

Complaints Policy and Procedure

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Policy Statement

This policy statement sets out Lawnswood School's approach to dealing with concerns and complaints raised by parents, carers and other adults concerned about action (or lack of action) taken by the school.

We value good home/school 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.

We welcome feedback about what parents 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.

We will treat all concerns and complaints seriously and courteously and will advise parents and others of the school's procedures for dealing with their concerns. In return, we expect parents, carers 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 or in front of students.

All school staff and members of the Governing Body, will be made aware of and have access to this policy statement and will be familiar with the school's procedures for dealing with parental concerns and complaints.

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.

The government and the Local Authority (LA) advocate resolution of parental concerns and complaints at school level wherever possible, in the interests of maintaining good home/school relations.

Stages of the Procedure

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

The procedure is divided into stages:

Informal stage, which aims to resolve the concern through informal contact at the appropriate level in school.

Stage 1, which is the first formal stage at which written complaints are considered by the Headteacher.

Stage 2, in which the designated governor with responsibility for dealing with complaints considers written complaints.

Stage 3, which is followed once Stages 1 and 2 have 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 can be dealt with informally when you make them known to us. Your first point of contact should be your child's Head of Year, Year Manager or Assistant Headteacher overseeing their year group.
2. As soon as your concern is made known to us, we will acknowledge it then, as we investigate the issue, will arrange to see you or will contact you by telephone or in writing. If it is necessary, all members of staff know how to refer to the appropriate person with responsibility for your particular issues. He or she will make a clear note of the details and will check later to make sure that the matter has been followed up.
3. Any actions or monitoring of the situation that has been agreed will be communicated clearly to you.
4. If necessary, we will contact appropriate people who may be able to help us with our enquiries into your concern.
5. We will normally update you on the progress of our enquiries within ten school days. Once we have responded to your concern, you will have the opportunity of asking for the matter to be considered further.
6. 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 1 - formal consideration of your complaint by the Headteacher

This stage in our procedure deals with written complaints. It applies where you are not happy with the informal approach to dealing with your concern, as outlined above. If you prefer to email your complaint, please send it to school@lawnswoodschool.co.uk

1. 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”.
2. We will acknowledge a written complaint in writing as soon as possible after receiving it. This will be within three school days.
3. 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.
4. As part of our consideration of your complaint, we may invite you to a meeting to discuss the complaint and any details we need to help our investigation. If you wish, you can ask someone to accompany you to help you explain the reasons for your complaint.
5. The Headteacher may also be accompanied by a suitable person if they wish.
6. Following the meeting, the Headteacher or investigating officer will, where necessary, talk to witnesses and take statements from others involved. If the complaint centres on a student, we will talk to the student concerned and, where appropriate, others present at the time of the incident in question.
7. If the complaint is against a member of staff, it will be dealt with under the school’s internal confidential procedures, as required by law.
8. The Headteacher or designated governor will keep written/typed and dated records of all meetings and telephone conversations, and other related documentation.
9. Once we have established all the relevant facts, we will either send you a written response to your complaint or telephone you to discuss the outcome and/or our response to your complaint. We will give an explanation of the Headteacher’s or governor’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.
10. 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 below for further information about this process.
11. If you are unhappy with the way in which we reached our conclusions, you may wish to proceed to Stage 2, as described below.

Stage 2 - formal consideration of your complaint by a designated Governor

Stage 2 applies if you are not satisfied with way the Headteacher reached the conclusions in Stage 1.

1. The complaint should be in writing and sent to the school, marked “for the attention of the governor responsible for complaints”. The Assistant to the Governors in school will ensure the complaint is delivered to the relevant governor.

2. The written complaint will be acknowledged in writing within three school days.
3. 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.
4. As part of the governor's consideration of your complaint, he/she may invite you to a meeting to discuss the complaint and any details he/she needs for the investigation. If you wish, you can ask someone to accompany you to help you explain the reasons for your complaint.
5. The designated governor may also be accompanied by a suitable person if they wish.
6. As in Stage 1, if the complaint is against a member of staff, it will be dealt with under the school's internal confidential procedures, as required by law.
7. The designated governor will keep written/typed and dated records of all meetings and telephone conversations, and other related documentation.
8. Once the designated governor has reviewed all the relevant facts, he/she will either send you a written response to your complaint or telephone you to discuss the outcome and/or his/her response to your complaint. You will be given an explanation of the governor's decision and the reasons for it. If follow-up action is needed, the governor will indicate what we are proposing to do.
9. As in Stage 1, the person investigating your complaint may decide that the school has done all it can to resolve the complaint, in which case the governor may use his/her discretion to close the complaint at this point. Please see below for further information about this process.
10. If you are unhappy with the way in which the designated governor reached his/her conclusions, you may wish to proceed to Stage 3, as described below.

Stage 3 - consideration by a governors appeal panel

- If the complaint has already been through Stages 1 and 2 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 rehear the complaint. It is there to review how the complaint has been investigated and to determine whether this has been conducted 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 procedure:

1. The governing body will convene a panel of three governors and will aim to arrange for the panel meeting to take place within 20 school days.
2. You will be asked whether you wish to provide any further written documentation in support of your appeal.

3. The Headteacher or complaint investigator and the designated governor involved in Stage 2 will be asked to prepare written reports 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 1 and you will be asked whether you wish to submit further written evidence to the panel.
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. If it is necessary in the interests of the ratifying the investigative process, the complaint investigator may, invite relevant witnesses directly involved in matters raised by you to attend the meeting.
8. 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.
9. The chair of the panel will ensure that the meeting is properly minuted. Please understand that any decision to share the minutes with you, the complainant, is a matter for the panel's discretion and you do not have an automatic right to see or receive a copy as the minutes are the property of the governing body. Since such minutes usually name individuals, they are understandably of a sensitive and, therefore, confidential nature.
10. Normally, the written outcome of the panel meeting should give you all the information you require. If, however, you feel that you would like to have a copy of the minutes it would be helpful if you could indicate this in advance. If the panel is happy for the minutes to be copied to you, the clerk can then be asked to maintain confidentiality in the minutes.
11. 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 3
 - the panel to hear the case from the school's complaint investigator and the designated governor (involved at Stage 2) in response
 - you to raise questions via the chair
 - you to be questioned by the complaint investigator and/or designated governor through the chair
 - the panel members to be able to question you, the complaint investigator and the designated governor
 - you and the Headteacher 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 on the case

- decide on the appropriate action to be taken, if necessary, recommend, where appropriate, to the Governing Body 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 but separate from students' personal records.

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 local authority 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, designated governor, chair of governors or anyone else – or to the local authority, this can be 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 complaint has exhausted our official process. The local authority will support us in this position, and especially where the complainant's action is causing distress to staff and/or students.

In exceptional circumstances, closure may occur before a complaint has reached Stage 2 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 or the designated governor 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 write to the Secretary of State for Education at ministers@education.gsi.gov.uk or at: Secretary of State, Department for Education (DfE), House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA

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 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 bodies are empowered to deal with many issues without reference to either the local authority or the secretary of state.

Lawnswood School Complaint / Feedback form

Your forename(s): _____

Your surname: _____

Your address: _____

Daytime telephone number _____

Evening telephone number _____

If applicable, name(s) of child(ren) and year at Lawnswood School

Your relationship to the school, e.g. parent, carer, neighbour, member of the public, student:

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? When? What was the response?

What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?

Your signature _____

Date _____

Thank you for completing this form.

For use in school:

Date of acknowledgment _____

Acknowledged by whom _____

Complaint referred to _____

Date referred _____

Flowchart

Complainant

School

