

# How to complain to your child's school - information for parents

## Introduction

School Governors are responsible in law for having a published complaints procedure and for responding to complaints. These complaints arrangements are well-established and were made following consultation with headteachers, governors, the Diocesan authorities, teacher associations and representatives of parent groups. For Church of England schools the Diocese of St Albans commends the adoption of this procedure. For Roman Catholic schools, the Diocese of Westminster provides its own guidelines to schools for dealing with complaints.

## What happens at the first stage?

Most concerns, complaints or potential complaints can be resolved by talking to the member of school staff concerned. The school can tell you who you should speak to first. You may wish to request a copy of the school's complaints procedure, available from the school office. If the concern isn't resolved by speaking to a member of staff, you should then talk to the headteacher who will investigate your complaint and aim to inform you of the outcome within 28 school days. If your first contact is with individual governors, you may be asked to take up your concerns with the headteacher or the appropriate member of staff.

If your complaint is about the headteacher, you should write to the chair of governors at the school. If your child has Special Educational Needs (SEN) you might find it helpful to talk to the Special Educational Needs co-ordinator (SENco) at your child's school or your named Special Needs Officer if your child has a Statement of SEN. A Parent Partnership supporter may also be able to help you.

## What happens at the second stage?

The school may ask you to complete a form or write a letter addressed to the chair of governors. In the letter you should:

- make it clear why you are complaining
- say who you have spoken to already
- explain what you want to happen as a result of your complaint.

The chair of governors will arrange for your complaint to be considered and investigated under the arrangements approved by the governing body. This is likely to involve a panel of governors. If the chair of governors or another governor has been involved in discussions to help settle the disagreement at stage 1, s/he should arrange for another governor to take charge of the investigation. The governor in charge of investigating the complaint may ask to meet you to discuss your concerns. The governing body should give you full details of how they will carry out any further investigation or formal hearing and keep you up-to-date with progress.

You and the school must make sure the governors' complaint panel is provided with any written information or evidence you intend to use in a formal hearing. You may bring a friend, representative or interpreter to any meeting if you wish. The chair of the panel may invite any person who may help establish the facts of the complaint. The chair should tell you who this person is before the meeting. If any member of staff is required by the governing body to attend a meeting they will have the opportunity to be accompanied or represented as they wish. A member of staff named by parents in the complaint may also choose to attend a meeting, even if not required to do so by the governors. They may be represented. If this happens, the school will inform you before the meeting.

When the panel has fully investigated your complaint, the chair of the panel or the governor in charge of the investigation will write to you to tell you the findings. These findings will be reported to the governing body. The chair of governors will then write to you confirming the outcome of your complaint and any agreed actions to be taken. The governing body should aim to deal with complaints within 28 school days.

### **Is there a third stage of complaint?**

**For most complaints, the procedure ends with the governing body and there is no third stage of complaint to the local authority.**

If the school's complaints procedure has been exhausted and you remain dissatisfied, you can approach the Secretary of State. Further advice is available from the Children's Legal Centre, the Advisory Centre for Education (ACE) or Parentline Plus.

**If your complaint is about the way that a school is providing for your child's Statement of Special Educational Needs you do have a third stage of complaint to the local authority.**

In this case, you can write to the complaints manager who will acknowledge your complaint within five working days and then inform the chair of governors and headteacher. The complaints team will aim to investigate your complaint within 25 working days, however this may be longer for complex situations. When your complaint has been fully investigated the complaints manager will write to let you know the decision. S/he will give the reasons for the decision, any action or proposed action to be taken and any further avenues open to you. S/he will send a copy to the headteacher, the chair of governors and anyone else concerned in the investigation.

Parents who remain dissatisfied following further investigation by the local authority have the right to complain to the Local Government Ombudsman who may decide to conduct an additional investigation: Local Government Ombudsman, PO Box 4771, Coventry, CV4 0EH. Tel: 0300 061 0614. Email: [advice@lgo.org.uk](mailto:advice@lgo.org.uk)

**If your complaint is about the national curriculum or collective worship in a community or voluntary-controlled school, you do have a third stage of complaint to the local authority.**

In this case, you can complain further by writing to the complaints manager who will acknowledge your complaint within five working days and inform the chair of governors and headteacher. S/he will make sure your complaint is investigated and will ask the governing body for further information or advice as necessary. Following this investigation,

a panel made up of the complaints manager and three members of the local authority will consider your complaint. You may talk to the investigating officer about your complaint and present your case personally to the panel. You may bring a friend, representative or interpreter to any meeting if you wish. Up to two representatives of the governing body may speak at the meeting.

