



CADLAND PRIMARY SCHOOL POLICY FOR MANAGING COMPLAINTS

At Cadland Primary School we hope your child's education will be a happy one. We believe our school provides a good education for all our children and that the Headteacher and all staff work very hard to build a positive relationship with all parents and pupils. However, we recognise that on occasion, parents may have a concern. All staff will be encouraged to take parental concerns seriously and to respond quickly. We do ask parents to observe the need to make an appointment with members of staff to ensure that concerns are dealt with efficiently and calmly. Nearly all issues can be managed speedily and informally. We are confident the following procedures will be effective.

Principles

- To prevent concerns from developing into major complaints.
- To strengthen parents' confidence.
- To strengthen relationships between parents, school and the community.
- To recognise that things can go wrong and that the school is committed to resolving concerns as quickly and effectively as possible.
- The school will not respond to anonymous complaints under this policy, however, the headteacher and / or chair of governors will use their professional discretion to consider whether the issue and fear of identification are genuine or the issue is one of child protection.

Aims and Objectives

- To resolve concerns through informal discussions at the earliest opportunity.
- To respond promptly, with well defined timescales and named contacts.
- To focus on resolution and service rather than apportionment of blame.
- To promote confidentiality and discretion - parents however, should be aware that enquiries may need to be carried out in respect of the complaint.
- To include fair and transparent investigative processes for staff as well as complainants.
- To signpost other sources of advice where appropriate.
- To be forthright in dealing with vexatious, abusive, malicious and anonymous complainants.

This policy explains the steps that will be followed whenever an issue arises that causes concern. Any person, including members of the general public, may make a complaint about provision of facilities or services that our school provides, unless separate statutory procedures apply.

This procedure does not apply to complaints about:

- Admissions to school
- Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs (SEN)
- School re-organisation proposals
- Matters likely to require a Child Protection investigation
- Exclusion of children from school
- Whistleblowing
- Staff grievance and disciplinary procedures
- Complaints about services provided by other providers who may use the school's premises or facilities

In these cases, there are other separate and statutory procedures.

If we cannot meet the timescales set out in our policy, we will provide a clear explanation of the reason for this along with details of the indicative timescales.

When an issue or concern first arises

If you have a concern that you would like to take up with the school you should initially inform a member of staff either in person, over the telephone or in writing. You may wish to approach your child's class teacher informally, at the earliest opportunity, first as they will be best placed to help you directly or by letting you know which other member of staff you should be speaking to.

We encourage parents to approach staff with any concerns they may have, and aim to resolve all issues with open dialogue and mutual understanding. We will take your concerns seriously and make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.

The chair of governors reserves the right to refer complaints that are taken straight to them back to the appropriate member of staff if it does not warrant the governing body's involvement at that point.

The staged approach for dealing with complaints:

Informal Stage

- Where a parent feels the complaint has not been resolved through an informal discussion with the class teacher, or that their concern is of a sufficiently serious nature, they should make an appointment to discuss it with their child's Phase Leader.
- On some occasions parents may wish to discuss a concern informally with the Deputy Headteacher or Headteacher.
- If the complaint relates to the Headteacher then the complaint should be addressed to the Chair of Governors, c/o the Clerk, Cadland Primary School for preliminary discussions.
- Any Governor, who is approached by a parent wishing to make a complaint, should direct them to the Headteacher.

We anticipate that the majority of concerns will achieve a satisfactory resolution at this informal stage. However, should the parent not be satisfied with the outcome then they must write to the Headteacher, giving details of the concern and enclosing any appropriate paper work.

The Headteacher, Deputy Headteacher or Chair of Governors will respond to the parent in writing, or by phone, as soon as possible. We will aim to acknowledge the complaint or offer a full response within five working days. The response may take the form of an invitation to a meeting or a letter.

If invited to a meeting, you are welcome to bring a friend, partner or, in the case of a pupil who has raised a concern, a parent along for support. It may be appropriate for a pupil to attend the meeting if their parent has raised a concern, depending on the nature of the issue.

