



Prettygate Infant and Junior School **Complaints Policy and Procedures**

Introduction

All schools have a duty to have a complaints procedure and to publicise it.

This procedure for Prettygate Infant and Junior School was based on DfE guidance, and approved by the Headteacher and Chair of Governors in consultation with governors, including parent governors and staff.

Complaints procedures should not be used for appeals or referrals that fall under other procedures and legislation and which are covered by other guidance including:

- Admissions
- Exclusions
- Special Educational Needs
- Staff Grievances
- Child Protection
- Whistleblowing

Compliments

These are always welcome and very encouraging to teachers and staff. The school encourages feedback or opinions from pupils and parents. It may not always be possible to act immediately but pupils and the school always benefit so please don't hold back.

Concerns

It is natural that parents may, occasionally, be concerned about an aspect of their child's education or welfare at school. This could include issues concerning the school's approach to aspects of the curriculum, homework, behavioural problems or any other issue.

The school welcomes enquiries from parents about any matter. Teachers and staff will explain the school practices, policies, and how they affect the pupils. The vast majority of concerns will be handled by the class teacher or by the subject co-ordinator if this is more helpful. If in doubt, keep asking until you are completely satisfied as all staff are eager to help.

The usual format is to speak to the child's class teacher in the first instance, or to contact the school office to arrange an appointment to discuss your concern with whoever you wish. At all times the staff will help to resolve a problem. If occasionally parents feel they must state their concern formally, this too is not a problem. The school has defined procedures for handling complaints so don't be embarrassed if you feel an issue warrants more attention.

Complaints

The procedure is again to speak to the child's class teacher in the first instance, or contact the school office to arrange an appointment to discuss your complaint with whoever you wish.

The school's policy is to follow this document when handling concerns and complaints. Just ask if you would like further advice or a copy. It would be unusual to deviate from these procedures but the school always retains discretion in these matters.

Raising a concern or complaint

Informal stage

Concerns can be raised by contacting a child's classteacher or the Headteacher. This should be by letter, or by telephone or email via the school office or in person by appointment. Many concerns can be resolved by simple clarification or the provision of information and it is anticipated that most complaints will be resolved at this informal stage. If your complaint remains unresolved, it should be raised with the Headteacher (or to the Chair of Governors, if the complaint is about the Headteacher) to investigate and respond to you.

In the case of serious concerns it may be appropriate to address them directly to the Headteacher (or to the Chair of Governors, if the complaint is about the Headteacher).

The school will endeavour to give prompt feedback (usually within 7 days) in response to any complaint received. If you are uncertain about who to contact, please seek advice from the school office or the Clerk to the governing body.

Formal Stage

If your concern or complaint is not resolved at the informal stage you must put the complaint in writing and pass it to the Headteacher (or the Clerk to the governing body, for the attention of the Chair, if the complaint is about the Headteacher) who will be responsible for ensuring that it is investigated appropriately.

You should include details which might assist the investigation, such as names of potential witnesses, dates and times of events, and copies of relevant documents. You may choose to use the Formal Complaints Form in Appendix A.

It is very important that you include a clear statement of the actions that you would like the school to take to resolve your concern. Without this, it is much more difficult to proceed.

Please pass the completed paperwork, in a sealed envelope to the Headteacher or to the Clerk to the governing body, as appropriate.

The Headteacher (or Chair) may invite you to a meeting to clarify your concerns and to seek an informal resolution. If you accept that invitation, you may be accompanied, by a friend (not a member of the legal profession or the media) if you wish, to assist you in explaining the nature of your concerns.

It is possible that your complaint will be resolved through a meeting with the Headteacher (or Chair). If not arrangements will be made for the matter to be fully investigated, using the appropriate procedure. In any case you should learn in writing, usually within 10 working days of the school receiving your formal complaint, how the school intends to proceed. This notification should include an indication of the anticipated timescale.

