



MILECASTLE PRIMARY SCHOOL

PROCEDURE FOR MAKING A COMPLAINT AGAINST THE SCHOOL

GENERAL PRINCIPLES.

The school's priority is to serve the needs of pupils and parents. We try to serve as efficiently and as courteously as possible but things can go wrong. We welcome complaints and comments as an opportunity to improve the quality of the services we offer.

The following general principles will apply:

- the desirability of settling differences informally;
- the need for more formal mechanisms for dealing fairly and effectively with complaints which have proved impossible to settle informally.
- the desirability of parents who have a complaint involving their child to take this complaint to school staff rather than confronting other children or parents.
- ensuring that parents, staff and governors are informed of the procedures.

All parties dealing with complaints should seek to deal with each stage within 15 days of receiving notification of the complaint or of the continuing dissatisfaction of the complaint.

DEFINITIONS.

Definitions are provided in Appendix 1.

Special procedures are available for complaints regarding the curriculum of a school, collective worship and for considering complaints about the way in which pupils' special needs are met. Further details are available from the headteacher.

The Directorate of Children's Services has a complaints policy and procedures in respect of its services. Details are available from the Civic Centre (0191 2328520 extension 5352).

COMPLAINTS ABOUT THE SCHOOL.

Complaints about school issues should be raised, in the first instance, with school staff.

Who can make a complaint?

Anyone can complain if they receive a service, seek a service or are affected by the school.

How a complaint can be made.

Complaints may be made in person, by telephone or made in writing. A person with a complaint will normally seek to contact the member of staff responsible for the relevant issue. All staff will seek to help a complainant even where the issue is not the individual's area of responsibility.

INFORMAL COMPLAINT.

An informal complaint is an initial approach by an individual to the school expressing dissatisfaction with some aspect of the service, its action or inaction. Informal complaints, however made, are complaints which are resolved quickly and simply, usually at the point of service delivery, and do not involve detailed or lengthy investigation.

A person with a complaint will normally seek to contact the member of staff responsible for the relevant issue.

Should the complaint not be resolved the complainant will be referred to the headteacher or a deputy headteacher. The head or deputy will seek to deal with the issue informally.

Should an initial informal discussion not resolve the situation, and the complainant indicates their continuing dissatisfaction, then the headteacher will convene an interview to review the issue in detail. The results of this review are reported back to the complainant.

If the complainant remains dissatisfied then the headteacher refers them to the Chair of Governors, who will attempt to settle the matter informally. If this does not prove possible, the Chair of Governors will ask the school to instigate procedures for a formal complaint.

FORMAL COMPLAINT.

A complaint becomes formal when the user remains dissatisfied after making an informal complaint or, alternatively, when, from the outset, a complaint cannot be dealt with simply and quickly and requires investigation.

The Chair of Governors will decide who should deal with the complaint. As far as possible this will be a person who has not been involved in investigating the complaint informally. (Usually the deputy headteacher).

When a complaint becomes formal, care will be taken to:

- clarify the complaint;

- clarify the outcome sought;
- check whether the complainant needs support of any kind (for example, if they have poor sight or hearing, or a language difficulty) to explain the investigation procedure.

Once a complaint has become formal:

- the progress of the complaint will be monitored by the headteacher or deputy headteacher.
- a full written response will be made within 15 working days or, where this is not possible, a reply should be sent indicating progress to date and an estimate of time to make a full response;
- the complainant will be given the name and telephone number of the person dealing with the complaint;
- the complainant will be advised how to proceed if not satisfied.

A complaint of serious maladministration should be progressed immediately as a formal complaint. The Chair of the Governing Body should be the first person to approach where the matter could involve disciplinary or legal action against the headteacher.

Where a complaint involves an allegation of financial irregularity then the City Treasurer will be advised by the head or Chair as appropriate.

The papers relating to the complaint will be passed to the Chair of Governors who will decide how the complaint is to be progressed.

The Chair will ensure:

- the complaint is quickly referred to the relevant Committee (or to the head if the complaints procedures at that level have not been exhausted);
- the complaint is not reported to the whole Governing Body until it is resolved, and then not in detail;
- all parties to the complaint are given a fair hearing;
- the decision of the Committee is given in writing to the complainant;
- the complainant is told of any right of appeal if the decision is given against him or her.

EXTERNAL REVIEW

If the complainant remains unhappy after the matter has been considered by the Governing Body, then the complainant will be asked to contact the Head of the Administration Department at the Civic Centre.

The Head of the Administration Department will carry out a review of the complaint and advise all parties of the findings.

OMBUDSMAN

Where a complainant indicates they remain dissatisfied with the result of the review carried out by the Head of the Administration Department they will be advised that they may refer the matter to a Local Councillor and/or the Commissioner for Local Administration in England (Local Government Ombudsman) and given the relevant details. This will normally be done by the Head of the Administration Department (or Diocesan body).

REMEDY.

Where a complaint is found to be justified a remedy should be provided. A remedy needs to be appropriate to the complaint. In virtually all cases the remedy will be an apology. In some cases the remedy will be the provision of a service desired by the complainant. In other cases, a change of procedure to prevent future difficulties for the complainant, or for customers in general, may be the appropriate remedy. There may be circumstances where the complainant has sustained loss or suffering. In such cases, financial compensation may be considered, and in all such cases a report to the Governing Body will be required before payments are made.

ANNUAL REVIEW

Annually a brief report will be presented to the Governing Body, which will detail:

- the number of complaints;
- the subjects concerned;
- the time taken to resolve complaints;
- the assessment of complainant satisfaction;
- changes brought about as a result of reviewing complaints.

This will be normally undertaken in the summer term for the previous year.

DEFINITIONS.

A '**concern**' may be defined as '*an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought*'.

A '**complaint**' may be generally defined as '*an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action*'.

A complaint is not:

- a request for a service;
- a request for information or explanation of school policy or practice;
- a matter for which there is a right of appeal within the LA or to an independent body or a legal remedy.

It should be noted that even where an appeal procedure is in place a complaint could still arise regarding the way that procedure is operated.

INFORMAL COMPLAINTS.

An informal complaint is one which can be resolved locally and quickly, which does not require an in-depth investigation, and which generally does not require to be put in writing.

FORMAL COMPLAINTS.

A formal complaint is one which cannot be immediately resolved to service users satisfaction, and, therefore, requires an investigation and which is generally put in writing.

ANONYMOUS COMPLAINTS.

The school does not wish to receive anonymous complaints and will not undertake to act on information received this way, unless clear evidence which can substantiate the complaint is provided at the outset.

CURRICULUM/COLLECTIVE WORSHIP - SPECIAL PROCEDURES.

Complaints about the curriculum of a school, collective worship or other related matters are dealt with by a special procedure in accordance with Section 23 of the Education Reform Act 1988. Special procedures are available for considering complaints about the way in which pupils' special needs are met.

A paper copy of the procedures will be made available to anyone wishing to make such a complaint. Arrangements can be made to provide a copy of the procedures in languages other than English.

LA: NO POWER TO DIRECT A SCHOOL.

Under the Local Management of Schools arrangements, introduced by the Education Reform Act 1988, the LA has no power to direct a school in relation to a complaint from a parent or pupil, unless there is a statutory basis for doing so. However, it may act as arbiter and advise a school where a complaint has not been resolved by the staff or governors. Any parent who is unsure of the procedures, or who feels that their complaint has not been considered properly by the school, may contact officers of Children's Services for further advice.