When the panel has fully investigated your complaint the complaints manager will write and let you know the decision. S/he will explain the reasons for the decision, any action taken or proposed to be taken and any further avenues open to you. S/he will send a copy to the clerk and chair of governors and the headteacher. The aim will be to complete this process within 25 working days (this may be longer for complex cases).

**If your complaint is about denominational religious education or collective worship in a voluntary-aided school you do not have a third stage of complaint to the local authority.**

This is because the local authority has no power in voluntary-aided schools to inspect the provision or to influence content. You may complain beyond the second stage to the relevant Diocesan authority where this applies:

***For Roman Catholic schools:*** The Director of the Education Service, Diocese of Westminster, 46 Francis Street, London, SW1P 1QN. Tel: 020 7798 9005. Email: [education@rcdow.org.uk](mailto:education@rcdow.org.uk)

***For Church of England schools:*** The Diocesan Director of Education, Diocese of St Albans Education Centre, Hall Grove, Welwyn Garden City, AL7 4PJ. Tel: 01707 332321. Website: [www.stalbans.anglican.org](http://www.stalbans.anglican.org)

## **Can I complain to anyone other than the County Council?**

**Yes, you can complain to the Secretary of State at the Department for Education:** The Secretary of State, Department for Education, Sanctuary Buildings, Great Smith Street, London, SW1P 3BT. Tel: 0870 000 2288. Web: [www.education.gov.uk](http://www.education.gov.uk)

Please note that the Department for Education will only follow up your complaint with the school or the local authority if they believe either might have acted unreasonably or failed to carry out a statutory duty.

