

Priory Junior School Complaints Policy

Updated July 2015

Priory Junior School: Listening to Parents, Pupils and the Community

1. We aim to make our school a happy, safe and caring place so that pupils may benefit from the best possible education. All of our staff, both teaching and non-teaching, are dedicated to this aim. If you think we are not living up to your expectations of us we want to know about it so that we may have the opportunity to put things right. We would also like to hear about the things you think we do well.
2. If you do have a concern or a complaint, speak to your child's class teacher or tutor. If he/she cannot resolve the matter you should then discuss it with the head teacher/ assistant head. If you are not a parent of a child at the school then please address your concerns to the head teacher/assistant head.
3. Most complaints will normally be resolved at this stage but if this is not possible, or your complaint is about the head teacher, you should write to our Chair of Governors currently Anne Baldry, at the school address, who is the school governor nominated for investigating complaints.
4. Mrs Baldry will contact you to find out more about your concerns and will then investigate your complaint. She will write to you on behalf of the governing body with the results of her investigation.
5. If you are still not satisfied you may appeal to a committee of the governing body which will listen to your complaint. This committee will be made up of governors who have not had any previous involvement with your complaint. You will be able to attend a meeting of the committee to put your case. The head teacher and Chair will also attend to explain what they have done to investigate and resolve your concerns. The committee will write to you after listening to all parties and coming to their conclusion.
6. If you are still not satisfied then you may complain to the Local Authority (LA). The LA only has powers to investigate complaints about the curriculum, religious education and collective worship, the school's charging policy and the provision of information required by law. For other complaints the LA will investigate whether the school's investigation was carried out properly, but will not re-hear the complaint.
7. After the LA has carried out its investigation it will write to you. In the very rare case that you remain dissatisfied you may pursue your complaint with the Secretary of State for Education and Employment. The Local Government Ombudsman is not able to consider complaints about schools, except where they relate to the admission of pupils.

Schools Complaints

Speak to the class teacher in the first instance if appropriate.

If the problem is not resolved speak to the Head Teacher.

If the problem is still unresolved please write to the Chair of Governors.

If at this point the complaint is still not resolved, please refer the situation to a sub-committee of the governing body. These groups meet on a regular basis.

Following a review by the sub-committee, you have the option of contacting the education department of the Local Authority.

As a final option, you should send details of your complaint to the Secretary of State for Education and Employment.

Guidance on obtaining witness statements - Recommended good practice

If the complaint relates to the conduct of the head teacher then it is the role of the Chair of Governors to ensure that a proper investigation is undertaken. For serious cases that could lead to disciplinary action if the complaint is upheld, advice should be sought from Education Personnel before undertaking the investigation. If required, the LA may be able to undertake the investigation on behalf of the governing body. There would be a charge for this service.

It is important when interviewing witnesses that an accurate and unbiased account is recorded. The details that may be provided by a witness can help to clarify and endorse a critical set of events. It is crucial that witnesses are informed that their statement may be given to other people who have a legitimate right to see it. In some cases, especially where a disciplinary outcome is possible, it is advisable to obtain parental consent prior to seeking a pupil witness statement.

When pupils are potential witnesses it is particularly important to let them recount the sequence of events in their own words and without leading questions. If they are literate then they should write their own account. Compound statements made by two or more pupils are not advised. Pupils should not be given the opportunity to confer with other witnesses prior to making their statement. If the statement lacks detail then it is reasonable for the Complaints Officer to ask questions of clarification and to ensure that the more detailed answers are recorded.

Where members of staff are providing witness statements they should be advised that they may have a friend or representative of their professional association present. This is particularly important if the detail of their evidence could lead to disciplinary action being taken against a member of staff. Typed witness statements are acceptable but **all statements should be signed and dated by the person who made them**. A copy of the statement should be given to the person who made it. All witness statements should be retained by the school as part of the documentation supporting the complaint.

The role of the governors in relation to complaints about the school

As a general rule governors should not be dealing with complaints on a day to day basis. This is an operational function that is within the remit of the head teacher. The governing body should carry out a mainly strategic role in the school. So the governing body should certainly be very involved in the development of the school's complaints procedure and should approve the procedure and monitor its use. This monitoring will mainly be done by the head teacher reporting to governors on the operation of the complaints procedure but equally governors should ask questions to satisfy themselves that it is being applied fairly and consistently.

Occasionally, however, individual governors may need to become involved in dealing with a complaint of a more persistent or serious nature. This is where the complainant wishes to raise concerns about the head teacher or is dissatisfied with the way in which the head teacher has handled the original complaint. It may be that the head has operated within the governing body's procedures and the complainant simply does not like the outcome of the head's investigation. However the governing body, in this instance, must be 'the court of appeal' and act as a safeguard by verifying that the complaint has been addressed with rigour and that appropriate

action has been taken by the head teacher.

In such cases it is not necessary for the full governing body to deal with the issue. It would be more sensible if it delegates power to one governor, probably the chair, to act as the complaints governor and ensure that an investigation is undertaken on behalf of the governing body. If the chair has been involved previously with the matter or feels that they may have a conflict of interest then another governor (the vice-chair?) should take on the role of complaints governor. This person will liaise with the LA on how to proceed.

Parent governors may have a particularly difficult role in relation to complaints as they very often are the recipients of parental concerns. In such cases it is important that governors do not get involved in investigating or dealing with the complaint themselves. They should urge the complainant to report their concerns to the head teacher immediately, or to the chair of governors in the circumstances outlined above. It would be helpful if the governor concerned could also contact the head teacher/chair and inform them that a complaint is likely to be made.

If the complainant feels unable to approach the head or chair on their own then the parent governor might suggest they take a friend or supporter with them. In extreme circumstances the parent governor could offer to accompany them **but not as an advocate**. Governors should avoid taking sides or becoming involved in pursuing complaints on behalf of others because they may ultimately find themselves in the situation where they are holding to account the governing body of which they are a member.

If the complaint is not resolved, it may be necessary for the governing body to convene a panel of three governors to hear an appeal about the way in which a complaint has been handled. Again this is a good reason for all governors to stay 'detached' from the detail of the original complaint. In convening the panel it will be very important to select impartial governors who have no previous knowledge or involvement with the facts. Their task will be to bring a fresh viewpoint to the matter and decide how it is to be resolved.

All serious complaints should be reported to the full governing body at the earliest opportunity and the complaints governor who is (or has been) dealing with the matter should confirm that the governing body's procedures have been followed. It is important that the governors are aware of such matters in general terms, and of the final outcome as, corporately, they have to be publicly accountable for the conduct of the school and for decisions of the governing body. However the **details** of each complaint should not be rehearsed in governors' meetings, especially if some governors may be needed to sit on an appeal panel. The governing body should trust the professionalism of the complaints governor and the head teacher to deal with the matter on its behalf. All parties should respect the confidentiality and sensitivity of such issues.

It is important that all governors are aware of the complaints procedures in the school and are able to explain them in general terms if asked. If governors feel that they may be involved in dealing with complaints in a more direct way, as outlined above, then it would be sensible to access some training.

Governors should also note that there are some professional issues over which head teachers have absolute discretion and in which it would not be appropriate for the governing body to intervene. For example the organisation of classes or the allocation of teaching staff to specific duties.

Supporting document:

School complaints toolkit 2014

Departmental advice for maintained schools, maintained nursery schools and local authorities