



Coppice School

Ash Hill Road

Hatfield

Doncaster

DN7 6JH

Tel 01302 844883

Complaints Policy and Procedures

*At Coppice
School we all...*

Communicate
to help us to
shape our
future

Open doors
to exciting
opportunities

Practise the
skills important
for life

Promote
friendships and
care for each
other

Include
everybody
Celebrate our
individuality
and
independence

Enjoy and excel

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(Headteacher)	
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COPPICE SCHOOL

GENERAL COMPLAINTS POLICY AND PROCEDURE

We strive to provide a good education for all our children. The Headteacher and staff work very hard to build positive relationships with all parents and carers. However, it is important that the school has procedures in place through which parents and carers of pupils registered at the school, can exercise their right to complain about aspects of the school's policy or practice, if they have concerns which have not been resolved through the normal channels of communication. This policy sets out the procedures which the school follows in such cases.

This policy does not cover complaints about;

- the curriculum and related matters;
- admissions or exclusions;
- staff grievance procedures;
- child protection matters;
- assessment of special educational needs.

These areas have their own specific complaints procedures.

If any parents or carers are unhappy with the education that their child is receiving, or have any concerns relating to the school, we encourage them to talk to the child's class teacher immediately. We always seek to resolve any concerns as quickly as possible, in the best interests of the child. In the vast majority of such cases, issues can be resolved to the satisfaction of parents and carers without recourse to formal procedures.

General Principles for dealing with concerns and complaints from parents and carers.

This General Complaints Procedure will:

- acknowledge the difference between a **concern** and a **complaint**;
- ensure complaints or concerns are dealt with **informally** wherever possible;
- ensure complaints or concerns are dealt with **seriously**, as **quickly** as possible and **in confidence**;
- be **publicised** and **straightforward** to use and understand (see guidance notes);
- be **impartial** and **non-adversarial**;
- ensure **full** and **fair** investigation, by an independent person where necessary;
- respect people's desire for **confidentiality**;
- provide an **effective response** and **appropriate redress** where necessary;
- provide **information** to the school's Management Team and Governors so that operations and procedures can be improved.

The Complaints Procedure

Stage One: complaint heard by member of staff;

Stage Two: complaint heard by Headteacher;

Stage Three: complaint heard by Governing Body's Complaints Committee.

An unsatisfied complainant can always take a complaint to the next stage and if necessary could go to the Local Authority to request mediation or to the Secretary of State, if they still feel that their complaint has not been properly addressed. Parents may also contact Ofsted.

STAGE ONE:

The First Contact

School Guidelines for dealing with concerns and complaints informally.

The vast majority of complaints can be resolved informally. There are many occasions where concerns are resolved straight away through the class teacher or school secretary or the Headteacher, depending on whom the parent first approached.

Parents must be able to feel comfortable in raising concerns with members of staff without any formality, either in person, by telephone or in writing. On occasion it may be appropriate for someone to act on behalf of a parent.

If a parent is concerned about anything to do with the education that we are providing at our school, they should, in the first instance, discuss the matter with their child's class teacher. In our experience, most matters of concern can be resolved positively in this way. Our teachers work to ensure that each child is happy at school, and are making good progress; they naturally want to know if there is a problem, so that they can take action before it seriously affects the child's progress.

Where parents or carers feel that a situation has not been resolved through contact with the class teacher, or that their concern is of a sufficiently serious nature, they should make an appointment to discuss it with the Headteacher. The Headteacher considers any such complaint very seriously, and investigates each case thoroughly. Most complaints are normally resolved by this stage. (This is stage 1 and is the informal stage in the procedure.) Members of staff will endeavour to resolve any concerns as soon as possible.

If the nature of the complaint is contentious then the complaint will be referred to the Headteacher immediately.

If a complaint is made about a member of staff then this will be referred to the Headteacher immediately.

If the concern or complaint cannot be satisfactorily resolved at this stage then the parent/carer will be referred to the Headteacher whether the complaint is expressed verbally or in writing.

STAGE TWO: Referral to the Headteacher for investigation.

Some concerns and complaints will come straight to the Headteacher verbally or written and they will be resolved informally wherever possible.

If a Governor is approached by a parent with a concern or complaint then this will be forwarded to the Headteacher and/or the Chair of Governors if the processes in stage one have been followed.

At this stage the Chair of Governors may be informed by the Headteacher and a copy of relevant documents shared.

Written complaints will be acknowledged in writing within five working days of receipt giving a date by which a response will be made. The response will be normally given within ten working days - if this is impossible then a letter will be sent explaining the delay and giving a revised date of response.

The Headteacher will carry out an investigation of the circumstances surrounding the complaint which might involve interviewing pupils and/or staff.

A record of interviews, statements, telephone conversations and other documentation will be kept.

The Headteacher will give a written response that will include a full explanation of the decision and the reasons behind it. Where appropriate, this will include what action the school will take to resolve the complaint. The complainant will be advised that if they wish to take the complaint any further, they should write to the Chair of Governors via the school within two weeks of receiving the Headteacher's response.

STAGE THREE: The Last School Stage.

Complaint Heard by the Complaints Appeal Committee of the Board of Governors.

Members of the governing body who are approached informally by a parent or carer with a complaint about the school will always refer the parent back to the Headteacher or an appropriate member of the school staff. Only when such steps at stages 1 and 2 have been followed and the parent remains dissatisfied should the complaint be taken forward to the governing body. This must be made in writing, stating the nature of the complaint, and how the school has handled it so far. The parent should send this written complaint to the Chair of Governors via the school office.

The Chair of Governors or another nominated governor will investigate the issue to ensure that stages 1 and 2 of the process have been followed and that the school has responded properly to the complaint at the informal stage.

