

Jan Brzechwa Polish Supplementary School in Hastings and St Leonards-on- Sea



Complaints Procedure

General Principles of Complaints

Dealing with Complaints – Initial concerns

1. Staff need to be clear about the difference between a concern and a complaint. Taking informal concerns seriously at the earliest stage will reduce the numbers that develop into formal complaints.
2. These key messages deal with complaints but the underlying principle is that concerns ought to be handled, if at all possible, without the need for formal procedures. The requirement to have a complaints procedure need not in any way undermine efforts to resolve the concern informally. In most cases the class teacher or the individual delivering the service in the case of extended school provision, will receive the first approach. It would be helpful if staff were able to resolve issues on the spot, including apologising where necessary.

Investigating Complaints

3. At each stage, the person investigating the complaint makes 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 (if unsure or further information is necessary);
 - ✓ clarify what the complainant feels would put things right;
 - ✓ interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish;
 - ✓ conduct the interview with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning;
 - ✓ keep notes of the interview

Time-Limits

4. Complaints need to be considered, and resolved, as quickly and efficiently as possible. An effective complaints procedure will have realistic time limits for each action within each stage. However, where further investigations are necessary, new time limits can be set and the complainant sent details of the new deadline and an explanation for the delay.

The Formal Complaints Procedure

The Stages of Complaints

5. It is in everyone's interest that complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage.
6. At each stage it would be helpful to clarify exactly who will be involved, what will happen, and how long it will take.
7. Three school-based stages are likely to be sufficient for Jan Brzechwa Polish School in Hastings and St Leonards on Sea:

Stage one: complaint heard by staff member (though not the subject of the complaint);

The experience of the first contact between the complainant and the school can be crucial in determining whether the complaint will escalate. To that end, if staff are made aware of the procedures, they know what to do when they receive a complaint.

The member of staff may be more senior but does not have to be. The ability to consider the complaint objectively and impartially is crucial.

Stage two: complaint heard by Principal or complaint heard by the members of the School Committee Management.

The Principal's influence will already have shaped the way complaints are handled in the school. 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 Principal may delegate the task of collating the information to another staff member but not the decision on the action to be taken.

The complainant can give details of the complaint to the member of School Committee Management. This stage could be chosen if complaint is against a member of teaching staff or Principal.

An unsatisfied complainant can always take a complaint to the Stage three. In some difficult circumstances School Committee Management can call the special meeting (Complaints Panel) with the task of resolving the matter.

8. An unsatisfied complainant can always take a complaint to an additional stage: an independent appeal or review by Polish Educational Society (Polska Macierz Szkolna) in London. Unfortunately this organization can not take any disciplinary procedures with regards to the complaint. It can only know the case and be aware that there is some problem to resolve. It can - but it has not to – give some advice to complainant or school staff.

The Remit of the Complaints Panel

- 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

10. There are several points which any person sitting on the Panel needs to remember:
a) It is important that the appeal hearing is independent and impartial and that it is seen to be so.

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 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.

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.

Roles and Responsibilities

The Role of the Chair (the School's Chairperson/Principal or one of School Committee members, as appropriate)

11. The Chair would be the contact point for the complainant and be required to: 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 proceedings; or appoint a Clerk to the meeting to take minutes

The Chair will ensure 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
- 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.
- all parties are notified of the Panel's decision.

Notification of the Panel's Decision

13. The chair of the Panel needs to ensure that the complainant is notified of the panel's decision, in writing, with the Panel's response; this is usually within a set deadline which is publicised in the procedure. The letter needs to explain if there are any further rights of appeal and, if so, to whom they need to be addressed

Checklist for a Panel Hearing

14. The panel needs to take the following points into account:

- a) The hearing is as informal as possible.
- b) Witnesses are only required to attend for the part of the hearing in which they give their evidence.

- c) After introductions, the complainant is invited to explain their complaint, and be followed by their witnesses.
- d) The Principal may question both the complainant and the witnesses after each has spoken.

Managing and Recording Complaints

Recording complaints

15. It would be useful for schools to record the progress of the complaint and the final outcome. A complaint may be made in person, by telephone, or in writing. An example of a complaint written form can be found in Appendix A. At the end of a meeting or telephone call, it would be helpful if the member of staff ensured that the complainant and the School have the same understanding of what was discussed and agreed. A brief note of meetings and telephone calls can be kept and a copy of any written response added to the record.

16. The Principal or School Committee Members will be responsible for the records and hold them centrally

Resolving Complaints

17. At each stage in the procedure the School will want to keep in mind 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:


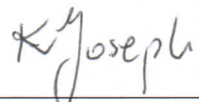
- an apology;
- an explanation;
- an admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better;
- an assurance that the event complained of will not recur;
- an explanation of the steps that have been taken to ensure that it will not happen again;
- an undertaking to review school policies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

Publicising the Procedure

20. There is a legal requirement for the Complaints Procedures to be publicised. It is up to the School Committee Members and Principal to decide how to fulfil this requirement but details of the Complaints Procedures could be form example included in:

- the school prospectus;
- any report/communication from the School Committee Members and staff to parents;
- the information given to new parents when their children join the school;
- an article on the School's website: www.pshastings.co.uk

Adopted 10/01/2015

Aleksandra Janowicz	Chairperson (Principal)	
Karolina Joseph	Secretary	
Anna I. Roby	Treasurer	