

POLICY STATEMENT

The staff at both schools are proud of their positive relationships with the parents/carers of the children, and encourages them to discuss openly any dissatisfaction that may arise with any aspect of each Nursery. If there is a problem, we aim to settle it as quickly as possible for the sake of the child involved. We aim to be fair, open and honest when dealing with any complaint and we aim to resolve any complaint through dialogue, and mutual understanding and, in all cases, we put the interest of the child above all other issues. The Federation has procedures in place in case there are complaints by parents and carers and this policy sets out the procedures that each school follows in such cases.

THE COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

The majority of concerns from parents, carers and others are handled under the following general procedures. The procedure is divided into three stages.

The informal stage aims to resolve the concern through informal contact at the appropriate level in the School.

Stage one is the first formal stage at which written complaints are considered by the Headteacher who has responsibility for dealing with complaints.

Should the complaint be about the Headteacher, the complainant may feel that it is more appropriate to speak to a Parent Governor or the Chair of the Governing Board. The Governor in question will aim to resolve the matter through dialogue with the School, however if the matter is still unresolved, the complainant can then make a formal complaint as outlined below.

Stage two is the next stage, once stage one has been worked through and involves consideration of the complaint by the Chair of the Governing Board.

How each of these stages operates is explained below:

Informal stage – your initial contact with the School

If a parent/carer is concerned about anything to do with the education and care that is being providing at one of the schools, they should arrange to discuss the issue privately with their child's keyworker. Most matters of concern can be dealt with in this way. All keyworkers work very hard to ensure that each child is happy at nursery and is making good progress. They always want to know if there is a problem so that they can take action before the problem affects the child's progress. Where a parent/carer feels that the matter has not been resolved through contact with the keyworker, or that their concern is of a sufficiently serious nature, they should discuss it with the Headteacher. Once the concern is made known to the Headteacher they will make arrangements to see the parent/carer or contact them by telephone to discuss and aim to resolve their concern. The member of staff will discuss any actions that may be taken or any monitoring of the situation, and ensure that this information is clearly communicated to the parent/carer. Once the School has responded to the concern, if

the complainant is still not happy, they will have the opportunity to ask for the matter to be considered further. If they are still dissatisfied with the approach, the concern will become a formal complaint and the School will deal with it at the next stage.

Stage one – formal consideration of a complaint

This stage in the procedure deals with written complaints. It applies when the parent/carer is not happy with the informal approach to dealing with the concern as outlined above.

Written complaints should be addressed to the Headteacher. If, however, the complaint is about the Headteacher, it should be sent to the school marked 'For the attention of the Chair of the Governing Board'. The School will acknowledge receipt of the complaint, in writing, as soon as possible, however it will be within **5 school days** and the School will enclose a copy of the procedures with the acknowledgement for the complainant's information.

The Federation would expect the appropriate School to respond in full within **15 school days** but if this is not possible, they will write to the complainant to explain the reason for the delay and let them know when they hope to make a full response. As part of the consideration process of the complaint, the Headteacher may invite the parent/carer to a meeting to discuss the complaint. If they wish, the complainant can ask someone to accompany them to the meeting. The Headteacher may also be accompanied by a suitable person if they wish. Following the meeting, the Headteacher will, where necessary, talk to witnesses or take statements from those involved. The Headteacher will keep written, signed and dated records of all meetings and telephone conversations and other related documentation.

Once the facts have been established, the School will send a written response to the complainant re. their complaint. The letter will give an explanation of the Headteacher's decision and the reasons for it. If follow up action is needed, the School will indicate what they are proposing to do. The person investigating the complaint may decide that they have done all they can to resolve the complaint in which case, they may use their discretion to close the complaint at that point. Please see the appropriate paragraph for further information about the process. If the parent/carer is dissatisfied with the way in which the School has reached their conclusion, they may wish to proceed to stage two, as described below.

Please note that 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.

Stage two (a) – consideration by the Chair of the Governing Board

If the complaint has already been through stage one and the parent/carer is not happy with the outcome, as a result of the way in which the complaint has been handled by the Headteacher, they can take it further by writing to the Chair of the Governing Board. The Chair will consider the complaint and determine if the complaint is 'general' in which case they shall deal with the matter themselves, or if the complaint should be considered by a panel of Governors. The Chair of the Governing Board will confirm which action will be taken in writing **within 10 school days**.

If the complaint is to be investigated further and dealt with by the Chair of the Governing Board the complainant can expect the matter to be dealt with and the outcome communicated to them within a further **15 school days**.

