



COMPLAINTS POLICY 2008 v2

Context

Why have a complaints procedure?

- To show parents that the School cares about what they think
- To contribute towards School improvement. Underlying issues may emerge from a complaint, so monitoring and reviewing complaints can be a useful tool in evaluating the effectiveness of our procedures
- To inform good practice for responding to parents concerns
- To prevent bad feeling developing if a problem remains unresolved
- To prevent complaints becoming protracted especially where a complainant tries to reopen the same issue
- To protect all sides of a dispute by providing a fair hearing

Status	Non Statutory
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Purpose

An effective complaints procedure will:

- encourage resolution of problems by informal means wherever possible
- be easily accessible and publicised
- be simple to understand and use
- be impartial
- be non-adversarial
- entail swift handling with established time-limits for action and keeping people informed of the progress
- ensure a full and fair investigation by an independent person where necessary
- respect people's desire for confidentiality
- address all the points at issue and provide an effective response and appropriate redress, where necessary
- provide information to the School's leadership so that services can be improved

Consultation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Governors, Staff, Students and Parents
Relationship to other policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •
Relationship to standard operating procedures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dealing with complaints

Role	Responsibility
Governors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure structures are in place to support the effective implementation of this policy • Regularly monitor and review the effectiveness of this policy • Manage Stage 3 complaints according to the procedure
Headteacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure wide consultation for the inception of this policy • Ensure structures are in place to support the effective implementation of this policy • Manage Stage 2 complaints according to the procedure
All staff with management responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manage Stage 1 complaints according to the procedure
Headteacher's PA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Act as complaints officer for all general complaints • Maintain complaints record
Parents and members of community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow complaints procedure as described in 'What to do if you have a concern or complaint about Ratton School'

Arrangements for Monitoring and Evaluation

Section 2 of the School Self-Evaluation Form

Date established by Governing body:	
Date for full implementation:	
Date of review:	

ANNEXES

Other Useful Information

- 'What to do if you have a concern about Ratton School'
- 'Who to Contact at Ratton School Regarding Stage 1 Concerns or Complaints'
- 'Managing Complaints'

Standard Operating Procedure for Dealing with Complaints (Stage 1)

Objectives

- To show parents that the school cares about what they think
- To contribute towards school improvement
- To inform good practice for responding to parents concerns
- To prevent bad feeling developing if a problem remains unresolved
- To prevent complaints becoming protracted especially where a complainant tries to reopen the same issue
- To protect all sides of a dispute by providing a fair hearing

Scope

Complaints and concerns received from outside school
Stage 1 Complaints

Procedure

Complaint	How	When
All complaints, unless received directly by a Manager, should be referred to the Head's PA (Complaints Officer)		
Ensure that this is a Stage 1 complaint - if not, refer on to Head's PA (if not already done)	By reference to 'What to do if you have a concern about Ratton School'	Within 1 day of complaint
Decide who should be dealing with the complaint	By reference to 'Who to contact at Ratton School regarding Stage 1 Concerns or Complaints'	
Inform complainant of name of person who will be dealing with their complaint, and provide person dealing with complaint of brief outline of the nature of the complaint		
Person dealing with complaint to hear and attempt to resolve complaint	By reference to guidance on 'Managing Complaints'	Within 5 days of complaint
If unable to resolve complaint refer on to Headteacher	By completing a Complaint Form for the attention of the Headteacher	
<u>IF COMPLAINANT IS, OR BECOMES, AGGRESSIVE BRING THE CONVERSATION TO AN END AND ADVISE THEM THAT YOU WILL REFER THEIR COMPLAINT ON TO THE HEADTEACHER</u>		

Other Useful Information

‘What to do if you have a concern about Ratton School’

‘Who to contact at Ratton School regarding Stage 1 Concerns or Complaints’

‘Managing Complaints’

Process for Monitoring Evaluation and Review

- Complaints reviewed as part of Section 2 of the School Self Evaluation Form
 - To be reviewed as required, but at least bi-annually
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Author	Headteacher	Date	December 2007
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What to do if you have a concern or complaint about Ratton School



We care about what you think.

At Ratton, we make many decisions every day. We try hard to do our best for all our students. Your views help us plan. We like to know when things are going well. We also want parents to tell us about their worries, concerns or complaints as soon as possible. It is much easier for us to sort out a recent problem than something that happened some time ago.

If you are unhappy with the treatment of your child, or any of our actions or lack of action, please feel able to tell us your concern. We know it can be difficult to question what a School is doing, but if you do not tell us what is worrying you, we cannot explain our actions or put things right. Our support and respect for you and your child will not lessen in any way.

Our promise to you.

- We will deal with your concern or complaint honestly, politely and in confidence.
- It will be looked into thoroughly, fairly and as quickly as possible.
- We will keep you up to date with what we are doing.
- We will apologise if we have made a mistake.
- We will tell you what we are going to do to put things right.

This complaints procedure is for general complaints. We must follow other procedures for complaints or appeals about the curriculum; special educational needs provision, exclusions and admissions. Staff disciplinary action, child protection issues or criminal investigation are also handled differently. We shall tell you which the right process is when you discuss your concern with us. Our complaints procedure has four stages.

