

# Sharp Lane Primary School

## Complaints Policy and Procedures



<b>Agreed by Governing Board</b>	July 2021
<b>Review date</b>	July 2024
<b>Responsible for this policy</b>	Headteacher (Policy adopted from Leeds City Council)

# **Sharp Lane Primary School Complaints Policy and Procedures**

## **Section 1: Policy**

1. This policy statement sets out the school's approach to dealing with concerns and complaints from parents or others. Further details of our procedures for handling complaints are included in section 2.
2. We value good home/school relations and good community relations and will, therefore, do everything we can to establish and maintain them. This includes seeking to resolve any concerns or complaints promptly, and to the satisfaction of all concerned.
3. We welcome feedback on what parents or others feel we do well, or not so well, as a school. We will consider carefully all feedback, whether positive or negative, and will review our policies and practices accordingly.
4. If, as a complainant, you are unclear about who to contact, or how to contact them, please contact the school office on 0113 3783060 and you will be given the advice you need.
5. We will treat all concerns and complaints seriously and courteously and will advise parents and other complainants of the school's procedures for dealing with their concerns. 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 on social media or in front of pupils.
6. All school staff and members of the Governing Board will receive a copy of this policy statement and will be familiar with the school's procedures for dealing with concerns and complaints, to which they will have access as required. A paper copy of this policy is available on request to parents or others.
7. The school's procedures will be reviewed regularly and updated as necessary.
8. Staff and governors will receive training in handling 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 Board.
9. Whilst we will seek to resolve concerns and complaints to the satisfaction of all parties, it may not be possible to achieve this in every case. We will, therefore, use our option to close a complaint before all the stages of the school's procedures have been exhausted, if this appears to be appropriate.
9. The government and the Local Authority (LA) advocate resolution of concerns and complaints at school level wherever possible, in the interests of maintaining good home/school and community relations. The role of the LA in advising complainants and schools on the handling of concerns and complaints is set out in the school's procedures.

## Section 2: School Complaints Procedure

The majority of concerns from parents, carers and others are handled under the following general procedures.

To ensure you receive an effective response to your complaint, it will be helpful if you:

- co-operate with the school in seeking a solution to the complaint
- express the complaint in full as early as possible; complaints must be raised within three months of an incident occurring (although exceptional circumstances will be considered)
- respond promptly to request for information or meetings or in agreeing the details of the complaint
- ask for assistance if needed (we will ensure that adjustments are made so that the complaint process is accessible to you, eg providing information in alternative formats or supporting you to make your complaint) and
- treat all those involved in the complaint, with respect.

At each stage in the procedure, Sharp Lane Primary School wants to resolve the complaint. If appropriate, we will acknowledge that the complaint is upheld in whole or in part. In addition, we may offer one or more of the following:

- an explanation
- an admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better
- an assurance that we will try to ensure the event complained of will not recur
- an explanation of the steps that have been or will be taken to help ensure that it will not happen again and an indication of the timescales within which any changes will be made
- an undertaking to review school policies in light of the complaint
- an apology.

The procedure is divided into three stages;

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

**Formal Stage One** is the first formal stage at which written complaints are considered by the head teacher or the designated governor, who has special responsibility for dealing with complaints.

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

How each of these stages operates is explained below.

### Informal Stage – Your initial contact with the school

1. Many concerns will be dealt with informally when you make them known to us. If you are a parent, the first point of contact should be the adult who is responsible for your child at the beginning or end of the day (Class Teacher, Teaching Assistant, Out of School Club Leader etc)
2. This adult or your child's class teacher will discuss this matter with you either in a meeting or a telephone call. In the vast majority of cases this will lead to a successful resolution to the complaint.
3. However, in some cases, depending on the nature of your complaint, this may be passed on by the member of staff to the department leader who will contact you for a further meeting. At this stage, the Senior Leadership Team will be made aware of any ongoing complaints and may contact parents if it is deemed necessary.
4. If after discussing the complaint further the issue has been unresolved then the Deputy Headteacher will arrange a meeting to discuss this further.
5. This will be followed with a meeting with the Headteacher if the complaint is still unresolved.
6. Once we have responded to your concern at this level, you will have the opportunity of asking for the matter to be considered further.
7. If you are still dissatisfied following this informal approach, your concern will become a formal complaint and we will deal with it at the next stage.

#### **Stage One - Formal consideration of your complaint**

1. 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.
2. 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".
3. Complainants should not approach individual governors to raise concerns or complaints. They have no power to act on an individual basis and it may also prevent them from considering complaints at Stage 2 of the procedure.
4. 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.
5. We will consider complaints made outside of term time to have been received on the first school day after the holiday period.
6. The complaint will either be investigated by the head teacher or they may ask a senior member of staff to be the investigating officer. If the complaint is about the head teacher personally, the chair of governors will usually investigate. However, they may appoint another governor to investigate.
7. 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.

