



## Sandy Lane Primary School Complaints Procedure

Reviewed by the full Governing Body July 2017  
Next review July 2020

Signature of Chairperson: *CLLr Sue Duffy*

1. All maintained schools in England are 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 or services that the school provides. This document details the complaints procedure at Sandy Lane Primary School, follows guidance from the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and is publicised on the Governing Body display board.

Any person, including members of the general public, may make a complaint about any provision of facilities or services that a school provides, unless separate statutory procedures apply (such as exclusions or admissions). Schools does not limit complaints to parents or carers of children that are registered at the school'.

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2. At Sandy Lane School, we undertake to provide a friendly and safe environment in which pupils will be helped to achieve their potential, both academically and socially. We recognise that sometimes things can go wrong and parents, carers and members of the public may need to make a complaint or raise concerns they have with the school. This procedure is intended to allow you to raise a concern or complaint relating to the school or the services that it provides

### **2. Framework of Principles**

This complaints procedure adheres to the following framework of principles.

An effective complaints procedure will:

- Encourage resolution of problems by informal means wherever possible
- Be easily accessible and publicised
- Be simple to understand and use
- Be impartial
- Be non-adversarial
- Allow swift handling with established time limits for action and keeping people informed of the progress
- Ensure a full and fair investigation by an independent person where necessary
- Respect people's desire for confidentiality
- Address all the points at issue and provide an effective response and appropriate redress where necessary
- Provide information to the school's senior management team to evaluate and possibly amend school policies.

### **3. Investigating complaints**

At each stage the complaints co-ordinator will make sure that they:

- Establish what has happened so far and who has been involved
- Clarify the nature of the complaint and what remains unresolved
- Meet with the complainant or contact them
- Clarify what the complainant feels would put things right
- Interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of
- Conduct the interview with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning
- Keep notes of the interview

### **4. Resolving complaints**

At each stage we will seek ways in which a complaint can be resolved. It might be sufficient to acknowledge that the complaint is valid in whole or in part. In addition it may be appropriate to offer one or more of the following:

- An apology
- An explanation
- An admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better
- An assurance that the event complained of will not recur
- An explanation of the steps that have been taken to ensure that it will not happen again
- An undertaking to review school policies in light of the complaint

We will encourage complainants to tell us what actions they feel might resolve the problem at any stage. An admission that the school could have handled the situation better is not the same as an admission of negligence.

### **5. Publicising the Procedure**

This procedure will be publicised on the governor's display board in the school's main entrance and on the school website. In addition there will be reference made to it in the school prospectus.

### **6. Dealing with complaints – initial concerns**

It is in everyone's interest that concerns and complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. At Sandy Lane Primary School we are clear about the difference between a concern and a complaint.

#### **Concerns**

We take informal concerns seriously at the earliest stage and we will always endeavour to resolve them as quickly as possible in an informal way. This includes staff discussing individual cases with complainants "on the spot" if appropriate and apologising where necessary.

#### **Complaints**

The formal procedures set out below will be invoked if initial attempts to resolve the issue are unsuccessful and the person raising the concern remains dissatisfied and wishes to take the matter further.

## **7. Dealing with complaints – procedures**

At Sandy Lane Primary School we have nominated a member of staff who has responsibility for the operation and management of the school's complaint procedure. This role is called the school's "complaints co-ordinator".

Currently **Diane Bonham** is the school complaints co-ordinator.

## **8. Informal Stage:**

### **Stage One: Complaint heard by a staff member**

The school will always respect the views of a complainant who indicates that he/she would have difficulty discussing a complaint with a particular member of staff. In these cases the member of staff who first heard the complaint will refer the complainant to the complaints co-ordinator.

Where the complaint concerns the Executive Headteacher, the complaints co-ordinators will refer the complainant to the Chair of Governors. Similarly if the member of staff initially approached feels too compromised to deal with a complaint, the complaints co-ordinator may consider referring the complainant to another member of staff. We will always endeavour to consider the complaint objectively and impartially.

Where the first approach is made to the Governing Body, or individual governor – either verbally or by letter - the next step would be to refer the complainant to the complaints co-ordinator and advise them about the procedure. Governors will not act unilaterally on an individual complaint outside the formal procedure or be involved at the early stages in case they are needed to sit on a panel at a later stage of the procedure.

### **9. Stage Two – Complaint heard by the Executive Headteacher**

At this point the complainant may be dissatisfied with the way the complaint was handled at stage one as well as pursuing their initial complaint. The Executive Headteacher may delegate the task of collating the information to another staff member but not the decision on the action to be taken.

The Executive Headteacher will acknowledge receipt of the complaint with a written reply within **five working days**.

Following an investigation of a complaint (see above) the Executive Headteacher will write to the complainant with the outcome of the investigation. Investigations may vary in the length of time they take. The Executive Headteacher will investigate the complaint as quickly and efficiently as possible. However where investigations become protracted because of reasons outside of the school's control the complainant will be kept regularly informed of the progress of the investigation.

The Executive Headteacher will ensure that the complaints co-ordinator is informed of the outcome.

### **Complaint heard by the Chair of Governors**

If the complaint concerns the Executive Headteacher the complainant will be referred directly to the Chair of Governors as stated above. The Chair of Governors will inform the Executive Headteacher of the complaint and will set up a meeting with the complainant and the Executive Headteacher in order to resolve the issue.

