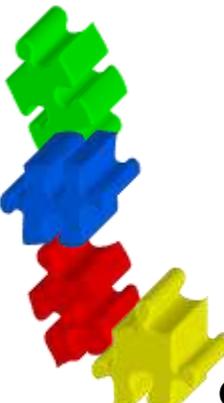


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General Principles:

- This procedure is intended to allow anyone to raise a concern or complaint relating to the school, or the services that it provides. Some complaints fall outside the school's complaints procedure, for example, staff grievances or disciplinary procedures (see Complaints not in Scope).

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*'.

- An anonymous concern or complaint will not be investigated under this procedure, unless there are exceptional circumstances.
- To enable a proper investigation, concerns or complaints should be brought to the attention of the school as soon as possible. In general, any matter raised more than 3 months after the event, being complained of, will not be considered.
- Conflict between estranged parents over the application of parental responsibility is a common cause of complaints made to schools. '*Understanding and Dealing with Issues Relating to Parental Responsibility*' contains specific advice about how to properly approach issues concerning parental responsibility and the school will refer to this document. The welfare of the child will be the paramount consideration for schools. In the event of a concern being raised where the school is unclear how to act, independent legal advice may be sought to ensure that a parent's rights and responsibilities are not infringed and the actions of the school are compliant with education law.

Raising a concern or complaint

Informal Stage STAGE 1

It is normally appropriate to communicate directly with the member of staff concerned. This may be by letter, email, by telephone or in person by appointment. Parent Concern forms are available to be filled out when parents feel the need to report upon a concern. Many concerns can be resolved by simple clarification or the provision of information and it is anticipated that most complaints will be resolved by this informal stage.

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In the case of serious concerns it may be appropriate to address them directly to the Head Teacher (or to the Chair of the governing body, if the complaint is about the Head Teacher).

If a concern or complaint is not resolved at the informal stage the complainant may choose to put the complaint in writing by completing a Complaint Form and pass it to the Head Teacher or – if the complaint is regarding the Head Teacher or they have been very closely involved informally – to the Chair of Governors.

Formal Stage STAGE 2

Other than the Chair of Governors (if the formal complaint is made to him/her), individuals on the governing body should not become involved at this stage to avoid prejudicing their possible future involvement.

PROCEDURE

Upon receipt of a formal complaint the Head Teacher (Chair of Governors) will be responsible for ensuring that it is investigated appropriately. A Complaint Form will immediately be issued for completion if not already received.

Upon receipt of the Complaint Form:-

- The Head Teacher (or Chair) may invite the complainant to a meeting to clarify their concerns and to explore the possibility of an informal resolution. If the complainant accepts that invitation, they may be accompanied by a friend, if they wish, to assist them in explaining the nature of their concerns. It is possible that the complaint will be resolved through this meeting with the Head Teacher (or Chair). If not, arrangements will be made for the matter to be fully investigated, using the appropriate procedure.
- In any case the complainant should receive acknowledgement in writing, usually within 3 school days of the school receiving the Complaint Form, and be told how the school intends to proceed, receive a brief explanation of the complaints procedures, a target date for providing a response and details of which staff member will be dealing with complaint. Ideally, a response should be within ten school 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.
- The recipient will then either pass the matter on to which ever staff member is best placed to deal with the complaint or investigate the matter themselves. This designated staff member 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.

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Interpreting facilities should be made available if required.

- If necessary, the Investigator should interview any witnesses and take statements from those involved. 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 Schools HR. Children/young people should be interviewed in the presence of another member of staff, or in the case of serious complaints (e.g. where the possibility of criminal investigation exists) in the presence of their parents/carers. However, it might not always be possible to conduct an interview in case it prejudices a LADO or police investigation.
- The Investigator should keep written records of meetings, telephone conversations and other documentation.
- Once all the relevant facts have been established, the Headteacher (Chair of Governors) 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 are not satisfied that their complaint has been dealt with fully and properly, they may choose to take it to a panel of Governors.

Governors' Complaints Panel STAGE 3

Where the complainant is still not satisfied that their complaint has been dealt with fully and properly, they may choose to take it to a panel of Governors. Any such request must be made in writing to the clerk to the governing body, within 10 school days of receiving notice of the outcome, and include a statement specifying any perceived failures to follow the procedure. The procedure described below will be followed. A Review Request form is provided for convenience.

When the clerk of governors or chair of governors receives a copy of the complaint form he/she will inform the governing board that a complaint has been received and that it has been passed to the panel to deal with.