Any investigation will begin as soon as possible and when it has been concluded, you will be informed in writing of its conclusion.

If you are not happy with the response provided by the Headteacher (or Chair of Governors) the complaint can be referred to the governing body for review. Any such request must be made in writing to the Clerk to the governing body, within 10 school days of receiving notice of the outcome, and include a statement specifying any perceived failures to follow the procedure. The procedure described below will be followed.

Review Process

Any review of the process followed by the school or of the investigation of the complaint will be conducted by a panel of 3 members of the governing body. This will usually take place within 10 school days of receipt of your request.

The review will normally be conducted through a consideration of written submissions, but reasonable requests to make oral representations should be considered sympathetically.

The panel will first receive written evidence from the complainant.

The panel will then invite representatives of the school (usually the Headteacher or the Chair of the governing body panel that has considered the matter), as appropriate, to make a response to the complaint.

The panel may also have access to the records kept of the process followed.

You, and the school representative(s), will be informed in writing of the outcome, usually within 5 school days of the panel meeting.

For most complaints the decision of the governors is the last step in the procedure.

The Secretary of State

If you are not satisfied with the response from the governing body you can contact the Secretary of State for Education via the DFE Helpline on 0370 000 2288 or write to

The Secretary of State
Department for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
LONDON
SW1P 3BT

You should enclose a copy of any correspondence with the school or governing body.

Formal Complaints Form

Please complete and return to the Headteacher (or Clerk to the governing body as appropriate), who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken	
Your Name:	
Pupil's Name:	
Your relationship to the pupil:	
Address:	
Postcode:	
Daytime telephone number:	
Evening telephone number:	
Please give details of your complaint here:	
What actions, if any have you taken to try and resolve your complaint?	
What actions do you feel might resolve the problem?	
Are you attaching any paperwork?	
For office use only	
Date acknowledgement sent:	
By whom:	
Complaint referred to:	
Date:	

ANNEX TO COMPLAINTS POLICY

Policy for dealing with Unreasonably Persistent Complaints, Harassment or Aggression

The Headteacher and staff deal with specific complaints as part of their day to day management of the school in accordance with the School's Complaints Procedure.

The majority of complaints are handled in an informal manner and are resolved quickly, sensitively and to the satisfaction of the complainant. The school is extremely committed to promoting positive relationships with all members of the school community, regardless of age, sex, religion, ability or culture and it welcomes the opportunity to address and resolve issues that may arise.

However, there are rare occasions when complainants behave in an unreasonable manner when raising and/or pursuing concerns. The consequences are that the actions of the complainants begin to impact negatively on the day to day running of the school and directly or indirectly the overall well being of the children or staff in the school. In these exceptional circumstances the school may take action in accordance with this policy.

1. What does the school expect of any person wishing to raise a concern?

The school expects anyone who wishes to raise concerns with the school to:

- Treat all members of the school community with courtesy and respect;
- Respect the needs of pupils and staff within the school;
- Avoid the use of violence, or threats of violence, towards people or property;
- Avoid any aggression or verbal abuse;
- Recognise the time constraints under which members of staff in schools work and allow the school a reasonable time to respond to a complaint;
- Recognise that resolving a specific problem can sometimes take time;
- Follow the school's complaints procedure (and for staff members to follow the appropriate internal staff procedure).

2. What do we mean by 'unreasonably persistent complainants'?

For the purpose of this policy, an unreasonably persistent complainant may be anyone who engages in unreasonable behaviour when making a complaint. This will include persons who pursue complaints in an unreasonable manner.

