



Dover Down Lower School

# Complaints Policy

Adopted Spring 06

Reviewed Spring 18

## **Complaints Policy**

### **Policy Statement**

Our policy is to ensure that any concern raised or complaint received is taken seriously and dealt with ethically, proportionately and promptly. To achieve this, we will put in place effective protocols for dealing with them.

### **Raising Concerns**

At Doverly Down Lower School we are committed to ensuring that every pupil has the opportunity to develop to their full potential. We recognise the importance of promoting liaison and communication with parents/carers to facilitate the development of our pupils.

However, parents/carers may have questions or concerns which they wish to bring to the school's attention.

This policy outlines the way to raise any concerns which any parent/carer may have about their child's school life.

The school will, once a concern or complaint has been made, ensure that a written record is maintained showing details of all contact, including face to face, electronic and conventional mail, and telephone, with names, dates and a note of content.

If the complaint relates to a member of staff, the headteacher may refer the matter to the LADO (Local Authority Designated Officer) for advice.

If the complaint relates to the Headteacher then the parent/carer should write directly to the Chair of Governors.

If the complaint relates to a governor in respect of school business, a contractor working on school premises, or a parent following an incident on school premises, then the headteacher will work with the Chair of Governors to seek a resolution. Advice may be sought from the Local Authority.

Each complaint will be treated as confidential.

## **THE INFORMAL STAGE**

### **The Teacher**

Many concerns may be settled by contacting the child's teacher because they work regularly with the child. The parents/carers can contact them by letter or by arranging an appointment to speak to them. They may be able to give immediate help but they may ask the parent to give them time to find further information.

### **The Headteacher**

If parents/carers wish to take the matter further, they should make an appointment to see the Headteacher. It is helpful to have the relevant information available at the meeting. However, if the parents are not satisfied with the school's response to the concern, they may make a **formal complaint**.

## **THE FORMAL STAGE**

1. The Headteacher will ask the parents for the complaint in writing with their contact address and telephone number.
2. The Headteacher will contact the parents within two school days of receipt of the written complaint to confirm that the complaint has been received.
3. The complaint should be investigated within five school days or as soon as possible after the written complaint has been received. Where the Headteacher identifies that the investigation cannot be completed within five school days due to the complexity of the complaint or due to the absence of key witnesses or information then the parents/carers will be notified in writing within five school days after the written complaint has been received and a revised timescale will be given. The parents/carers may be asked to provide further information.
4. After the investigation has taken place, parents will be invited to a meeting at which the matter will be discussed. This will take place within 15 school days of receiving the original complaint in writing or according to the new timescale that has been issued.
5. Within 5 school days after the meeting, the parents/carers will then receive a written reply to the complaint. The school will also give details of any actions which may be taken.

## **THE CHAIR OF GOVERNORS**

If the parents/carers are not satisfied with the Headteacher's formal reply, they should write to the Chair of Governors (school address) within five school days after receipt of the headteacher's written reply to the complaint to ask for a **Formal Hearing**.

The parents/carers will receive an acknowledgement within five school days of receipt of the written complaint from the Chair of Governors or their nominated person.

The Chair of Governors will organise a meeting of the 'Appeals Committee' as is soon as possible and will ensure that all correspondence and relevant documents are made available to the Committee.

The Chair of the Governors Appeals Committee will establish contact with the parents/carers and inform them of the structure of the meeting, the identity of the Governors who form the Committee and offer a time and date for the hearing.

The complaint should be heard by the Governors Appeals Committee within fifteen school days after receipt of the request for a formal hearing or as soon as possible. Where the Chair identifies that the hearing cannot be heard within fifteen school days due to the complexity of the complaint or due to the absence of key witnesses or information then the parents/carers will be notified in writing with a revised timescale. The parents/carers may be asked to provide further information. The resultant meeting is to resolve the complaint.

The time and date of the meeting will be arranged to suit everyone and the parents/carers may bring a friend with them. The committee's decision will be sent in writing within five school days from the date of the meeting.

### **Vexatious Complainants**

It is important to distinguish between people who make a number of complaints because they really think things have gone wrong, and people who make potentially vexatious complaints.

Complainants can be frustrated and aggrieved and the School will consider the merits of the case rather than the attitude of the complaint. The school's policy on dealing with unreasonably persistent, harassing or abusive complaints is set out in Annex 1.