If the complaint requires an in-depth investigation, the Headteacher will acknowledge this and let the complainant know that a response will take longer than usual. The investigation and response preparation will normally take place within 10 working days or if it is likely to take longer a letter will be sent stating the anticipated response time.

The Headteacher will follow up any meeting with parents by summarising the main points in a letter. This is to avoid any misunderstanding and ensure that all parties have a clear record of the progress or agreements made.

Staff have a responsibility to ensure that you understand any future points of action that have been agreed and will make a record of what has been discussed, as well as any outcomes and a plan of action, if one has been agreed.

All staff will do their best to ensure your concerns are dealt with appropriately and efficiently, but if an agreement cannot be reached, or if you are dissatisfied with the outcome, you can make a formal complaint to the headteacher. If your complaint is about the headteacher you should make your complaint in writing to the chair of governors. It is preferable for you to make your formal complaint in writing, but complaints can be made in person or by telephone.

Formal Complaints

In order to ensure complaints are dealt with efficiently and effectively, Cadland Primary School deals with formal complaints in three stages.

Stage 1 - Complaint heard by the Headteacher

If you feel that your concern has not been dealt with as you would like, are unhappy with the outcome of your informal meeting or feel that the issue is serious enough that it warrants it, you can make a formal complaint to the headteacher. It is preferable for you to make your formal complaint in writing and we provide a proforma for you to complete which is appendix 1, but complaints can be made in person or by telephone.

The headteacher will acknowledge your complaint in writing or offer a full response within **5 school days**. If further investigation is required, the headteacher will acknowledge receipt of your complaint within 5 school days and will advise you that a full response will be provided within **20 school days**.

The headteacher may invite you to attend a meeting to discuss your complaint and possible solutions, or to explain what has happened or will happen as a result of your complaint.

The headteacher will keep a record of all interactions with you and other staff, meetings and decisions made in reference to your complaint.

If your complaint is about a member of staff, the headteacher will talk to that employee and invoke the relevant procedure if required. It will not be appropriate to inform you of the outcome of any investigation in relation to an individual member of staff.

The headteacher will respond to you in writing within **20 school days** of receiving your complaint outlining their full response to your concern, and any action that has or will be taken. If the headteacher has decided not to take any further action, they will explain what they have decided and how they reached the decision. You will also be advised of your right to take the matter further if you are not satisfied with the headteacher's response.

Stage 2 – Complaint heard by the Chair of Governors

If, having spoken to the headteacher, you are dissatisfied with the outcome of your complaint, you should write to the chair of governors within **10 school days**¹, explaining your concern and the steps that have resulted in you taking this course of action.

The chair of governors will acknowledge your complaint in writing or offer a full response within **5 school days**. If further investigation is required, the chair of governors will acknowledge receipt of your complaint within 5 school days and will advise you that a full response will be provided within **20 school days**.

The chair of governors may invite you to attend a meeting to discuss your complaint and possible solutions, or to explain what has happened or will happen as a result of your complaint.

The chair of governors will explain that the governing body has a strategic role, and is responsible for the school's strategic framework and the headteacher is responsible for the internal organisation, management and control of the school and for advising on and implementing the governors' policies. The headteacher is solely responsible for making day to day decisions.

This stage offers an opportunity for achieving conciliation between all parties and discussions between the chair of governors and the headteacher will be key to resolving the complaint and agreeing a way forward. The chair of governors will decide what powers are available to governors in respect of the particular complaint. In reaching this decision, the chair of governors will determine to what extent the issues relate to responsibilities that:

- (a) are delegated to the headteacher by the governing body; or
- (b) fall within the governing body's remit only; or
- (c) are within the headteacher's Terms and Conditions of Employment and relate to the internal organisation, management and control of the school.

For delegated responsibilities and matters within the remit of the governing body, the chair of governors may look at the whole issue afresh. If the matter relates to the headteacher's conduct, the chair of governors will decide whether the matter should be dealt with through the Complaints Procedure or Staff Disciplinary Procedure. Advice may be sought from the Local Authority and/or Education Personnel Services. For matters that are the headteacher's responsibility, the chair of governors is empowered only to look at whether the headteacher's decision or action was reasonable in the light of the information available at the time.