Unreasonable behaviour may include the following (not an exhaustive list);

- Actions which are obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific, repetitious;
- Prolific correspondence or excessive email or telephone contact about a concern or complaint;
- Uses Freedom of Information requests excessively and unreasonably;
- An insistence upon pursuing unsubstantial complaints and/or unrealistic or unreasonable outcomes;
- An insistence upon pursuing complaints in an unreasonable manner;
- An insistence on only dealing with the Headteacher on all occasions irrespective of the issue and the level of delegation in the school to deal with such matters;
- An insistence upon repeatedly pursuing a complaint when the outcome is not satisfactory to the complainant but cannot be changed, for example, if the desired outcome is beyond the remit of the school because it is unlawful;
- Making what appears to be groundless complaints about staff dealing with the complaint and seeking to have them replaced;
- Abusive or threatening behaviour or language towards school staff;
- Failing to specify grounds of the complaint, despite offers of assistance from the school.

3. What is harassment?

We regard harassment as including the unreasonable pursuit of issues or complaints, particularly if the matter appears to be pursued in a way intended to cause personal distress, rather than to seek a resolution.

Behaviour may fall within the scope of this policy if:

- It appears to be deliberately targeted at one or more members of school staff or others, without good cause;
- The way in which a complaint or other issue is pursued (as opposed to the complaint itself) causes undue distress to school staff or others;
- It has an unjustifiably significant and disproportionate adverse effect on the school community.

4. School's responses to unreasonably persistent complaints or harassment

This policy is intended to be used in conjunction with the school's complaints procedure. Taken together, these documents set out how we will always seek to work with parents, carers and others with a legitimate complaint to resolve a difficulty.

However, in cases of unreasonably persistent complaints or harassment, the school may take some or all of the following steps, as appropriate:

- Inform the complainant informally that his/her behaviour is now considered by the school to be unreasonable or unacceptable, and request a changed approach.
- Inform the complainant in writing that the school considers his/her behaviour to fall under the terms of the Unreasonably Persistent Complaints/Harassment Policy.
- Require any future meetings with a member of staff to be conducted with a second person present. In the interests of all parties, notes of these meetings may be taken;
- Inform the complainant that, except in emergencies, the school will respond only to written communication and that these may be required to be channelled through a third party chosen by the school, for example the Local Authority or County Solicitor;
- Inform the complainant that, with the exception of urgent communication regarding their child in school, the school will respond to their correspondence on a 6 weekly basis only;
- Take legal advice on pursuing a case under Anti-Harassment legislation.

Legitimate new complaints will always be considered in an appropriate time frame, even if the person making them is (or has been) subject to the Unreasonably Persistent Complaints/Harassment Policy. The school nevertheless reserves the right not to respond to communications from individuals whose conduct falls within the scope of this policy.

5. Physical or verbal aggression

The governing body will not tolerate any form of physical or verbal aggression against members of the school community. If there is evidence of any such aggression the school may:

- Ban the individual from entering the school site, with immediate effect;
- Request an Anti-Social Behaviour Order (ASBO);
- Take legal advice on pursuing a case under Anti-Harassment legislation;
- Call the police to remove the individual from the premises, under powers provided by the Education Act 1996.

6. Right of Appeal

All persons who are notified by the school that they are being dealt with under this procedure have the right of appeal. Appeals must be addressed to the Chair of Governors under confidential cover, care of the school. The Chair of Governors will consider each appeal on its merits, consulting with the Headteacher as appropriate. The outcome of the appeal should be notified to appellant and copied to the Headteacher within 10 working days of receipt.

Complaints procedures

Our procedures for dealing with general concerns

The majority of concerns from parents, carers and others are handled under the following general procedures.

The procedure is divided into three stages:

Stage 1 aims to resolve the concern through informal contact at the appropriate level in school (as described on pages 2 and 3 of this guidance).

Stage 2 is the first formal stage at which written complaints are considered by the headteacher

Stage 3 is the second formal stage when written complaints are considered by the Chair of Governors

Stage 4 is the next stage once Stage 3 has been worked through. It involves a complaints review panel of governors.

