

Children Young People and Families

School Complaints
A Brief Guide for Parents and Carers

Revised Edition Spring 2011

School Complaints

Advice to Parents/Carers about making a complaint

If you have comments or concerns please let your school know. We welcome suggestions for improving our work in schools. We understand a common fear is that the school's relationship with you and your child/children will be affected if you express dissatisfaction. However, we wish to assure you that by having an effective complaints procedure, we would hope to be able to minimise problems and provide the school with helpful information. We would hope to treat complaints as constructive suggestions, which we will use to improve standards and prevent cause for further complaint.

1. What to do first

Many concerns arise from misunderstandings and are best dealt with positively in discussion with the staff at the school. This is best done by speaking with your child's class or form teacher. All staff will make every effort to resolve your concern quickly and informally. They will make sure that they understand what you feel went wrong and they will explain their own actions to you. They will ask what you would like the school to do to put things right. Of course, this does not necessarily mean that in every instance they will agree with your point of view but the response should help both you and the school to understand both viewpoints. It may also prevent a similar problem arising in the future.

2. What to do next

Should you remain dissatisfied with the teacher's initial response, you can make a complaint to the Head Teacher. This is best done in writing or by making an appointment to discuss the problem. You may find it helpful at this stage to have a copy of the full School Complaints Procedure as this explains in detail what procedures should be followed. (This is available from the School Office). The Head Teacher will ask to meet with you for a discussion of the problem and you may take a friend or someone else with you if you wish. The Head Teacher will conduct a full investigation of your complaint and may interview members of staff or pupils involved. You will then receive a written response to your complaint. This will hopefully resolve the matter. However, should you remain dissatisfied, the Head Teacher should give you detail and of ways to take matters further.

3. If you are still unhappy

If you are still not satisfied, you may wish to contact the Chair of Governors and request that they look again at your complaint and the Head Teacher's response. The Chair of Governors will seek to clarify your concerns and undertake their own independent investigation; this may well involve speaking with members of staff and others. Once their investigation has been concluded, you will then receive a written response to your complaint. This will hopefully resolve the matter.

4. Further action

Should you remain dissatisfied with the response from the Chair of Governors, you can ask for your complaint to be referred to a Governing Body Complaints Review Panel. This will comprise a group of three governors from the school who, as far as is possible, have no previous knowledge of the problem and who will therefore be able to give it fresh assessment. You will be invited to attend a meeting and speak to the Panel in person. The full School Complaints procedure explains how these meetings operate.

5. Beyond the school

The Advice and Conciliation Service

Before any action is considered it is essential that you discuss your concerns with the Advice and Conciliation Service. The Advice and Conciliation Service is an impartial Service based within Children and Young People's Services and aims to help all sections of the Service in Sheffield become more responsive to comments, complaints, criticisms and suggestions from parents and carers, young people and other service users. The Advice and Conciliation Officer can be contacted on Sheffield 0114 2053938/2053939.

The Local Government Ombudsman

Complaints about school are almost always settled within school but in exceptional cases it may be possible to refer the problem to the Local Government Ombudsman. The Local Government Ombudsman's remit, has recently been extended to cover internal school management issues. From September 2010 parents in Sheffield can go to the Local Government Ombudsman if they feel they have an unresolved complaint and have suffered injustice as a result of the actions of a governing body. Unless there are exceptional circumstances, the Ombudsman will not deal with a complaint unless the school has had a proper opportunity to consider it and respond.

At any stage the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) can decide whether or not to pursue a complaint. If the decision has been made to pursue a complaint, the parent or pupil will be written to with an explanation of the reasons. If the complaint is to be pursued, the Ombudsman will contact the complainant to confirm their

understanding of the complaint and how it will be investigated. There is an aim to reach a decision as quickly as possible, especially when time is an important factor. Both parties will be kept informed and will have an opportunity to comment on the thinking before a decision has been made. The LGO's prime focus is dealing with complaints about schools is the needs and best interests of the child and their continuing relationship with the school.

Further information is available on the LGO website at www.lgo.org.uk/schools.

The LGO Advice Team can be contacted on **0300 061 0614**, by email at advice@lgo.org.uk, or by post at address PO Box 4771, Coventry, CV4 0EH. Advisers will pass the complaint to a specialist team who will evaluate it and speak to the parent or pupil before deciding how to proceed.

Complaints about academies

Academies operate independently of local authorities. They are not currently within the LGO's jurisdiction. If you have a complaint about an academy which you have been unable to resolve, you should contact the Young People's Learning Agency. Information is available on the website at www.ypla.gov.uk.