The chair of governors will keep a record of all interactions with you and any decisions made in reference to your complaint.

If the chair of governors has decided not to take any further action, they will explain what they have decided and how they reached the decision. You will also be advised of your right to take the matter further if you are not satisfied with the chair of governor's response.

¹ Exceptions to this time frame may be considered

Stage 3 – Complaint heard by governing body's complaints panel

If you are dissatisfied with the outcome of your complaint, you should write to the clerk to governors within **10 school days**² of the outcome of stage 2, explaining your concern and the steps that have resulted in you taking this course of action.

The clerk to governors will acknowledge receipt of your request within **5 school days**.

The complaints panel will usually be convened within **20 school days** of receiving the request for your complaint to be heard by the governing body's complaints panel. Where it is not possible to find a mutually convenient date within that timescale, all reasonable steps will be taken to agree a time and date mutually convenient to all parties.

The main function of the complaints panel will be to:

- a) ensure the complaint has been properly handled by the headteacher (and chair of governors)
- b) ensure that a sufficient comprehensive investigation was carried out
- c) ensure that the correct procedure / policies were followed.

The panel will also review whether the headteacher (and chair of governors) acted reasonably.

The clerk to governors will arrange and facilitate the meeting of the complaints panel. You are entitled to an independent panel to hear your complaint and the complaints panel will consist of three governors who have no former knowledge or involvement in the matter being considered. The chair of the panel will be nominated from within the group of panel members. All panel members will have access to, and will be familiar with, this complaints policy. The clerk to governors will confirm to all parties in writing, the date, time and venue for the meeting at least **10 school days** in advance.

The clerk to governors will request that you supply any paperwork you feel the panel will require to consider your complaint fully. The headteacher (and chair of governors) will also be requested to supply copies of their responses to the previous stages of the procedure, and any further paperwork they consider the panel will require to consider the complaint fully. Copies of all paperwork will be distributed to all parties by the clerk to governors at least **3 school days** in advance of the meeting.

You are welcome to bring a friend or partner for support to the meeting and the chair of the panel will ensure the meeting is conducted within a relaxed atmosphere whilst keeping to the formal agenda. The headteacher (and chair of governors if attending) is also invited to bring a representative or member of staff for support.

No previously undisclosed evidence relating to the complaint should be introduced during the meeting.

The clerk will inform you (and the headteacher and / or chair of governors) in writing of the panel's decision within **15 school days** of the meeting. The letter will include a summary of the issues, an outline of the main points of discussion, the reasons for the decision and the proposed actions or outcome. The panel may suggest you meet with the headteacher and / or chair of governors again to agree a way forward.

² Exceptions to this time frame may be considered

The letter may set out recommendations which will be made to the governing body.

The panel's decision is the final stage in the complaints procedure. If you feel the school has acted unreasonably or has not followed the correct procedures in relation to your complaint, you may write to the Secretary of State using the following contact details:

School Complaints Unit, Department for Education,
2nd Floor, Piccadilly Gate, Store Street, Manchester, M1 2WD

The Governors Complaint Panel will follow the procedure and advice as outlined in Appendix 2 (Checklist for a Governors Complaints Panel Hearing).

Unreasonable Complaints

In dealing with vexatious, abusive and anonymous complaints the school will follow advice from the Local Education Authority.

Cadland Primary School is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, and to providing a high quality service to those who complain. We will not normally limit the contact complainants have with the school. Operating from a position of mutual respect, we do not expect our staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour and will take action to protect staff from that behaviour including that which is abusive, offensive or threatening.

Cadland Primary School defines unreasonable complaints as "those who, because of the frequency or nature of their contacts with the school, hinder our consideration of their or other people's complaints".