No further information about the complaint should be shared with other governors.

- a) It is important that the appeal hearing is independent and impartial and that it is seen to be so. No governor should sit on the panel if they have had a prior involvement in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it.
However, if it is impossible to find 3 governors who have no detailed prior knowledge of the case the Chair can nominate 3 governors with minimal prior knowledge. If there are still insufficient governors able to sit on a panel, the governing board in consultation with the Local Authority will put in place an alternative fair process.
- b) The aim of the hearing, which needs to be held in private, will always be to resolve the complaint

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and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant

The Chair of the Panel will be nominated by the Chair of Governors and is responsible for ensuring that both complainant and Headteacher are given a fair hearing and that the panel arrives at its judgment without fear or favour.

Remit of the panel: the complaints panel can:

- dismiss the complaint in whole or in part;
- uphold the complaint in whole or in part;
- decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint
- recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to ensure problems of a similar nature do not recur.

It may:

- Consider and, if appropriate, criticise the way in which an operational decision was communicated — **but cannot overturn the decision itself**
- Consider the thoroughness with which the Headteacher investigated a complaint about a member of staff — **but cannot expect the Headteacher to provide details about confidential discussions with that staff member.**
- Consider the manner in which a complaint about any decision was addressed and ask for the decision to be reviewed — **but cannot expect the Headteacher to have changed the decision**
- Consider and, if appropriate, identify limitations in a policy or procedures —**but cannot make changes to the policy.** (It can, however, recommend that the policy be reviewed by the governing board to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not recur, and individual panel members can subsequently play their part in improving the policy)
- Consider whether it should recommend that the governing board offer appropriate redress

Format of a Panel Hearing

1. Complainant and Headteacher will enter the room where the hearing is taking place together.
2. The chair will introduce the panel members and the clerk and outline the process.
3. The complainant is invited to explain the complaint,
4. The Headteacher may question the complainant
5. The panel will question the complainant
6. The Headteacher is then invited to explain the school's actions
7. The complainant may question the Headteacher
8. The panel will question the Headteacher
9. The complainant is then invited to sum up their complaint.

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10. The Headteacher is then invited to sum up the school's actions and response to the complaint.
11. The chair explains that both parties will hear from the panel within five working days.
12. Both parties leave together while the panel decides on the issues.
13. The clerk will remain with the panel to clarify any issues

A decision letter will be sent to the complainant, with a copy to the Head, within 5 school days of the Panel Hearing.

Monitoring Complaints

As well as addressing an individual's complaint, the process of listening to and resolving complaints can contribute to school improvement. When individual complaints are heard, the school may identify issues that need to be addressed. The monitoring and review of complaints by the school and Governing Body may be useful to evaluating the school's performance. Any discussion of complaints by the Governing Body or others in the school community will not name or be able to identify individuals.

Complaints not in Scope

Exceptions	Whom to contact
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Admissions to school • Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs • School re-organisation proposals • Matters likely to require a Child Protection investigation 	Local authority.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exclusion from school 	Parents and carers may use procedures to challenge permanent exclusions and fixed term exclusions of more than 5 days in a given term. Concerns about the process followed can be raised via the complaints procedure.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whistleblowing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school has an internal procedure for employees and volunteers. • Ofsted may be contacted by email (whistleblowing@ofsted.gov.uk) telephone (03001233155) or in writing (WBHL, Ofsted, Piccadilly Gate, Store Street, Manchester, M1 2WD).

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff grievances and disciplinary procedures 	The school has staff grievances, discipline and conduct procedures in place. Complainants are not informed of the outcomes of actions under this procedure.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complaints about services provided by external bodies using a school's premises or facilities. 	Providers should be contacted directly and have their own procedures for such eventualities.

South End Junior will do its best to be helpful to people who contact them with a complaint or concern or a request for information. However, in cases where the school is contacted repeatedly by an individual making the same points, or who asks them to reconsider their position, the school will need to act appropriately.

There will be occasions when, despite all stages of the complaint procedure having been followed, the complainant remains dissatisfied. It is important for schools to recognise when they really have done everything they can in response to a complaint. It is a poor use of a schools' time and resources to reply to repeated letters, emails or telephone calls making substantially the same points. If a complainant tries to re-open the same issue, the Chair of Governors can inform them that the procedure has been completed and that the matter is now closed.

If the complainant contacts the school again on the same issue, then the correspondence may be viewed as 'serial' or 'persistent' and the school may choose not to respond. Before South End Junior makes this decision it will refer to the latest guidance issued by the DfE.