8. 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.
9. The Headteacher, Chair of Governors or Investigating Officer may also be accompanied by a suitable person if they wish. This meeting will be minuted by a member of the office staff and these would be sent for your approval.
10. Following the meeting, the Headteacher, Chair of Governors or Investigating Officer 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.
11. 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.
12. If the complaint is about the conduct of a member of staff, it will be dealt with under the school's internal confidential procedures, as required by law.
13. The Headteacher, Chair of Governors or Investigating Officer will keep written or typed, signed and dated records of all meetings and telephone conversations, and other related documentation in accordance with GDPR regulations.
14. With regards to meetings with yourself or other witnesses, accurate notes will be agreed by both/all parties.
15. In accordance with equality law, we will consider making reasonable adjustments if required, to enable complainants to access and complete this complaints procedure. For instance, providing information in alternative formats, assisting complainants in raising a formal complaint or holding meetings in accessible locations.
16. 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' or Investigating Officer's 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.
17. 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. Please see the next page for further information about this process.
18. If you are unhappy with the way in which we reached our conclusions, you may wish to proceed to stage two, as described below. If you wish to move your complaint to stage two, you should contact us within **10 school days** of receiving our response.

## Stage Two - Consideration by a governors' appeal panel

If the complaint has already been through stage one and you are not happy with the outcome as a result of the way in which the complaint has been handled, you can take it further to a governors' appeal panel. This is a formal process, and the ultimate recourse at school level.

The purpose of this arrangement is to give you the chance to present your arguments in front of a panel of governors who have no prior knowledge of the details of the case and who can, therefore, consider it without prejudice.

However, the aim of a panel is not to reinvestigate the complaint. It is there to review how the complaint has been investigated and to determine whether the process has been undertaken fairly. It is there to establish facts and make recommendations which will reassure you that we have taken the complaint seriously.

The governors' appeal panel operates according to the following formal procedures:

1. The Governing Board will convene a panel of three governors and will aim to arrange for the panel meeting to take place within **20 school days of receiving your request**.
2. You will be asked whether you wish to provide any further written documentation in support of your appeal.
3. The Headteacher or Complaints Governor will be asked to prepare a pack of the documentation related to the investigation and the outcome for the panel. The panel can request additional information from other sources if necessary.
4. You will be informed, at least **five school days** in advance, of the date, time and place of the meeting. We hope you will feel comfortable with the meeting taking place in the school but we will do what we can to make alternative arrangements if you prefer.
5. With the letter, you will receive any relevant correspondence or reports regarding stage one and you will be asked whether you wish to submit further written evidence to the panel. Any additional documentation should be submitted **two days** prior to the review panel meeting.
6. The letter will explain what will happen at the panel meeting and that you are entitled to be accompanied to the meeting. The choice of person to accompany you is your own, but it is usually best to involve someone in whom you have confidence but who is not directly connected with the school. They are there to give you support but also to witness the proceedings and to speak on your behalf if you wish.
7. It is not recommended that legal representatives attend: this is not a legal process. However, there may be occasions when legal representation is appropriate, for instance, if a school employee is called as a witness in a complaint meeting, they may wish to be supported by union and/or legal representation.
8. Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.
9. In exceptional circumstances, If it is necessary in the interests of the ratifying the investigative process, the complaint investigator may, with the agreement of the chair of the panel, invite relevant witnesses directly involved in matters raised by you to attend the meeting.

10. The chair of the panel will bear in mind that the formal nature of the meeting can be intimidating for you and will do his or her best to put you at your ease.
11. As a general rule, no evidence or witnesses previously undisclosed should be introduced into the meeting by any of the participants. If either party wishes to do so, the meeting will be adjourned so that the other party has a fair opportunity to consider and respond to the new evidence.
12. The chair of the panel will ensure that the meeting is properly minuted. You will receive the written outcome of the panel meeting with the panel's decision. You may also request a copy of the minutes and should make this request at the start of the panel's proceedings.
13. Electronic recording of the meeting is not permitted without the consent of all attendees and only in special circumstances where there are communication difficulties. Agreement must be sought from the chair before the date of the meeting. Any recordings remain private and further sharing is subject to restrictions under the Data Protection Act 2018 and General Data Protection Regulations (EU) 2016/679 (GDPR).
14. During the meeting, you can expect there to be opportunities for:
  - the panel to hear you explain your case and your argument for why it should be heard at stage two
  - the panel to hear the headteacher's/investigating officer's case in response
  - the head teacher/investigating officer to raise questions through the chair
  - the panel members to be able to question you and the Headteacher/Investigating Officer
  - you and the Headteacher/Investigating Officer to make a final statement.
- 12 In closing the meeting, the chair will explain that the panel will now consider its decision and that written notice of the decision will be sent to you and the Headteacher **within three school days**. All participants other than the panel and the clerk will then leave.
- 13 The panel will then consider the complaint and all the evidence presented in order to:
  - reach a unanimous, or at least a majority, decision to uphold/dismiss the complaint in whole or in part
  - decide on the appropriate action to be taken by the school, if necessary recommend, where appropriate, to the Governing Board changes to the school's systems or procedures to ensure that similar problems do not happen again.
- 14 The clerk will send you and the Headteacher a letter outlining the decision of the panel. The letter will also explain that you are entitled to have the handling of the complaint reviewed by the Secretary of State for Education.
- 15 We will keep a copy of all correspondence and notes on file in the school's records in line with GDPR records but separate from pupils' personal records.