Stage 1 of the process is informal:

If you have a concern about the School, try to talk to someone at the School, preferably the person who is most closely involved. Your concern can usually be settled quickly and without fuss by contacting the right person in the School. See "Who to Contact at Ratton School Regarding Stage 1 concerns or complaints"

If your concern cannot be sorted out in this way or you are not happy with the way it has been dealt with you should take it to stage 2.

The issue is referred to the Headteacher for investigation, usually by the complainant writing to the Headteacher. If your complaint is about the Headteacher you can complain directly to the Chair of Governors (see Stage 3). Any complaint received by the Headteacher under this process, will be acknowledged within 5 school days with a full written response within 15 school days.

If your complaint has still not been resolved to your satisfaction, you may take it to stage 3.

You can complain in writing to the Chair of Governors care of the School. You should make it clear why you are complaining, whom you have already spoken to and what you want to happen as a result of your complaint. The Chair of Governors will let you know that he or she has received your complaint within 7 School days and will then investigate it. You will be told about the outcome of the Chair of Governors' investigation in writing within 20 School days. At this stage the LEA's governor support team should be informed that the governing body is dealing with a complaint at this level.

If you are still not satisfied after receiving the Chair of Governor's report, you can ask to have your complaint referred to a complaints committee of the Governing Body at stage 4.

You can write to the Clerk of the Governors, care of the School. You should say exactly why you are unhappy with the Chair of Governors' findings and ask that a complaints committee be set up to look at the complaint.

What you can do if you are still not satisfied with the Governing Body's decision.

You may believe that your complaint was not handled fairly according to the School's own complaints procedure. In this case, you can ask the local education authority to investigate:

You can write to the Children's Services complaints officer at this address.

Children's Services,
East Sussex County Council
PO Box 4,
County Hall
St Anne's Crescent
Lewes
East Sussex
BN7 1SG

The LEA has limited powers to investigate internal school matters but it does retain a responsibility to ensure that governors have acted properly in the exercise of their functions. You should explain your complaint and say why you think Ratton did not follow its complaints procedure properly. Wherever possible you should give evidence for why you think this. The Authorities complaints officer will let you know that he has received your letter within 10 working days. The complaints officer will look at your evidence and then

decide if there should be an investigation. Until Ratton has finished considering your complaint, nothing can be done. This stage does not represent a general right of appeal and the LEA cannot carry out an investigation solely because the complainant disagrees with the decision of the governing body. The LEA can only investigate inappropriate procedure; it is not able to re-investigate the original complaint nor can it intervene to overturn the governing body's decision. If it is concluded that Ratton did not follow its procedures properly the matter will be referred back to the chair of the governing body. The governing body should then re-investigate the complaint.

If you believe that the Children's Services Authority has acted unreasonably, you may appeal to the Secretary of State for Education and Skills;

The Secretary of State for Education and Skills
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BT

The Secretary of State could step in if a Governing Body or CSA had not carried out its legal duty or had acted unreasonably. The Secretary of State would not do anything until Ratton and CSA had finished looking into the complaint.

If you feel that there has been a fault in the way your complaint has been dealt with, you can take this to the Local Government Ombudsman;

The Local Government Ombudsman
21 Queens Anne's Gate
London SW1H 9BU

The Ombudsman will only investigate where there has been a fault in the way the process was handled by Ratton or CSA. Complaints about how something has been done can be investigated. This could be giving the wrong information, not dealing with letters or taking too long to do something. What has been done just because someone does not agree with the result cannot be questioned. The Ombudsman cannot investigate how Ratton is run. The Ombudsman could not do anything until Ratton and the CSA have finished looking into your complaint.



Who to Contact at Ratton School Regarding Stage 1 Concerns or Complaints

If you have a concern regarding progress in a specific subject then your first point of contact should be the subject teacher. If you do not regard it as appropriate for the subject teacher to deal with your concern then you can contact the Curriculum Leader.

Subject(s)	Curriculum Leader	Subject(s)	Curriculum Leader
Art	Mrs J Sula	ICT KS3	Mr N Avard
Citizenship/PSHE	Mr M Pickup/ Mr D Fox	ICT KS4	Mr M Bristow
Dance	Ms A Duncan	Mathematics KS3	Miss S Blyth
Drama	Mr N Stocker	Mathematics KS4	Mr G Edwards
English KS3	Mr P Lennon	Media Studies	Ms S Parker
English KS4	Mr D Fox	Music	Ms N Smith/ Mr D Cane-Hardy
Food Tech/Textiles	Mrs R Clemerson	Physical Education	Mr J Chaundy
French	Mrs M Woods	Science KS3	Mr T Dunn
Geography	Miss S Bax	Science KS4	Miss K Wells
German	Miss C Dean	Vocational	Mrs C Clarke
Graphics/ Resistant Materials	Mr R Fenwick	Experience	
History	Mrs R Vinson	Special Educational Needs	Mrs S Lock
Religious Education	Ms G Bryden		

If you have a concern regarding your child's welfare the first point of contact is his/her Form Tutor. Form tutors have the best overall knowledge of your child and will either be able to deal with your concern directly or pass the matter on to the appropriate person.