### **10. Formal Stage:**

#### **Complaint heard by Governing Body's Complaints Committee**

At this point the complainant may be dissatisfied with the way the complaint was handled at the informal stage as well as pursuing their initial complaint. The complainant will need to write to the Chair of Governors giving details of the complaint. The Chair will acknowledge the complaint in writing within seven days, explaining the next stage of the process. The Chair will also inform the Executive Headteacher of the receipt of the complaint.

The Clerk to Governors will convene a Governing Body Complaints Committee meeting and the complainant will be issued a letter inviting them to a hearing. The complainant will be issued a letter inviting them to a hearing.

The Complaints Committee will take the following points into account:

- The hearing is as informal as possible
- Witnesses are only required to attend the part of the hearing in which they give their evidence
- After introductions, the complainant is invited to explain their complaint, and be followed by their witnesses
- The Executive Headteacher may question both the complainant and the witnesses after each has spoken
- The Executive Headteacher is then invited to explain the school's actions and be followed by the school's witnesses
- The complainant may question both the Executive Headteacher and the witnesses after each has spoken
- The Complaints Committee may ask questions at any point
- The complainant is then invited to sum up their complaint
- The Executive Headteacher is then invited to sum up the school's actions and response to the complaint
- The Chair of Governors will be informed in writing of the decision of the committee within seven working days.
- Both parties leave together while the panel decides on the issues
- The Governing Body will be informed of the actions and any points for action at their next Governing Body meeting.

## **11. The Remit of the Complaints Committee**

The committee 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 that problems of a similar nature do not recur.

There are several points which any governor sitting on a complaints committee needs to remember

**a.** It is important that the appeal hearing is independent and impartial. No governor may sit on the panel if they have a prior involvement in the complaint. In deciding the make-up of the panel, governors need to try and ensure that it is a cross section of the categories of governor and sensitive to the issues of race, gender and religious affiliation.

**b.** The aim of the hearing, which needs to be held in private, will always be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant. However, it has to be recognised, that the complainant might not be satisfied with the outcome if the hearing does not find in their favour. It may only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations which will satisfy the complainant that his or her complaint has been taken seriously.

**c.** An effective panel will acknowledge that many complainants feel nervous and inhibited in a formal setting. Parents often feel emotional when discussing an issue that affects their child. The panel chair will ensure that the proceedings are as welcoming as possible. The layout of the room will set the tone and care is needed to ensure the setting is informal and not adversarial.

**d.** Extra care needs to be taken when the complainant is a child. Careful consideration of the atmosphere and proceedings will ensure that the child does not feel intimidated. The panel needs to be aware of the views of the child and give them equal consideration to those of adults. Where the child's parent is the complainant it would be helpful to give the parent the opportunity to say which parts of the hearing, if any, the child needs to attend.

**e.** The governors sitting on the panel need to be aware of the complaints procedure.

## **12. Roles and Responsibilities**

### **a. The Role of the Clerk**

The clerk will:

- Set the date, time and venue of the hearing, ensuring that the dates are convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible
- Collate any written material and send it to the parties in advance of the hearing
- Meet and welcome the parties as they arrive at the hearing
- Record the proceeding
- Notify all parties of the panel's decision.

### **b.The Role of the Chair of the Governing Body or the Nominated Governor**

The nominated governor will:

- Check that the correct procedure has been followed
- If a hearing is appropriate notify the clerk to notify the panel

### **c.The Role of the Chair of the Panel**

The Chair of the Panel has a key role, ensuring that:

- The remit of the panel is explained to the parties and each party has the opportunity of putting their case without undue interruption
- The issues are addressed
- Key findings of fact are made
- Parents and others who may not be used to speaking at such a hearing are put at ease
- The hearing is conducted in an informal manner with each party treating the other with respect and courtesy
- The panel is open minded and acting independently
- No member of the panel has a vested interest in the outcome of the proceedings or any involvement in an earlier stage of the procedure
- Each side is given the opportunity to state their case and ask questions
- Written material is seen by all parties (if a new issue arises it would be useful to give all parties the opportunity to consider and comment on it)

## **13.Appendices**

**Appendix 1 – School complaints procedure flowchart**

**Appendix 2 – School complaints procedure complaint form**

Policy approved by the Governing Body Date: July 2017

Signed: *Cllr Sue Duffy* Role: Chair of Governors

Review Date: July 2020



**Sandy Lane Primary School**

**School Complaints Procedure**

**Flowchart**

**Summary of Dealing with Complaints**

Complaint heard by staff member (**Informal**)

- Ensure complaints co-ordinator informed of outcome

Issue resolved

Issue not resolved

Complaint heard by Executive Headteacher (**Informal**)

- Acknowledge receipt of complaint
- Write to complainant with outcome of investigation
- Ensure complaints co-ordinator informed of outcome

Complaint heard by Chair (**Informal**)

Issue resolved

Issue not resolved

**Formal**

Governor's complaints Committee Meeting arranged

- Issue letter inviting complainant to meeting
- Issue letter confirming panel decision
- Ensure complaints co-ordinator informed of outcome
- Report outcome and actions required to Governing Board at next meeting.



## School Complaints Procedure

**Please complete and return to Diane Bonham (Complaints Coordinator) who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.**

Your name:

Pupil's name:

Your relationship to pupil:

Address:

Postcode:

Daytime telephone number:

Evening telephone number:

Please give details of your complaint:

What action, if any, have you already taken to try and resolve your complaint. (Who did you speak to and what was the response)?