How each of these stages operates is explained below:

Stage 1 – Your initial contact with the school

1. Many concerns will be dealt with informally when you make them known to us. The first point of contact should be your child's class teacher.
2. We will see you, or contact you by telephone or in writing, as soon as possible after your concern is made known to us. All members of staff know how to refer, if necessary, to the appropriate person with responsibility for particular issues raised by you. He or she will make a clear note of the details and will check later to make sure that the matter has been followed up.
3. We will ensure that you are clear what action or monitoring of the situation, if any, has been agreed. We will confirm this in writing to you.
4. We will ensure that we speak directly to all appropriate persons who may be able to assist us with our enquiries into your concern.
5. We will discuss with you (normally within ten working days) the progress of our enquiries. You will have the opportunity of asking for the matter to be considered further, once we have responded to your concern.
6. If you are still dissatisfied following this informal approach, your concern will become a formal complaint and we will deal with it at the next stage.

Stage 2/3 - Formal consideration of your complaint

This stage in our procedures deals with written complaints. It applies where you are not happy with the informal approach to dealing with your concern, as outlined under Stage 1 above.

1. Normally, your written complaint should be addressed to the headteacher. If, however, your complaint concerns the headteacher personally, it should be sent to the school marked "For the attention of the Chair of Governors".
2. We will acknowledge your complaint in writing as soon as possible after receiving it. This will be within three working days.
3. We will enclose a copy of these procedures with the acknowledgement.
4. Normally we would expect to respond in full within ten working days but if this is not possible we will write to explain the reason for the delay and let you know when we hope to be able to provide a full response.

5. As part of our consideration of your complaint, we may invite you to a meeting to discuss the complaint and fill in any details required. If you wish, you can ask someone to accompany you to help you explain the reasons for your complaint.
6. The headteacher, or chair of governors may also be accompanied by a suitable person if they wish.
7. Following the meeting, the headteacher or chair of governors will, where necessary, talk to witnesses and take statements from others involved. If the complaint centres on a pupil, we will talk to the pupil concerned and, where appropriate, others present at the time of the incident in question.
8. We will normally talk to pupils with a parent or carer present, unless this would delay the investigation of a serious or urgent complaint, or where a pupil has specifically said that he or she would prefer the parent or carer not to be involved. In such circumstances, we will ensure that another member of staff, with whom the pupil feels comfortable, is present.
9. 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.
10. The headteacher or chair of governors will keep written/typed, signed and dated records of all meetings and telephone conversations, and other related documentation.
11. Once we have established all the relevant facts, we will send you a written response to your complaint. This will give a full explanation of the headteacher's chair of governors' decision and the reasons for it. If follow-up action is needed, we will indicate what we are proposing to do. We may invite you to a meeting to discuss the outcome as part of our commitment to building and maintaining good relations with you.
12. If you are not satisfied with the outcome of the Stage 2/3 investigation and the schools findings, you may wish to proceed to Stage 4, as described below.

Stage 4 - Consideration by a complaints review panel

- If your concern has already been through Stages 1, 2 and 3 and you are not happy with the outcome, the Chair of Governors will instruct the Clerk to set up a complaints review panel to consider it. This is a formal process, and your ultimate recourse at school level.
- The purpose of this arrangement is to give your complaint a hearing in front of a panel of governors who have no prior knowledge of the details of the complaint and who can, therefore, consider it without prejudice.
- The aim of a complaints review panel is to resolve the complaint and to achieve reconciliation between the school and the parent. We recognise, however, that it may sometimes only be possible to establish facts and make recommendations which will reassure you that we have taken your complaint seriously.

The complaints review panel operates according to the following formal procedures:

1. The clerk to the governing body will aim to arrange for the panel meeting to take place within **20 working days**.
2. The clerk will ask you whether you wish to provide any **further written documentation** in support of your complaint. You can include witness statements, or ask witnesses to give evidence in person, if you wish.
3. The headteacher will be asked to prepare a **written report** for the panel. Other members of staff directly involved in matters raised in your complaint will also be asked to prepare reports or statements.
4. The clerk will inform you, the headteacher, any relevant witnesses and members of the panel by letter, at least **five working days** in advance, of the date, time and place of the meeting. We hope that you will feel comfortable with the meeting taking place in the school; but we will do what we can to make alternative arrangements if you prefer.