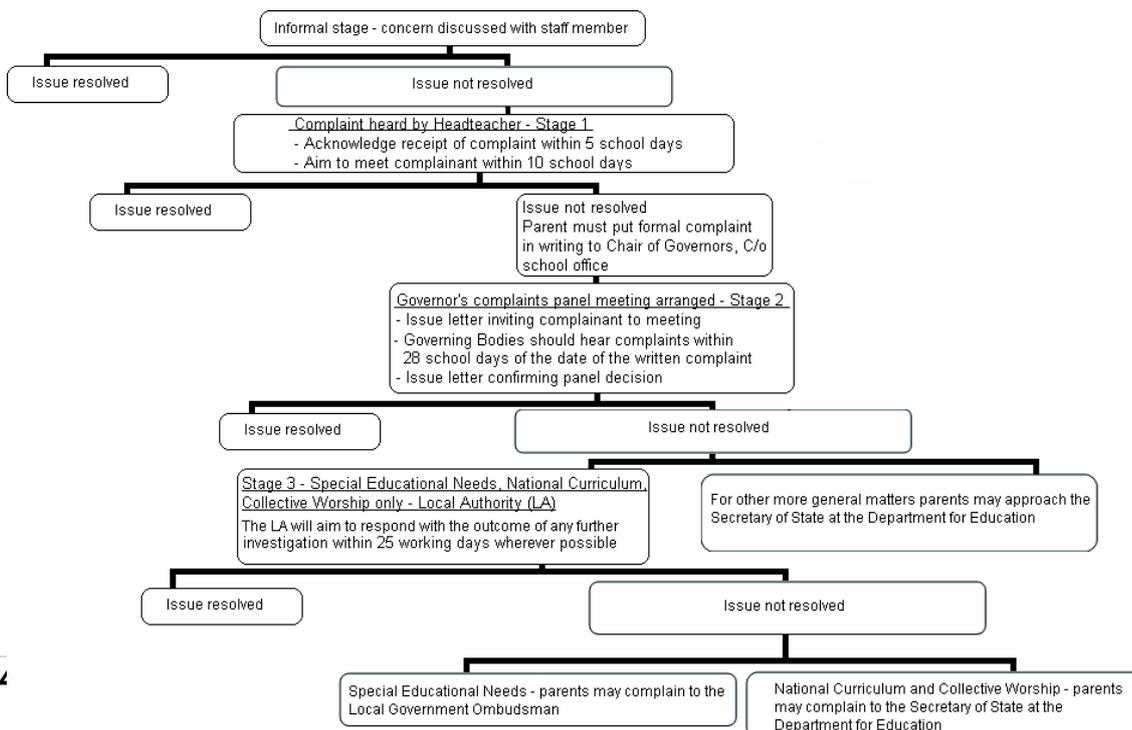
## **Complaints about Academies**

Whilst they are required to have a complaints procedure in place, Academies operate independently of the local authority. As such, the local authority is unable to investigate complaints regarding Academies even if the complaints relate to Special Educational Needs provision, the national curriculum or collective worship. If you have a complaint about an Academy which has not been satisfactorily resolved through the Academy's complaints procedure, you should contact the Young People's Learning Agency. Write to: The Young People's Learning Agency, Cheylesmore House, Quinton Road, Coventry, CV1 2WT. Tel: 0845 337 2000. Email: [enquiries@ypla.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ypla.gov.uk)

## Useful contact details

Chair of Governors	The school secretary can tell you who this is and pass on any written correspondence	
Complaints Team Children Schools and Families	<a href="http://www.hertsdirect.org/csfcustomerfocus">www.hertsdirect.org/csfcustomerfocus</a> Email: <a href="mailto:cft.csf@hertscc.gov.uk">cft.csf@hertscc.gov.uk</a>	01992 588542
Parent Partnership Service (SEN)	<a href="http://www.hertsdirect.org/parentpartnership">www.hertsdirect.org/parentpartnership</a> Email: <a href="mailto:parent.partnership@hertscc.gov.uk">parent.partnership@hertscc.gov.uk</a>	01992 555847
Minority Ethnic Curriculum Support Service (MECS) If your complaint is about racial harassment or discrimination	<a href="http://www.thegrid.org.uk">www.thegrid.org.uk</a>	01438 844752
ACE (Advisory Centre for Education)	<a href="http://www.ace-ed.org.uk">www.ace-ed.org.uk</a>	0808 800 5793
POhWER (advocacy service)	<a href="http://www.pohwer.net">www.pohwer.net</a>	01438 740162 (North Herts) 01438 846010 (South Herts)
ParentlinePlus	<a href="http://www.parentlineplus.org.uk">www.parentlineplus.org.uk</a>	0808 800 2222
Carers in Herts	<a href="http://www.carersinherts.org.uk">www.carersinherts.org.uk</a>	01992 586969
Children's Legal Centre	<a href="http://www.childrenslegalcentre.com">www.childrenslegalcentre.com</a>	01206 873820
Citizen's Advice Bureau	<a href="http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk">www.citizensadvice.org.uk</a>	

## Summary of the complaints process



# Information for Parents

How to comment or complain to Aboyne Lodge School, Etna Road, St Albans, HERTS AL3 5NL

Tel: 01727 766117

[www.aboyne.herts.sch.uk](http://www.aboyne.herts.sch.uk)

## HOW TO COMMENT OR COMPLAIN

### We care about what you think

Each day this school makes many decisions and tries hard to do the best for all the children. Your comments - either positive or negative - are helpful for future planning.

You may want to talk to us about a particular aspect of this school, though not actually make a complaint - you just want to get something 'off your chest'.

If you are dissatisfied about the way your child is being treated, or any actions or lack of action by us, please feel able to contact us using the details listed above.

### Our aims

- Your complaint will be dealt with honestly, politely and in confidence
- Your complaint will be looked into thoroughly and fairly
- If your complaint is urgent we will deal with it more quickly
- We will keep you up to date with progress at each stage
- You will get an apology if we have made a mistake
- You will be told what we are going to do to put things right
- You will get a full and clear written reply to formal complaints within 28 school days

**Aboyne Lodge School**

*Proud of ourselves, proud of others, proud of our school.*

Telephone: 01727 766117

Web: [www.aboyne.herts.sch.uk](http://www.aboyne.herts.sch.uk)



## How to make a complaint

### First

If you have a concern about anything we do, or if you wish to make a complaint, you can do this by telephone, in person or in writing (by letter or email). We hope that most complaints can be settled quickly and informally, either by putting matters right or by giving you an explanation. If there is something you are not happy about, or you don't understand why we are doing something in a particular way, please come in and discuss it with the class teacher or another appropriate member of staff, such as the special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCo) if it is about special needs.

