

Complaints Policy and Procedure

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Policy Statement

This policy statement sets out Lawnswood School's approach to dealing with concerns and complaints raised by parents, carers and other adults concerned about action (or lack of action) taken by the school.

We value good home/school relations and will therefore do everything we can to establish and maintain them. This includes seeking to resolve any concerns or complaints promptly, and to the satisfaction of all concerned.

We welcome feedback about what parents feel we do well, or not so well, as a school. We will consider carefully all feedback, whether positive or negative, and will review our policies and practices accordingly.

We will treat all concerns and complaints seriously and courteously and will advise parents and others of the school's procedures for dealing with their concerns. In return, we expect parents, carers and other complainants to behave respectfully towards all members of the school community. In particular, any disagreement with the school should not be expressed inappropriately or in front of students.

All school staff and members of the Governing Body will be made aware of and have access to this policy statement and will be familiar with the school's procedures for dealing with parental concerns and complaints. The policy is available on request and also on the school's website.

The school's procedures will be reviewed regularly and updated as necessary.

Staff and governors will receive training in handling concerns and complaints as appropriate. This may be on an individual basis, or as a group activity for all staff, or for specific groups such as the office staff or members of the governing body.

Whilst we will seek to resolve concerns and complaints to the satisfaction of all parties, it may not be possible to achieve this in every case. We will, therefore, use our option to close a complaint once all the stages of the school's procedures have been exhausted, if this appears to be appropriate.

The government and the Local Authority (LA) advocate resolution of parental concerns and complaints at school level wherever possible, in the interests of maintaining good home/school relations. The role of the local authority in advising complainants and schools on the handling of concerns and complaints is set out in the school's procedures.

Lawnswood School procedures for dealing with complaints

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

To ensure you receive an effective response to your complaint, it will be helpful if you:

- Co-operate with the school in seeking a solution to the complaint;
- Express the complaint in full as early as possible; complaints must be raised within three months of an incident occurring (although exceptional circumstances will be considered);
- Respond promptly to requests for information or meetings or in agreeing the details of the complaint;
- Ask for assistance if needed (we will ensure that adjustments are made so that the complaint process is accessible to you e.g. providing information in alternative formats or supporting you to make your complaint) and
- Treat all those involved in the complaint with respect.

At each stage in the procedure, Lawnswood Schools wants to resolve the complaint. If appropriate, we will acknowledge that the complaint is upheld in whole or in part. In addition, we may offer one or more of the following:

- An explanation
- An admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better
- An assurance that we will try to ensure the event complained of will not recur
- An explanation of the steps that have been taken or will be taken to help ensure that it will not happen again and an indication of the timescales within which any changes will be made
- An undertaking to review school policies in light of the complaint
- An apology.

The procedure is divided into three stages:

The Informal stage aims to resolve the concern through informal contact at the appropriate level in school.

Stage one is the first formal stage at which written complaints are considered by the Headteacher or the designated governor, who has special responsibility for dealing with complaints.

Stage two is the next stage once stage one has been worked through. It involves a complaints appeal panel of governors.

How each of these stages operates is explained below:

Informal stage – your initial contact with the school

1. Many concerns can be dealt with informally when you make them known to us. Your first point of contact should be your child's Head of Year, Year Manager or Assistant Headteacher overseeing their year group.
2. Once your concern is made known to us, we will see you, or contact you by telephone or in writing, as soon as possible. If it is necessary, all members of staff know how to refer to the appropriate person with responsibility for your particular issues. 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. Any actions or monitoring of the situation that has been agreed will be communicated clearly and we will confirm this in writing to you.
4. If necessary, we will contact appropriate people who may be able to help us with our enquiries into your concern.
5. We will normally update you on the progress of our enquiries within ten school days. Once we have responded to your concern, you will have the opportunity of asking for the matter to be considered further.
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 one - formal consideration of your complaint by the Headteacher

This stage in our procedure deals with written complaints. It applies where you are not happy with the informal approach to dealing with your concern, as outlined above. If you prefer to email your complaint, please send it to school@lawnswoodschool.co.uk.