Stage two (b) – consideration by a panel of Governors

In considering how the complaint has been handled, the Chair of the Governing Board may choose to refer the complaint to a panel of Governors. This will give the parent/carer the opportunity to present their case as to how the complaint has been handled 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 the panel is not to rehear the complaint. The panel is there, however, to review how the complaint has been investigated and to determine whether it has been conducted fairly. The panel is there to establish facts and make recommendations which will reassure the complainant that the School/Headteacher has taken the complaint seriously. The panel of Governors operates according to the following formal procedures:

- The Governing Board will convene a panel of three Governors and will aim to arrange for the panel meeting to take place within **20 school days**
- The complainant will be asked whether they wish to provide any further written documentation in support of their appeal
- The Headteacher will be asked to provide a written report for the panel. The panel can request additional information from other sources if necessary
- The complainant will be informed, at least **5 school days** in advance, of the date, time and place of the meeting. The letter will also explain what will happen at the panel meeting. The complainant may wish to be accompanied to the meeting. The choice of that person is their own, but it is usually best to involve someone in whom you have confidence, but who is not directly connected to the School as they are there to give you support and to speak on your behalf if you so wish
- If it is necessary, in the interest of ratifying the investigative process, relevant witnesses, directly involved in matters raised by you, may be invited to attend
- The Chair of the panel will bear in mind that the formal nature of the meeting may be uncomfortable for the complainant, and therefore do their best to put them at ease. During the meeting, there will be an opportunity for the complainant to explain their case and for the original investigator of the complaint to provide a response. The complainant may ask questions, via the Chair, and can also be questioned, via the Chair. There will also be the opportunity for the complainant and the Headteacher or their representative to make a final statement. The Chair of the panel will also ensure that the meeting is properly minuted. Please note that any decision to share these minutes with the complainant is a matter for the panel's discretion. You do not have an automatic right to see or receive a copy of the minutes as they are the property of the Governing Board. Since such minutes usually name individuals, they are, understandably of a sensitive and, therefore, confidential nature. Normally, the written outcome of the panel meeting, which will be sent directly to the complainant, should provide all of the information that you need.

- In closing the meeting, the Chair of the panel, will explain that the panel will now consider its decision. The panel will consider all the evidence presented and reach a unanimous or majority decision on the case. They may also decide upon any necessary action to be taken which may include a recommendation to the Governing Board that changes are made to school policy or procedures to ensure that a similar case does not arise in the future. Written notice of the outcome will be sent to complainant and the Headteacher **within 5 school days**. The letter will also explain that the complainant is entitled to have the handling of the complaint reviewed by the Secretary of State for Education.

Stage 2(c) - is a formal process and the ultimate recourse at school level

Closure of Complaints

Very occasionally, a school will feel that it needs, regretfully, to close a complaint, where the complainant is still dissatisfied. The Headteacher/Governing Board will do all they can to resolve a complaint against the School, but sometimes it is just not possible to meet all of the complainant's wishes. Sometimes it can be a case of 'agreeing to disagree'.

If a complainant persists in making representations to the School – to the Headteacher, designated Governor, Chair of the Governing Board, the Local Authority or anyone else, this can be extremely time consuming and can detract from the School's responsibility, which is to look after the best interests of the children. For this reason, the Governing Board/Headteacher is entitled to close correspondence (including personal approaches as well as letters and telephone calls) on a complaint where they feel that they have taken all reasonable action to resolve the complaint and that the complaint has exhausted all of the official processes.

In exceptional circumstances, closure may occur before a complaint has reached stage two of the procedures described in the document. This is because a complaint panel takes considerable time and effort to set up and the School must be sure that it is likely to assist the process of investigating the complaint. The Chair of the Governing Board may decide, therefore, that every reasonable action has been undertaken to resolve the complaint and that a complaints panel would not help to move things forward.

Where the complainant has been through the School's internal complaints procedures (with or without recourse to a complaints panel of Governors) and they feel that the Governing Board has acted unreasonably about their concerns, they can write to the Secretary of State for Education. The complainant will need to list the steps that have already been taken and the responses received. For further guidance please write to:

The Secretary of State
Department for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
London
SW1

Please note that we would like to advise parents that unless the School has behaved unreasonably or has not followed their own procedures, there is likely to be little further action that can be taken as Governing Boards are empowered to deal with many issues without reference to either the Local Authority or the Secretary of State. The DfE advise parents that they will not usually consider a complaint if parents have not first followed the School's complaints procedure.