



Dovecot Primary School

*Learning together, growing
together*

Date of review	September 2024
Next review date	September 2025

DOVECOT PRIMARY SCHOOL

VISION STATEMENT

Learning together, growing together

Complaints Procedure and Policy

Introduction

At Dovecot Primary School we aim to resolve any problems or complaints through discussion with the appropriate staff. If the person making the complaint is dissatisfied with the outcome, there is a formal procedure which enables him/ her to put the complaint in writing to the Head teacher (in the first instance) and then to the Chair of Governors. Governors are unable to deal with complaints unless they have first been raised with the school staff.

Dovecot Primary School has a strong commitment towards working in close partnership with members of the school community in order to resolve issues and concerns. However, any attempts by a person to confront members of staff in an aggressive manner is not acceptable, and in the rare event of this occurring, this person will be asked to leave the premises, and a future appointment to discuss the situation will be followed up by the Head teacher.

If you or your child has Special Educational Needs and/ or Disabilities and you need support to make a complaint, please contact the school office where we will be able to make the necessary arrangements.

Overview

From 1st September 2003 Governing Bodies (GBs) of all maintained schools and maintained nursery schools in England were required, under Section 29 of the Education Act 2002, summarised in Annex A, to have in place a procedure to deal with complaints relating to the school and to an community facilities or services that the school provides. The law also requires the procedure to be publicised.

Framework of Principles

This Policy aims to:

- 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**
- Allow **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 senior management team so that services can be improved.

PART 1: General Principles of Complaints

Dealing with Complaints – initial concerns

Dovecot Primary School endeavours to be clear about the difference between a concern and a complaint. We take informal concerns seriously at the earliest stage in the hope that this will reduce the numbers that develop into formal complaints. This Complaints Policy does not in any way undermine efforts to resolve the concern formally. In most cases the class teacher will receive the first approach and will attempt to resolve issues on the spot when possible.

COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

If you have a concern or complaint we would like you to tell us about it. We welcome suggestions for improving our work in school. Be assured that no matter what you want to tell us, our support and respect for you and your child will not be affected in any way. Please tell us of your concern as soon as possible. It is difficult for us to fully investigate an incident or problem which happened some time ago.

What to do first

Most concerns/ complaints are usually resolved informally and quickly through discussion with the person concerned. This should be the first step in the procedure. Initial concern should be brought to the attention of your child’s class teacher.

If you still have concerns or feel the matter has not been resolved you should refer to the Phase/Senior Leader responsible for that department of school.

Early Years Foundation Stage (Nursery and Reception)	Mrs R Dornan
Year 1 and Year 2	Miss S Buckle
Years 3, 4, 5 and 6	Mrs K Barr

If you have a serious concern which you feel should be looked at by the Head teacher or Deputy Head teacher in the first instance you can contact them straightaway. It is always best to resolve the matter with the class teacher or the Phase Leader first.

If you need to meet with the Head teacher or Deputy Head teacher you will need to make an appointment to ensure there is enough time available to discuss your complaint in detail.

You can make an appointment by ringing or calling into the school office. All staff will make every effort to resolve your problem. They will make sure that they understand what you feel went wrong and they will explain their own actions to you.

They will ask what you would like the school to do to put things right. Of course, this does not mean that in every case they will come round to your point of view but it will help you and the school to understand both sides of the question. It may also help to prevent a similar problem arising again.

What to do next

If you are dissatisfied with the response of the teacher, Phase Leader, or Deputy Head teacher (or with the Head teacher's initial reaction if she has already been involved) you can make a complaint to the Head teacher. This should be made in writing.

If your complaint is about the Head teacher, then you should refer it to the Chair of Governors. You can contact her through the school office.

The Head teacher / Chair of Governors will ask to meet you for a discussion about the problem. The Head teacher will conduct a full investigation of the complaint and may interview any members of staff or pupils involved.

The problem will normally be resolved by this stage.

If you are still not satisfied

If you are still not satisfied you may wish to contact the Chair of Governors to ask for a referral of your complaint to the Complaints Committee of the Governing Body. It will then be heard by a group of three governors who have no previous knowledge of the problem and so will be able to give it a fresh assessment. You will be invited to attend and speak to the Committee at a meeting which the Head teacher will also attend.

