simply a case of "agreeing to disagree".
- If a complainant persists in making representations to the school – to the Headteacher, Designated Governor, Chair of Governors or anyone else this can be extremely time-consuming and can detract from our responsibility to look after the interests of all the children in our care.
- For this reason, we are entitled to close correspondence (including personal approaches, as well as letters and telephone calls) on a complaint where we feel that we have taken all reasonable action to resolve the complaint and that the complaint has exhausted our official process. In exceptional circumstances, closure may occur before a complaint has reached stage two of the procedures described in this document. This is because a complaints panel takes considerable time and effort to set up and we must be sure that it is likely to assist the process of investigating the complaint.
- The Chair of Governors may decide, therefore, that every reasonable action has been undertaken to resolve the complaint and that a complaints review panel would not help to move things forward.

If any parent is still not content that the complaint has been dealt with properly, then s/he can write to the Secretary of State for Education:

The Secretary of State
Department for Education
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

Telephone: 0370 000 2288

Complaints made directly to the Governing Body

In the event of a complaint being received directly by the Governing Body from a parent or other stakeholders before attempting to resolve the matter with the school, governors should have regard to the following:

- Any complaint to the Governing Body or one of its members should be passed immediately to the Headteacher for investigation. The Headteacher, if he /she has not already done so, should follow the informal procedure outlined above to attempt to resolve the matter and report the outcome to the complainant and details of action taken to the Chair of Governors.
- If the Chair of Governors is satisfied that the informal procedures have been exhausted and the complaint is still not resolved, he/she may, after further discussions with the Headteacher, decide to initiate the formal procedure.
- In the event of the complaint being about the Headteacher, the Chair of Governors will inform the Head Teacher of the complaint and then attempt, through an informal approach, to resolve the matter. The complainant will be advised of the Chair's conclusions.

Complaints received anonymously

Complaints that are made anonymously will be handled at the discretion of the School and may be considered using other procedures, depending on the nature of the complaint. For example, anonymous complaints relating to (or appearing to relate to) a child protection matter or alleged criminal activity may be referred immediately to the relevant authorities.

Complaints received by petition

Complaints received by petition will be dealt with informally in the same way as other complaints. If it is not clear who the response should be directed to, the complaint will be treated as an anonymous complaint.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality is vital. All conversations and correspondence will be treated with discretion. Complainants have the right to know what use will be made of personal information and, accordingly, personal information will only be shared between staff on a 'need to know' basis.

Equal access, accompaniment and representation

Appropriate steps should be taken to ensure that any individual has the opportunity to raise their concerns or submit a formal complaint. This includes the right to be

accompanied or represented by a friend or relative at discussions and hearings and/or to submit formal complaints which have been written by another individual on their behalf. Should any meeting need to be held where any parties would have difficulties in terms of access, the school can assist with providing an appropriate venue.

Vexatious complaints

The Chair of Governors can write to a complainant and refuse to consider their complaint at stage 1 if he feels that there are insufficient grounds to do so.

Monitoring and review

The governors monitor the complaints procedure, in order to ensure that all complaints are handled properly. The Headteacher logs all complaints received by the school, and records how they were resolved. Governors examine this log periodically.

Governors take into account any local or national decisions that affect the complaints process, and make any modifications necessary to this policy.

This policy is made available to all parents, so that they can be properly informed about the complaints process.

Signed on behalf of the Governing Body:	
Position:	Date:
Approved in April 2021 by the Governing Body of Columbia School. To be reviewed in April 2024 unless any statutory documentation is published which supersedes this policy.	