A complaint may be regarded as unreasonable when the person making the complaint:

- refuses to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcomes sought by raising the complaint, despite offers of assistance
- refuses to co-operate with the complaints investigation process while still wishing their complaint to be resolved
- refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of a complaints procedure
- insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the school's complaints procedure or with good practice
- introduces trivial or irrelevant information which the complainant expects to be taken into account and commented on, or raises large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions, and insists they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales
- makes unjustified comments about staff who are trying to deal with the issues, and seeks to have them replaced
- changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds
- repeatedly makes the same complaint (despite previous investigations or responses concluding that the complaint is groundless or has been addressed)
- refuses to accept the findings of the investigation into a complaint where the school's complaint procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed including referral to the Department for Education
- seeks an unrealistic outcome

- makes excessive demands on school time by frequent, lengthy, complicated and stressful contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with

A complaint may also be considered unreasonable if the person making the complaint does so either face-to-face, by telephone or in writing or electronically:

- maliciously
- aggressively
- using threats, intimidation or violence
- using abusive, offensive or discriminatory language
- knowing it to be false
- using falsified information
- publishing unacceptable information in a variety of media such as in social media websites and newspapers

Complainants should limit the numbers of communications with a school while a complaint is being progressed. It is not helpful if repeated correspondence is sent (either by letter, phone, email or text) as it could delay the outcome being reached.

Whenever possible, the headteacher or chair of governors will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying an 'unreasonable' marking.

If the behaviour continues the headteacher will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and asking them to change it. For complainants who excessively contact Cadland Primary School causing a significant level of disruption, we may specify methods of communication and limit the number of contacts in a communication plan. This will usually be reviewed after 6 months.

In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, the concerns and actions taken will be put in writing immediately and the police informed. This may include banning an individual from Cadland Primary School.

5. Governing Body review and monitoring of complaints

The Headteacher is responsible for the formal complaints records and holds them in a central file.

The records must include:

- Who was involved
- When and what the issue was
- The action taken
- The complaints conclusion

The headteacher will report annually to the Governing Body on the number of formal complaints received and the levels at which they have been resolved. No details identifying the complaint or any member of staff will be published.

The Governing Body will monitor the level and nature of complaints and review the outcomes on an annual basis to ensure the effectiveness of the policy and to make changes where necessary.

6. Staff Complaints

Staff who have a concern about a colleague or volunteer in school should refer to the **whistleblowing** policy which is available on the Cadland Primary School system

The procedure for dealing with any other staff complaint or employment grievance is set out in the school's **staff discipline, conduct and grievance** policies which are available on the Cadland Primary School system.

7. Complaints Policy Review

The governing body of Cadland Primary School will review this policy every 2 years, or sooner if there are any legislative changes. The governing body of Cadland Primary School will also review this policy following a complaint panel meeting to ensure that it met the requirement to provide a clear, fair and efficient complaints procedure.



Appendix 1
Cadland Primary School
Complaints Form

Name of complainant:	
Contact details:	Address:
	Telephone:
	Email:
Outline of your complaint and how it has affected you (the complainant) / pupil:	
Have you discussed the matter already with a member of staff, if so, who? What was the outcome?	
What would you like to happen as a result of your complaint?	
Signature:	
Date:	

For school use:

Date received:	
Date acknowledged and by whom:	
Summary of action taken:	



Appendix 2

Cadland Primary School

Checklist for Governors Complaints Panel Hearing

The panel should take the following points into account:

- The panel will elect a *Chair of the Complaints Panel*
- The hearing, while structured, is conducted as informally as possible.
- Witnesses are only required to attend for the part of the hearing in which they give evidence.
- After introductions, the complainant is invited to explain their complaint and is then followed by their witnesses.
- The Headteacher may question both the complainant and the witnesses after each has spoken.
- The complainant may question both the Headteacher and the witnesses after each has spoken.
- The panel may ask questions at any point.
- The complainant is then invited to sum up their complaint.
- The Headteacher is then invited to sum up the schools' actions and responses to the complaint.
- The *Chair of the Complaints Panel* explains that both parties will hear from the panel within the set time scale.
- Both parties leave together while the panel decides on the issues.

This policy was agreed at the full governing body meeting on

Renewal Date:- February 2019

Signed:

Chair of Governors

Date: 8th February 2017