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. Complainants should not approach individual governors to raise concerns or complains. They have no power to act on an individual basis and it may also prevent them from considering complaints at Stage 2 of the procedure.
3. We will acknowledge a written complaint in writing as soon as possible after receiving it. This will be within three school days.
4. We will consider complaints made out of term time to have been received on the first school day after the holiday period.
5. The complaint will either be investigated by the Headteacher or they may ask a senior member of staff to be the investigating officer. If the complaint is about the Headteacher personally, the Chair of Governors will usually investigate. However, they may appoint another governor to investigate.
6. Normally we would expect to respond in full within 15 school 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.
7. 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.

8. The Headteacher / investigating officer, of Chair of Governors / designated governor* may also be accompanied by a suitable person if they wish.
9. Following the meeting, the Headteacher / investigating officer, or Chair of Governors / designated governor will, where necessary, talk to witnesses and take statements from others involved. If the complaint centres on a student, we will talk to the student concerned and, where appropriate, others present at the time of the incident in question.
10. If the complaint involved a student, his / her parent / carer will be contacted and, if interviewed, we will try to ensure the parent / carer is present. In some cases this might not be possible due to the urgency of the matter and a member of staff with whom the student feels comfortable, for example a learning mentor, will attend the interview.
11. 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.
12. The Headteacher / investigating officer or Chair of Governors / designated governor will keep dated records of all meetings and telephone conversations, and other related documentation.
13. With regards to meetings with yourself or other witnesses, accurate notes will be agreed by both / all parties.
14. In accordance with equality law, we will consider making reasonable adjustments if required, to enable complainants to access and complete this complaints procedure. For instance, providing information in alternative formats, assisting complainants in raising a formal complaint or holding meetings in accessible locations.
15. Once we have established all the relevant facts, we will send you a written response to your complaint. This will give an explanation of the Headteacher's or governor's / designated governor's 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.
16. If you are unhappy with the way in which we reached our conclusions, you may wish to proceed to stage two, as described below. If you wish to move your complaint to stage two, you should contact us within 10 school days of receiving our response.

*The designated governor will usually be the governor with allocated responsibility for dealing with complaints but may from time to time be another member of the governing body (including the chair of governors).

Stage two - consideration by a governors' appeal panel

If the complaint has already been through stage one and you are not happy with the outcome as a result of the way in which the complaint has been handled, you can take it further to a governors' appeal panel. This is a formal process, and the ultimate recourse at school level.

The purpose of this arrangement is to give you the chance to present your views in front of a panel of governors who have no prior knowledge of the details of the case and who can, therefore, consider it without prejudice.

However, the aim of a panel is not to rehear the complaint. It is there to review how the complaint has been investigated and to determine whether this has been conducted fairly. It is there to establish facts and make recommendations which will reassure you that we have taken the complaint seriously.

The governors' appeal panel operates according to the following formal procedure:

1. The governing body will convene a panel of three governors and will aim to arrange for the panel meeting to take place within **20 school days** of receiving your request.
2. The Headteacher (or whoever investigated at stage one) will be asked to prepare a pack of documentation related to the investigation and the stage one outcome, for the panel. The panel can request additional information from other sources if necessary.
3. You will be informed, at least **five school days** in advance of the date, time and place of the meeting. We hope 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.
4. We will try and arrange the meeting around your availability whilst taking into account all attendees' circumstances. However, if after being offered three separate dates you cannot agree to attend, it may be that the meeting will be held in your absence but with written submissions from all parties.
5. With the letter inviting you to the meeting, you will receive any relevant correspondence or reports regarding stage one, and you will be asked whether you wish to submit further written evidence to the panel. Any additional documentation should be submitted prior to the review panel meeting.
6. The letter will explain what will happen at the panel meeting and 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. It is not recommended that legal representatives attend: this is not a legal process. However, there may be occasions when legal representation is appropriate, for instance, if a school employee is called as witness in a complaint meeting, they may wish to be supported by union and / or legal representation. *Note: Complaints about staff conduct will not generally be handled under this complaints procedure. Complainants will be advised that any staff conduct complaints will be considered under staff disciplinary procedures, if appropriate, but outcomes will not be shared with them.*
8. Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.
9. In exceptional circumstances, and if it is necessary in the interests of ratifying the investigative process, the Headteacher / investigating officer may, with the agreement of the chair of the panel, invite relevant witnesses directly involved in matters raised by you to attend the meeting.
10. 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.
11. 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.
12. The chair of the panel will ensure that the meeting is properly minuted. You will receive the written outcome of the panel meeting with the panel's decision. You may also request a copy of the minutes and should make this request at the start of the panel's proceedings.
13. Electronic recording of the meeting is not permitted without the consent of all attendees and only in special circumstances where there are communication difficulties. Agreement must be sought from the chair before the date of the meeting. Any recordings remain

private, and further sharing is subject to restrictions under the Data Protection Act 2018 and General Data Protection Regulations (EU) 2016/679 (GDPR).