If the complaint is jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair or the entire Governing Board or the majority of the Governing Board, Stage 2 will be heard by a committee of independent governors.

The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions Sharp Lane Primary School will take to resolve the complaint.

The response will also advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied.

### **Closure of complaints**

- Very occasionally, a school and/or the LA will feel that it needs, regretfully, to close a complaint where the complainant is still dissatisfied.
- We, and the LA where appropriate, 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, Chair of Governors or anyone else- or to the LA, this can be an 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 position, and especially where the complainant's action is causing distress to staff and/or pupils.
- 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.

Where you have been through the school's internal complaints procedures (with or without recourse to a complaints review panel) and are still unhappy with the outcome or decision from the governing body, you can contact the Secretary of State for Education via the DfE website [www.education.gov.uk](http://www.education.gov.uk), by telephoning 0370 000 2288 or by writing to the address below:

The School Complaints Unit (SCU)  
Department for Education  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

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Please enclose with your letter to the DfE a copy of the complaint outcome. This will save time in that the DfE will not need to ask for our view of what has happened.

We would advise parents and other complainants that, unless the school is shown to have behaved unreasonably or not to have followed their own procedures, there is likely to be little further action that can be taken, as Governing Boards are empowered to deal with many issues without reference to either the Local Authority or the Secretary of State.



## Appendix 1: Other sources of information and advice

If your concern is about an aspect of **Special Educational Needs** provision, which might include information about relevant voluntary organisations and support groups in Leeds, you might like to talk to Leeds SEND Information Advice Service (Leeds Special Educational Needs and Disability Advice Support Service) on their helpline:0113 3951222.

If you have a complaint about services offered by other providers who use the Sharp Lane Primary School site, your complaints should be directed to those providers.

## Appendix 2: Serial and Unreasonable Complaints

Sharp Lane Primary School is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, and to providing a high quality service to those who complain. We will not normally limit the contact complainants have with the school. However, we do not expect our staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour and will take action to protect staff from such behaviour, including that which is abusive, offensive or threatening.

Sharp Lane Primary School defines unreasonable complainants as *'those who, because of the frequency or nature of their contacts with the school, hinder our consideration of their or other people's complaints'*.

A complaint may be regarded as unreasonable when the person making the complaint:

- refuses to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcomes sought by raising the complaint, despite offers of assistance
- refuses to co-operate with the complaints investigation process while still wishing their complaint to be resolved
- refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of a complaints procedure
- insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the adopted complaints procedure or with good practice
- introduces trivial or irrelevant information which the complainant expects to be taken into account and commented on, or raises large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions, and insists they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales
- makes unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues, and seeks to have them replaced
- changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds
- repeatedly makes the same complaint (despite previous investigations or responses concluding that the complaint is groundless or has been addressed)
- refuses to accept the findings of the investigation into that complaint where the school's complaint procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed including referral to the Department for Education
- seeks an unrealistic outcome

- makes excessive demands on school time by frequent, lengthy, complicated, and stressful contact with staff regarding the complaint – either in person, in writing, by email and/or by telephone - while the complaint is being dealt with
- uses threats to intimidate
- uses abusive, offensive or discriminatory language or violence
- knowingly provides falsified information or
- publishes unacceptable information on social media or other public forums.

If the behaviour continues the Headteacher will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and asking them to change it. For complainants who excessively contact Sharp Lane Primary School causing a significant level of disruption, we may specify methods of communication and limit the number of contacts in a communication plan. This will usually be reviewed after 6 months.

In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, the concerns and actions taken will be put in writing immediately and the police informed. This may include banning an individual from Sharp Lane Primary School

### **Steps we will take**

We will take every reasonable step to address the complainant's concerns, and give them a clear statement of our position and their options. We will follow our complaints procedure as normal (as outlined above) wherever possible. Complainants should limit the numbers of communications with school while a complaint is being progressed. It is not helpful if repeated correspondence is sent (either by letter, phone, email or text) as it could delay the outcome being reached. Whenever possible, the Head teacher or Chair of Governors will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying an 'unreasonable' marking.

If the complainant continues to contact the school in a disruptive way, we may put a communications strategy in place. We may:

- Give the complainant a single point of contact via an email address.
- Limit the number of times the complainant can make contact, such as a fixed number per term.
- Ask the complainant to engage a third party to act on their behalf, such as Citizens Advice.
- Put any other strategy in place, as necessary.

### **Stopping responding**

We may stop responding to the complainant when all of these factors are met:

- We believe we have taken all reasonable steps to help address their concerns
- We have provided a clear statement of our position and their options
- The complainant contacts us repeatedly, and we believe their intention is to cause disruption or inconvenience

Where we stop responding, we will inform the individual that we intend to do so. We will also explain that we will still consider any new complaints they make.

In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, we will immediately inform the police and communicate our actions in writing. This may include barring an individual from our school site.