### **CONCLUSION**

Everyone who is involved in the child's education works together to make sure that the child is happy and supported in their life at school. This policy should make sure that any concerns are sorted out as quickly as possible and that the parents are satisfied with the school's response. Some concerns may be the responsibility of the LA. If this is the case the Headteacher will advise the parents.

### **Development, Approval and review**

The school's policy will be reviewed when:

1. There has been a significant change in staffing or pupil intake.
2. There has been a significant change in guidelines concerning complaints procedure from the LA.

## **Annex 1**

### **Doverly Down Lower School Policy for Handling Unreasonably Persistent, Harassing or Abusive Complainants**

The headteacher and governing body are fully committed to the improvement of our school. We welcome feedback from parents/carers and will always try to resolve any concerns as quickly as possible. There is a procedure for parents to use if they wish to make a formal complaint.

Sometimes, however, parents or carers pursuing complaints or other issues treat staff and others in a way that is unacceptable. Whilst we recognise that some complaints may relate to serious and distressing incidents, we will not accept threatening or harassing behaviour towards any members of the school community.

The aim of this policy is to provide information about our school policy on unreasonably persistent complainants or harassment of staff.

#### **What do we mean by ‘an unreasonably persistent complainant’?**

An unreasonably persistent complainant may be anyone who engages in unreasonable behaviour when making a complaint. This will include persons who pursue complaints in an unreasonable manner.

Unreasonable behaviour may include:

Actions which are

- out of proportion to the nature of the complaint, or
- persistent - even when the complaints procedure has been exhausted, or
- personally harassing, or
- unjustifiably repetitious

An insistence on

- pursuing unjustified complaints and /or
- unrealistic outcomes to justified complaints
- pursuing justifiable complaints in an unreasonable manner (e.g. using abusive or threatening language; or
- making complaints in public or via a social networking site such as Facebook; or
- refusing to attend appointments to discuss the complaint.

## **What is harassment?**

We regard as harassment as the unreasonable pursuit of issues or complaints, particularly if the matter appears to be pursued in a way intended to cause personal distress rather than to seek a resolution.

Behaviour may fall within the scope of this policy if:

- it appears to be deliberately targeted at one or more members of school staff or others, without good cause;
- the way in which a complaint or other issues is pursued (as opposed to the complaint itself) causes undue distress to school staff or others;
- it has a significant and disproportionate adverse effect on the school community.

## **What does the school expect of any person wishing to raise a concern?**

The school expects anyone who wishes to raise concerns with the school to:

- treat all members of the school community with courtesy and respect;
- respect the needs of pupils and staff within the school;
- avoid the use of violence, or threats of violence, towards people or property;
- recognise the time constraints under which members of staff in schools work and allow the school a reasonable time to respond to a complaint;
- follow the school's complaint procedure.

## **Schools responses to unreasonable persistent complaints or harassment**

This policy is intended to be used in conjunction with the school's complaints procedure. Taken together, these documents set out how we will always seek to work with parents, carers and others with a legitimate complaint to resolve a difficulty.

However, in cases of unreasonably persistent complaints or harassment, the school may take some or all of the following steps, as appropriate:

- inform the complainant informally that his/her behaviour is now considered by the school to be unreasonable or unacceptable, and request a changed approach;
- inform the complainant in writing that the school considers his/her behaviour to fall under the terms of the unreasonably Persistent Complaints/Harassment Policy;
- require all future meetings with a member of staff to be conducted with a second person present. In the interests of all parties, notes of these meetings may be taken;
- inform the complainant that, except in emergencies, the school will respond only to written communication and that these may be required to be channelled through the Local Authority.

## **Physical or verbal aggression**

The governing body will not tolerate any form of physical or verbal aggression against members of the school community. If there is evidence of any such aggression the school may:

- ban the individual from entering the school site, with immediate effect;
- request an Anti-Social Behaviour Order (ASBO);
- prosecute under Anti-Harassment legislation.
- call the police to remove the individual from the premises, under powers provided by the Education Act 1996

Legitimate new complaints will always be considered, even if the person making them is (or has been) subject to the Unreasonably Persistent Complaints/Harassment Policy. The school nevertheless reserves the right not to respond to communication from individual's subject to the policy.