We know that it can feel uncomfortable to question or challenge, but if you don't tell us what is worrying you we cannot explain what we are doing or try to put it right. If the first person you talk to cannot help you then speak to the headteacher. Make an appointment with the school secretary to make sure the headteacher is available. You should be able to sort out your worries but sometimes this is not possible. In this case there is a next step.

### Second

If you are not satisfied you can complain formally by filling in a form, which is available from the school office and online (***include or delete as appropriate***). Address the form to the Chair of Governors. The school secretary will tell you who this is and pass on any written correspondence. The Chair will then arrange for your complaint to be investigated and considered and will reply within 10 working days to give you a progress report and tell you what will happen next. This is likely to involve a panel of governors. When your complaint has been fully investigated you will be told of the outcome in writing.

### Third

Most complaints are the responsibility of the governing body of the school and will be resolved by them. A small number of complaints may not be resolved by this process.

In the case of complaints about **Special Educational Needs**, the **National Curriculum** or **Collective Worship**, in Local Authority maintained schools, you can complain further to the local authority. This should be done by writing to the Complaints Manager in the Customer Focus Team at the address on the back page.

It should be noted however that if you wish to pursue this route, you must do so within 28 days of receiving the written outcome of the hearing into your complaint. After 28 days, neither the school nor the local authority is under any obligation to investigate or progress your complaint any further.

## Useful contacts

### County Councillor for your area

[www.hertsdirect.org/yrccouncil/councillors/](http://www.hertsdirect.org/yrccouncil/councillors/) or contact the Members Secretariat at County Hall on **01992 556556**

### Advisory Centre for Education (ACE)

1C Aberdeen Studios, 22 Highbury Grove, London, N5 2EA

Free Advice Line 2-5pm, Monday to Friday

Web: [www.ace-ed.org.uk](http://www.ace-ed.org.uk)

Email: [enquiries@ace-ed.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@ace-ed.org.uk)

Phone: **0808 800 5793**

### Children's Legal Centre

University of Essex, Wivenhoe Park, Colchester, Essex, CO4 3SQ

Free Advice Service, 2-5pm

Web: [www.childrenslegalcentre.com](http://www.childrenslegalcentre.com)

Email: [clc@essex.ac.uk](mailto:clc@essex.ac.uk)

Phone: **01206 873820**

### Complaints Team

Customer Focus Team, CSF, County Hall, Hertford SG13 8DF

Web: [www.hertsdirect.org/csfcustomerfocus](http://www.hertsdirect.org/csfcustomerfocus)

Email: [cft.csf@hertscc.gov.uk](mailto:cft.csf@hertscc.gov.uk)

Phone: **01992 588542**

### Parent Partnership Team (Special Educational Needs)

Customer Focus Team, CSF, County Hall, Hertford SG13 8DF

Web: [www.hertsdirect.org/parentpartnership](http://www.hertsdirect.org/parentpartnership)

Email: [parent.partnership@hertscc.gov.uk](mailto:parent.partnership@hertscc.gov.uk)

Phone: **01992 555847**

The Parent Partnership service provides impartial information and offers guidance on special educational needs to parents, carers and professionals. There are four Parent Partnership supporters in the county and you can contact your local supporter directly and confidentially. Their contact details are as follows:

- **Irene Holland - 01462 634488**  
(Stevenage/Hitchin/Letchworth/Baldock/villages)
- **Dawn Owen - 01920 411152**  
(Hertford/Ware/Bishops Stortford/Waltham Cross/Hatfield/WGC/villages)
- **Kären Edwards - 01442 453316**  
(Watford/Rickmansworth/Potters Bar/Borehamwood/villages)
- **Helena Marks - 01442 217143**  
(St Albans/Hemel Hempstead/Tring/Harpenden/Berkhamsted/villages)

### ParentlinePlus

520 Highgate Studios

53-79 Highgate Road

Kentish Town

London, NW5 1TL

Web: [www.parentlineplus.org.uk](http://www.parentlineplus.org.uk)

Phone: **0808 800 2222**