14. During the meeting, you can expect there to be opportunities for:
 - the panel to hear you explain your case and your argument for why it should be heard at stage two;
 - the panel to hear the Headteacher / investigating officer's case in response
 - you to raise questions via the chair;
 - The Headteacher / investigating officer to raise questions through the chair;
 - the panel members to be able to question you and the Headteacher / investigating officer; and
 - you and the Headteacher / investigating officer to make a final statement.
15. 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 you and the Headteacher **within three school days**. All participants other than the panel and the clerk will then leave.
16. The panel will then consider the complaint and all the evidence presented in order to:
 - reach a unanimous, or at least a majority decision, to uphold / dismiss the complaint in whole or in part;
 - decide on the appropriate action to be taken by the school, if necessary; and recommend, where appropriate, to the Governing Body changes to the school's systems or procedures to ensure that similar problems do not happen again.
17. The chair of the panel will send you and the Headteacher a letter outlining the decision of the panel. The letter will also explain that you are entitled to have the handling of the complaint reviewed by the Secretary of State for Education.
18. We will keep a copy of all correspondence and notes on file in the school's records but separate from students' personal records.
19. If the complaint is:
 - Jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair or
 - The entire governing body or
 - The majority of the governing body

Stage two will be heard by a committee of independent governors.

The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions Lawnswood School will take to resolve the complaint.

The response will also advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied.

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 – or to the local authority, 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 and that the complaint has exhausted our official process. The local authority will support us in this position, and especially where the complainant's action is causing distress to staff and/or students.

In exceptional circumstances, closure may occur before a complaint has reached Stage 2 of the procedures described in this document. This is because a complaints panel takes considerable time and effort to set up and we must be sure that it is likely to assist the process of investigating the complaint.

Where you have been through the school's internal complaints and are still unhappy with the outcome or decision from the governing body, you can write to the Secretary of State for Education via the DfE website www.education.gov.uk/contactus, by telephoning 0370 000 2288 or by writing to the address below:

Department for Education
Picadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

Please enclose with your letter to the DfE a copy of the complaint outcome. This will save time in that the DfE will not need to ask for our view of what has happened.

We would advise parents that, unless the school is shown to have behaved unreasonably or not to have followed their own procedures or any statutory procedures, there is likely to be little further action that can be taken. Governing bodies are empowered to deal with many issues without reference to either the local authority or the secretary of state.

Campaigns

Where we receive numerous complaints from parents and carers and / or other people unconnected with the school regarding a particular issue, we will classify these as campaigns.

These usually concern a high-profile issue that has motivated a number of people to come together and write to the school to express their dissatisfaction.

We will not deal with these under the school's complaint policy. However, we will produce a response to the issue that will either be sent to all correspondents or we will publish a response on the school's website and direct people to it.

Other sources of information and advice

If your concern is about an aspect of **special educational needs provision**, which might include information about relevant voluntary organisations and support groups in Leeds, you might like to talk to Leeds SEND Information Advice Service (Leeds Special Educational Needs and Disability Advice Support Service) on their helpline: 0113 395 1922.

Lawnswood School Complaint / Feedback form

Your forename(s): _____

Your surname: _____

Your address: _____

Daytime telephone number _____

Evening telephone number _____

If applicable, name(s) of child(ren) and year at Lawnswood School

Your relationship to the school, e.g. parent, carer, neighbour, member of the public, student:

Please give details of your complaint:

What action, if any, have you already taken to try and resolve your complaint? Who did you speak to? When? What was the response?

What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?

Your signature _____

Date _____

Thank you for completing this form.

For use in school:

Date of acknowledgment _____

Acknowledged by whom _____

Complaint referred to _____

Date referred _____

Flowchart