5. With the letter, the clerk will send you all relevant correspondence, reports and documentation about the complaint and ask whether you wish to submit **further written evidence** to the panel.
6. The letter will explain what will happen at the panel meeting and the clerk will also inform you that **you are entitled to be accompanied** to the meeting. The choice of person to accompany you is your own, but it is usually best to involve someone in whom you have confidence but who is not directly connected with the school. They are there to give you support but also to witness the proceedings and to speak on your behalf if you wish.
7. With the agreement of the chair of the panel, the headteacher may invite **members of staff** directly involved in matters raised by you to attend the meeting,
8. The chair of the panel will bear in mind that the formal nature of the meeting can be intimidating for you and will do his or her best to **put you at your ease**.
9. As a general rule, no evidence or witnesses **previously undisclosed** should be introduced into the meeting by any of the participants. If either party wishes to do so, the meeting will be adjourned so that the other party has a fair opportunity to consider and respond to the new evidence.
10. The chair of the panel will ensure that the meeting is properly **minuted**. Please understand that any decision to share the minutes with you, the complainant, is a matter for the panel's discretion and you do not have an automatic right to see or receive a copy. Since such minutes usually name individuals, they are understandably of a sensitive and, therefore, confidential nature.
11. Normally, the written outcome of the panel meeting, which will be sent to you, should give you all the information you require. If, however, you feel that you would like to have a **copy of the minutes** it would be helpful if you could indicate this in advance. If the panel is happy for the minutes to be copied to you, the clerk can then be asked maintain confidentiality in the minutes.
12. During the meeting, you can expect there to be opportunities for:
 - you to explain your complaint;
 - you to hear the school's response from the headteacher;
 - you to question the headteacher about the complaint;
 - you to be questioned by the headteacher about the complaint;
 - the panel members to be able to question you and the headteacher;
 - any party to have the right to call witnesses (subject to the chair's approval) and all parties to have the right to question all witnesses;
 - you and the headteacher to make a final statement.
13. In closing the meeting, the chair will explain that the panel will now consider its decision and that written notice of the decision will be sent to the headteacher and yourself **within two weeks**. All participants other than the panel and the clerk will then leave.
14. The panel will then consider the complaint and all the evidence presented in order to:
 - reach a unanimous, or at least a majority, decision on the complaint;
 - decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint;
 - recommend, where appropriate, to the governing body changes to the school's systems or procedures to ensure that similar problems do not happen again.
15. The clerk will send you and the headteacher a written statement outlining the decision of the panel **within two weeks**. The letter will explain what further recourse, beyond the governing

body, is available to you.

16. We will keep a copy of all correspondence and notes on file in the school's records but separate from pupils' personal records.

Closure of complaints

- Very occasionally, a school will feel that it needs, regretfully, to close a complaint where the complainant is still dissatisfied.
- We will do all we can to help to resolve a complaint against the school but sometimes it is simply not possible to meet all of the complainant's wishes. Sometimes it is simply a case of "agreeing to disagree".
- If a complainant persists in making representations to the school – to the headteacher, designated governor, chair of governors or anyone else - this can be extremely time-consuming and can detract from our responsibility to look after the interests of all the children in our care.
- For this reason, we are entitled to close correspondence (including personal approaches, as well as letters and telephone calls) on a complaint where we feel that we have taken all reasonable action to resolve the complaint.

Other sources of information and advice

If your concern is about an aspect of **special needs provision**, which might include information about relevant voluntary organisations and support groups in Essex, you might like to talk to our **Parent Partnership** team on their helpline: **01245 436036**.