Our Care and Guidance Managers can also be contacted regarding welfare and behaviour issues -

Mrs Pierce Lyric and Adelphi Communities
Mrs Jones Lyceum and Apollo Communities
Mrs Huggins Globe Community

The following Learning Leaders also have a direct responsibility for your child's academic progress and can be contacted if you do not think it is appropriate for your child's Form Tutor to deal with your concern -

Adelphi Community	Mrs C Sugden
Apollo Community	Mr G Kingham
Globe Community	Ms N Smith
Lyceum Community	Mrs C Rampley
Lyric Community	Mrs S Lock

If you do not think it appropriate for the Learning Leader to deal with your concern the following Senior Managers also have a direct responsibility for your child's welfare -

Year 7	Mr R Stanley
Years 8/9	Mrs E Fitzpatrick
Years 10-11	Mrs S Louis (acting)

Mrs A Wardle (Deputy Head) should be contacted regarding any broader issues relating to learning and teaching.

Managing Complaints

Guidelines for investigating complaints.

- 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

If the complaint is found to be justified, it might be sufficient for Schools to acknowledge that the complaint is valid in whole or in part. Admitting that the School could have handled the situation better is not the same as an admission of negligence. It would be useful if complainants were encouraged to state what actions they feel might resolve the problem at any stage. One or more of the following, for example, may be an appropriate remedy:

- 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

How to listen to complaints

As soon as you realise that you are listening to a complaint, remember these points:

Don't pass the buck.

Try not to keep transferring an angry person from one place to another. Make sure you know the contact person for anything you cannot deal with yourself.

Don't be flippant.

First impressions count. You and the School may be judged on your immediate reaction.

Treat all complaints seriously.

However small or trivial it may seem to you, the complaint will be an important problem for anyone who takes the trouble to complain.

Be open-minded.

Set aside any prejudices about the complainant or the issue raised and listen in an open-minded way.

Be courteous and patient.

Be sympathetic and helpful, but do not blame other colleagues.

Say who you are.

If you are unknown to the person, introduce yourself.

Ask for their name and use it.

Anonymous complaints are difficult to resolve.

Take time to find out exactly what the problem is.

It is easy for someone to forget to tell you an important detail, particularly if they are upset or annoyed.

Don't take the complaint personally.

To an angry person or upset person, YOU are the School and the only one they can put their feelings to right now.

Stay calm and cool.

Do not argue with the person - be polite and try to find out exactly what the person thinks is going wrong or has gone wrong.

Check you are being understood.

Make sure that the person understands what you are saying. Don't use jargon; it can confuse or annoy someone 'not in the know'.

Don't rush.

Take your time. Let people have their say and let off steam if they need to. Listen carefully and sympathetically to their problems before replying and attempting to find a solution or offer a next step.

Governing Body Complaints Appeals

The Governing Body nominates a number of members with delegated powers to hear complaints and set out its terms of reference. These include:

- Drawing up its procedures
- Hearing individual appeals
- Making recommendations on the policy as a results of complaints

The procedure adopted by the panel for hearing appeals is part of the School's complaints procedure. The panel is drawn from the nominated members and may consist of three people. The panel will choose its own Chair.

Remit of the complaints appeal panel.

The panel can:

- 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

There are several points that any governor sitting on a complaints panel needs to remember:

- It is important that the appeal hearing is independent and impartial and that it is seen to be so. No governor may sit on the panel if they have had a prior involvement in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it. In deciding the make-up of the panel, governors need to try to ensure that it includes a cross-section of the categories of governor and is sensitive to the issues of race, gender and religious affiliation.
- 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 that will satisfy the complainant that his or her complaint has been taken seriously.
- 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. The layout of the room will set the tone and care is needed to ensure this is informal and not adversarial.
- 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.

- The governors sitting on the panel need to be aware of the complaints procedure plus any relevant policy.

Roles and responsibilities.

The Clerk.

The clerk 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.
- Notify all parties of the panel's decision.

The Chair of the panel.

The Chair of the panel has a key role, ensuring 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 rules of natural justice are followed.
- The complainant is notified of the panel's decision, in writing with details of any further rights of appeal.



COMPLAINT RECORD FOR COMPLAINTS PROGRESSING FROM STAGE 1 TO STAGE 2

To be completed by person dealing with complaint and copy given to the Headteacher's PA

Person hearing complaint	
Complainant's details	
Brief description of complaint (Please attach any letter or other evidence)	
Brief description of outcome - action taken and whether resolved. (Please attach any letter or other evidence)	
Recommendations for any further action, if any. (Please ensure interested parties are informed)	



Complaint Form

Please complete and return to the Headteacher's PA who will explain what action will be taken.

Your name:	
Pupil's name:	
Your relationship to the pupil:	
Address:	
Daytime telephone number:	
Evening telephone number:	
E-mail address:	
Please give details of your complaint:	
What action, if any have you already taken to try to resolve your complaint? (Who did you speak to and what was the response?)	
What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?	
Signature:	Date:
Official use:	
Date acknowledgement sent:	
By whom:	
Complaint referred to:	Date:

