

## **Complaints procedure for Higham Ferrers Junior School**

This complaint procedure for schools has three stages:

1. Initial Approach
2. Formal complaint (to Head Teacher or Chair of Governors)
3. Appeal (to Governor Committee)

### **Stage 1 – Initial Approach**

#### **Guidelines**

- The vast majority of concerns and complaints can be resolved informally, often straightaway by the class teacher, year co-ordinator or Head Teacher.
- The school should aim to ensure that parents feel able to raise concerns with staff without undue formality, either in person, by telephone or in writing. There may be occasions when it is appropriate or helpful for someone to accompany or act on behalf of a parent.
- Parents may not be clear at first that they are making a complaint. They may wish to ask a question or express an opinion. A preliminary discussion with school staff will usually clarify the issue and help parents to decide whether they wish to take the matter further.

#### **Procedure**

1. Parents should have an opportunity for informal discussion of their concerns with an appropriate member of staff. This discussion should aim to clarify the nature of the parent's concern and assure them that the school wishes to hear about it. The discussion should also aim to clarify what kind of outcome the parent is seeking.
2. If the member of staff first contacted cannot deal with the matter immediately, he/she should make a firm arrangement to deal with it at a future date or refer the matter to the Head Teacher or another appropriate member of staff. In either case a note of the name, date and contact details of the complaint should be taken. The first contact should check later to make sure the referral has been successful.
3. The Head Teacher should ensure that staff have guidelines about when to refer a matter and to whom.

4. If the concern relates to the Head Teacher and the parent feels unable to raise it with the Head Teacher they should be advised to contact the Chair of Governors.
5. The staff member/ Head Teacher dealing with the complaint should make sure that the complainant is clear about what will happen next (if anything). This should be put in writing if it seems the best way of making the next steps or outcome clear.
6. If no satisfactory solution has been found, the complainant should be informed about how they should proceed if they wish to take their complaint further. They should be informed of any advice and support that they may be available to them.

## **Stage 2 – Formal complaint to Head Teacher or Chair of Governors**

### **Guidelines**

- The Head Teacher needs to determine who has responsibility for responding to a formal complaint, including the decision about his/her own involvement at various stages.
- If the complainant is dissatisfied with the action of the Head Teacher, or the Head Teacher has been very closely involved informally, the Chair of Governors, or in exceptional circumstances another designated governor, should carry out all the Stage Two procedures, with support if necessary from another governor.
- Individuals on the governing body should not become involved at this stage to avoid prejudicing their possible future involvement.

### **Procedure**

1. Parents who wish to pursue a formal complaint at Stage Two should be asked to put the complaint and their desired outcome in writing to the Chair of Governors or Head Teacher. The Chair of Governors/Head Teacher (or designated member of staff) should acknowledge the complaint orally or in writing within three days of receipt giving a brief explanation of the complaints procedures and a target date for providing a response. Ideally, this should be within ten days. If it is not possible to deal with the matter in this time, the complainant should be informed of when it is likely to be concluded.
2. The Chair of Governors/Head Teacher (or designated member of staff) may offer an opportunity for the complainant to meet him/her. The complainant should, if he/she wishes, be allowed to be accompanied by a friend or relative who can speak on his/her behalf. Interpreting facilities should be made available if required.
3. If necessary, the Chair of Governors/Head Teacher (or designated member of staff) should interview any witnesses and take statements from those

- involved. If the complaint centres around a pupil, the pupil should also be interviewed, normally with parent/guardian present. In some circumstances this may not be possible or appropriate and a senior member of staff with whom the pupil feels comfortable should attend with him/her. If a member of staff is complained against, the needs of that person should be borne in mind. Advice may need to be sought from Education Personnel.
4. The Chair of Governors/Head Teacher (or designated member of staff) should either write to the complainant or arrange a meeting to discuss or resolve the matter. This meeting should be followed up with a letter summarising the outcome of the meeting. The complainant should be advised in this letter that if they remain unhappy with the outcome, he/she may appeal to a panel of governors. The complainant should notify the chair of governors within two weeks of receiving the letter detailing the outcome of the complaint.

### **Stage 3 – Appeal to panel of governors**

#### **Guidelines**

- Complaints only rarely reach the appeal stage, but it is important that governing bodies are prepared to deal with them.
- The aim of the appeal to a panel of governors is to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant. However, it may only be possible to establish the facts of a situation and make recommendations about future action, and to satisfy the complainant that their complaint has been taken seriously.
- It is important should a complaint reach the appeal stage that the governing body is impartial and independent and is seen to be so. Individual complaints should not be considered by the full governing body. The governing body should therefore establish a panel to deal with complaints, by nominating a pool of five governors, which three can be drawn for any hearing.
- Panel members should have had no prior involvement with the complaint. Generally, the chair of governors is not on the panel as he/she may be involved at the earlier stage. Governing bodies should have regard to the advantages of having a mix of types of governor on the panel and be sensitive to issues of equal opportunity in the composition of the panel.
- Individual governors should not get involved in looking into complaints before this stage to avoid prejudicing their potential involvement. If individual governors are approached by parents or others with complaints, they should refer the complainant to the schools complaints procedure, making the necessary introduction to a member of staff or the Head Teacher if appropriate.

- Complaints that reach the appeal stage will do so because the complainant is not satisfied with the response so far. In this situation it is perhaps helpful for the governing body to view any complaint as being against the school rather than an individual staff member whose actions may led to the original complaint.

## **Procedure**

Upon receipt of a written request from the complainant for the complaint to proceed to Stage Three, the following procedure should be followed.

A suitable clerk to the panel should be appointed.

1. The clerk should write acknowledge receipt of the written request, informing the complainant that it will be heard by a committee of the governing body within fifteen working days of receipt.
2. The clerk should convene a meeting of the complaints committee at a time, which is convenient for the complainant and the school.
3. The clerk should ensure that the complainant, Head Teacher and any other witnesses are given at least five working days notice in writing of the date, time and place of the hearing or otherwise in full agreement of a shorter timescale. The letter of notification to the complainant should also inform him/her of their right to be accompanied by a friend/relative who can act as an advocate. The chair should ensure that interpretation facilities for the hearing are offered and made available if required. The letter should set out the procedure for the conduct of the hearing (see annex A) and the complainant's right to submit further written evidence to the committee.
4. The clerk should invite the Head Teacher to attend the hearing and to submit a written report for the committee in response to the complaint. The Head Teacher may also invite the Chair of Governors or any other member of staff directly involved in matters raised by the complainant to respond in writing and/or in person to complainant. Any involvement of other staff should be at the discretion of the chair of the committee.
5. All relevant documents should be received by all parties, (including the complainant) at least five days before the meeting of the panel. This provides adequate opportunity to read them prior to the start of the meeting.
6. The panel should elect a chairperson who should ensure that proper minutes of the meeting are taken.
7. The chair of the panel should try to ensure that the proceedings are sufficiently informal as possible and that the complainant and other participants feel at ease.
8. At the conclusion of the representations and questions, the chair should explain that the panel will consider the issues and write to both parties with their decision or judgement within three day.