

School Non-Curriculum Complaints Guidance

Introduction

The purpose of this leaflet is to explain how to tell your child's school your views.

The personal approach is always appreciated. Teachers and staff at your child's school value your comments and thoughts. It is particularly helpful if you are able to find time to visit the school to speak to them personally and parents' evenings are usually a good opportunity to do this. It is always best to try to make an appointment where you can sit and talk things through calmly and without interruption. However, sometimes this is just not possible or you might want to tell the school how you feel in a different way, for example by writing to them.

Whichever way you choose to tell the school your views, it is important to remember that co-operation between parents, staff and governors is always in the best interests of the child and will benefit all those concerned with your child's education.

Should I pay a compliment?

Yes, in just the same way that you like to be told when you have done a good job or have worked really hard; the school staff are always pleased to hear that things have gone well and that they are appreciated.

Should I tell the school my concerns?

Yes, schools recognise that parents and carers are important partners in providing a happy, safe environment in which children may learn. All members of staff want to know as soon as possible if you have concerns about your child because everyone benefits from a quick solution to problems and concerns. Once they are aware of your concern, the school can let you know what they can do, and you will be able to work together to solve the problem.

Whom do I contact?

That depends on the particular concern. The class teacher will usually be able to deal with the matter, but more serious problems may require a senior member of staff or the Headteacher.

It is always best to express your concern to the person involved at the earliest possible opportunity. In this way, most problems can be resolved informally by working together with the school.

In all cases the school will take your concerns seriously, but it will be particularly helpful to them if you present concerns in a calm and reasonable manner; mutual courtesy is expected and ensures that things go smoothly.

Will my child's school be able to tell me how complaints are dealt with?

Schools have a duty to make all parents and carers aware of how they can raise concerns. The complaints procedures may be included in any of the following:

- the school prospectus
- the Governor's reports to parents/carers
- the information given to new parents/carers when they join the school
- the home-school agreement
- the home-school newsletter
- a specific complaints leaflet
- the school website

If you are unsure about where the procedures can be found, the school Secretary or your child's class teacher will be able to tell you where to find them.

Can the Complaints Procedure be used for any school-related issue?

The Complaints Procedure will be appropriate for most of the more serious concerns that parents/carers have but there are some specific concerns that are dealt with separately. These include:

- complaints about the National Curriculum
- religious education
- collective worship
- admissions to school
- pupil exclusions
- special educational needs
- child protection

If you are uncertain about the way in which your concerns should be raised, the staff at the school or the Parent Partnership Service can provide information and guidance. Included at the end of this leaflet is a list of contact addresses and telephone numbers, which you may find useful.

Are there any specific procedures that the school must follow when a concern has been raised?

Enfield Local Education Authority (the LEA) provides schools with a model procedure which they can choose to adapt for dealing with complaints which is designed to ensure that the complaints process is consistent and fair to all parents and carers. You will find a flowchart outlining this procedure at the end of this leaflet. Where a school has adopted their own procedures you should refer to their documentation.

It is expected that most complaints will be resolved quickly and informally at **Stage 1** of the complaints procedure usually through the child's class teacher

who will record your concerns and inform the Headteacher or, in a larger school, the nominated Deputy Headteacher. However, if the issue cannot be resolved informally there is a formal complaints procedure that can be followed.

Formal Stage 1 is the first step in the **formal** procedure for dealing with complaints. If you decide to make a formal complaint you should write to the Headteacher explaining your concerns in as much detail as possible. The Headteacher should let you know within three school days that s/he has received your letter.

In some cases it may still be possible to reach an informal resolution and the Headteacher may arrange to meet with you to discuss your concerns. If not, s/he will decide whether it is appropriate to deal with your concerns using the general school complaints procedure or via another route. If another complaints route is more appropriate, for example in the case of an admissions issue, the Headteacher will advise you on what you need to do.

If your complaint involves the Headteacher you can access **Formal Stage 1** in the same way as described by writing to the Chair of Governors with as much detail as possible.

Where the Headteacher carries out the investigation of your concerns s/he will examine the notes taken by your child's class teacher, your written comments and any other relevant information that is available. If necessary s/he may also interview the people involved and take statements from them. When s/he has completed the investigation s/he will write and tell what her/his decision is and what action (if any) will be taken. You should receive this response within ten school days of the school acknowledging your written complaint.

If you are not satisfied with the way your complaint has been treated you can ask for it to be considered by the complaints panel of the school's governing body. This is the..

Formal Stage 2 at this stage the complaints panel will meet to hear the case. Both sides will be asked to submit a written statement. You will be invited to the hearing so that you can present your point of view. You may, if you wish, bring a friend or representative who can act for you.

The panel's decision will be sent in writing to both parties.

Very few concerns will extend to **Formal Stage 2** of the procedure, but for those that do there is a Complaint Form, available from your child's school, which should be completed and sent to the Chair of Governors of the school together with any relevant documents and information. You should receive acknowledgement of the receipt of your complaint within five school days.

The Chair of Governors will ask the Clerk to the Governing Body to make arrangements for a Complaints Panel Hearing. This Panel will consist of three to five Governors, one of whom will be elected to chair the Panel.

The clerk of the Complaints Panel will act as your contact point with the Panel and s/he will ensure that all the Panel members receive the relevant documents relating to your complaint and set a date for the hearing of your complaint. Within five school days of the hearing the Clerk will let you know, in writing, of the Panel's decision and what action (if any) needs to be taken.

If you feel that the Governors Complaints Panel did not handle your complaint fairly and in accordance with the school's complaints procedures, you are entitled to go to **Review Stage** of the Complaints Procedure.

Review Stage of the complaints procedure involves the Local Education Authority and can only be used in the event that previous stages have been followed and exhausted.

The LEA will not investigate your original complaint, but they will review the way in which the Governing Body dealt with your complaint.

If you decide to go to Review Stage you should send your written complaint to:

Education Welfare Service
London Borough of Enfield
Education Group
PO Box 56
Civic Centre
Silver Street
ENFIELD
EN1 3XQ
Tel: 020 8379 3341/ 020 8379 3336

Your complaint to the LEA should include:

- details of your original complaint
- the decision and recommendations (if any) of the Governors' Complaints Panel
- reasons why you believe that your original complaint was not dealt with fairly and in accordance with the school's complaints procedures
- what you would like to see happen

The LEA will acknowledge the receipt of your complaint within 5 working days.

The LEA will ask for and review all the relevant paperwork relating to your complaint. In some circumstances the LEA may also meet with you, the Headteacher or Chair of Governors. The LEA will write to you, the school and

the Governing Body within 20 working days of receiving your complaint, giving their findings and making recommendations (if any) of future action by the school.

Do the people dealing with my complaint have to keep to the set time limits?

At all stages of the complaints process those dealing with your concerns should keep within the set time limits and aim to consider and resolve your concerns as quickly as possible. However, on rare occasions there may be exceptional circumstances that result in the time limits not being met. If this should happen, new time limits should be set and you should be given details of this together with an explanation of why the delay has occurred.

Is there a time limit for making a complaint?

You should always try to deal with any issues that cause concern as quickly as possible. A complaint will normally be considered as 'out of time' if you raise it more than three months after the problem is known to be a cause for complaint. This time limit will usually be stated in the school's Complaints Policy.

What should I do if I am not sure about raising my concerns with the school?

If you would like more details on any of the stages of the complaints procedure you can contact your child's school or Education Welfare Service on 020 8379 3341.