If the complainant is still not satisfied, a panel of two or three governors will be convened to hear the complaint and make a final decision about it on behalf of the governing body. The governors appointed to the panel should have had no previous involvement in the complaint.

The primary function of the complaints panel is to decide on the merits or otherwise of the complaint. However, the panel will also play an important role in attempting to resolve the complaint. The panel should reach a decision on whether the complaint is upheld or rejected and may call for certain action to be taken by the school or the parents.

The panel should invite written evidence from the complainant and the Headteacher on the complaint and the action taken to resolve it. Any written evidence should be circulated to all parties before hearing itself is as follows:

- Introduction by the chair of the panel
- Complainant makes statement of complaint and outcome sought
- Questions to complainant by panel and Headteacher
- All parties hear and question any witnesses called by complainant
- Headteacher makes statement
- Questions to Headteacher by panel and complainant
- All parties hear and question any witnesses called by Headteacher
- Complainant makes final statement
- Headteacher makes final statement
- Panel withdraws and reaches decision.

It is best practice to have these meetings minuted and recorded. Care will be taken in identifying a clerk. It may be appropriate for a member of staff such as the school secretary to act as clerk, although consideration will be given to the sensitivity of the particular complaint. It is not appropriate for a governor to act as clerk. Both the complainant and the Headteacher are entitled to be accompanied by a friend who can speak on their behalf if necessary.

The decision reached by the panel will be notified to the complainant and the Headteacher in writing. The panel will consult Local Authority and School policies, seeking further relevant information or advice where appropriate, prior to discussing the outcome with the Headteacher and subsequently informing the complainant. It should also be reported back to the next meeting of the full governing body. Only a brief summary should be provided with no detailed or named information; this will ensure that any further actions will not be jeopardised.

Local Authority Role

The Local Authority has no power to investigate complaints about general matters that are the responsibility of the governing body. If parents approach the LA with a complaint about a school, they will be advised to contact and to follow the school's complaints procedure.

If the complainant is not satisfied by the school's procedures, there is no right of appeal to the LA. However, the LA can play a useful role in mediating between the parties and helping to reach a mutual understanding or agreement. It is for each governing body to decide whether or not the LA should have a role within their general procedures.

Independent Review

If the complainant remains dissatisfied with the response by the Governing Body, he or she would have the right to refer the matter to the Secretary of State for Education on the grounds that the governing body had failed to discharge a statutory duty or that the governing body had acted, or was proposing to act, unreasonably. This could lead to the issuing of a direction against the governing body.

The Local Government Ombudsman can only consider complaints about school governing bodies that relate to admissions. If the matter is not concerned with admissions, it would not be appropriate to direct a complainant to the Ombudsman.

Managing and Recording complaints

The Headteacher is responsible for logging complaints and keeping a record of progress and outcomes.

Class teachers will keep notes of significant conversations, telephone calls or letters from parents/carers which are concerns rather than complaints. All complaints will be logged and notes kept centrally, by the Headteacher.

Governing Body Review of Complaints

This is a regular item on Governors' Meetings Agendas and gives the Board the opportunity to monitor the level and nature of complaints and review the outcomes on a regular basis. This will ensure the effectiveness of the Complaints Policy and make changes where necessary. Complaints information shared with the whole Board will not name individuals.

Publicising the Procedure

There is a legal requirement for the Complaints Procedure to be publicised. The Complaints Procedure will be published on the school's website.

COPPICE SCHOOL
CONCERNS AND COMPLAINTS ABOUT SCHOOL
Guidance notes for parents

If you have a concern or complaint

We would like you to tell us about it. We welcome suggestions for improving our work in the school. Be assured that no matter what you want to tell us, our support and respect for you and your child in the school will not be affected in any way. Please tell us of your concern as soon as possible. It is difficult for us to investigate properly an incident or problem that has happened some time ago.

What to do first

Most concerns and complaints can be sorted out quickly by speaking with your child's class teacher. If you have a complaint that you feel should be looked at by the Headteacher in the first instance you can contact the Head straightaway if you prefer. It is usually best to discuss the problem face to face. You may need an appointment to do this, and can make one by ringing or calling in to the school office. You can take a friend or relation to the appointment with you if you would like.

All staff will make every effort to resolve your problem informally. They will make sure that they understand what you feel has gone 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 mean that in every case they will come round to your point of view but it will help both you and the school to understand both sides of the question. It may also help to prevent a similar problem arising again. If the member of staff is unable to resolve your problem you will be referred to the Headteacher.

What to do next

If you are dissatisfied with the member of staff's response you can make an informal complaint to the Headteacher. This can be made verbally or in writing.

The Headteacher will ask to meet you for a discussion of the problem. Again you may take a friend or someone else with you if you wish. The Headteacher will conduct a full investigation of the complaint and may interview members of staff or pupils involved. You will receive a written or verbal response to your complaint.

If your complaint is about an action of the Headteacher personally, then you should refer it to the Chair of Governors in writing via the school office.

If you are still unhappy

The problem will normally be solved by this stage. However, if you are still not satisfied you may wish to write to the Chair of the governing body to ask for referral of your complaint to a Governors' Complaints Panel. It will then be heard by a group of two or three governors who have no previous knowledge of the problem and so will be able to give it a fresh assessment. You will be invited to attend and speak to the panel at a meeting that the Headteacher will also attend. The General Complaints Procedures statement explains how these meetings operate.

Further action

Complaints about school problems are almost always settled within schools but in exceptional cases it may be possible to refer the problem to an outside body such as the Local Authority or the Secretary of State for Education or Ofsted.