Further Action Complaints about school problems are almost always settled within school but in exceptional cases it may be necessary to refer the problem to an outside body such as the Schools Ombudsman (in rare circumstances but particularly in relation to admissions) or the Secretary of State for Education.

Dealing with Complaints – Formal procedures

Formal procedures will need to be invoked when initial attempts to resolve the issue are unsuccessful and the person raising the concern remains dissatisfied and wishes to take the matter further.

At Dovecot Primary, the Head teacher is responsible for the operation and management of this Complaints Policy.

Resolving Complaints

At each stage of the procedure, the school will keep in mind ways in which a complaint can be resolved. It might be sufficient to acknowledge that the complaint is valid in whole or in part. In addition, it may be appropriate to offer one or more of the following:

- 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

The school will encourage complainants to state what actions they feel might resolve the problem at any stage. An admission that the school could have handled the situation better is not the same as an admission of negligence.

The school will aim to identify areas of agreement between the parties. It is of equal importance to clarify misunderstandings that might have occurred as this hopefully create a positive atmosphere in which to discuss any outstanding issues.

Vexatious Complaints

If adhered to appropriately, this Complaints Policy will limit the number of complaints that become protracted. However, there will be occasions when, despite all stages of the procedures having been followed, the complainant remains dissatisfied. If the complainant tries to reopen the same issue, the Chair of the GB is able to inform them in writing that the procedure has been exhausted and that the matter is now closed.

Time Limits

The school will consider and resolve complaints as quickly and efficiently as possible. However, where further investigations are necessary, new time limits will be set and the complainant sent details of the new deadline and an explanation for the delay.

PART 2: The Formal Complaints Procedure

The Stages of Complaints

Dovecot Primary School ensures that the Complaints procedures have well-defined stages. At each stage it will be clarified exactly who will be involved, what will happen, and how long it will take. There may, on occasion, be the need for some flexibility; for example, the possibility of further meetings between the complainant and the member of staff directly involved and

further investigations may be required by the Head teacher after a meeting with the complainant.

Three school-based stages are usually sufficient:

- Stage 1: complaint heard and dealt with by staff member
- Stage 2: complaint referred to and dealt with by Head teacher
- Stage 3: complaint referred to and heard by GBs Complaints Appeal Panel

PART 3: Managing and Recording Complaints

Recording Complaints

A complaint may be made in person, by telephone, or in writing. At the end of a meeting or telephone call, the member of staff will ensure that the complainant and the school have the same understanding of what was discussed and agreed. A brief note of meetings and telephone calls will be kept and a copy of any written response will be added to the record.

The Head teacher is responsible for these records.

Governing Body Review

The GB will monitor the level and nature of complaints, the process of listening to, and resolving complaints in order to contribute to school improvement. The monitoring and review of complaints by the GB is used as a tool to evaluate the school's performance.

For further information and advice on the school's Complaints Policy and Procedure (example of a complaints procedure; Checklist for a Panel Hearing; Summary of Dealing with Complaints; Complaint Form) please call in at the school office.

Complaint Form

Please complete and return to Mr J Smith who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

Your name:

Pupil's name (if relevant):

Your relationship to the pupil (if relevant):

Address:

Postcode:

Day time telephone number:

Evening telephone number:

Please give details of your complaint, including whether you have spoken to anybody at the school about it:

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What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?
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Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details.

Signature:
Date:

Official use

Date acknowledgement sent:

By who:

Complaint referred to:

Date:

Roles and Responsibilities

Complainant

The complainant will receive a more effective response to the complaint if they:

- explain the complaint in full as early as possible
- co-operate with the school in seeking a solution to the complaint
- respond promptly to requests for information or meetings or in agreeing the details of the complaint
- ask for assistance as needed
- treat all those involved in the complaint with respect
- refrain from publicising the details of their complaint on social media and respect confidentiality.

Investigator

The investigator's role is to establish the facts relevant to the complaint by:

- providing a comprehensive, open, transparent and fair consideration of the complaint through:
 - sensitive and thorough interviewing of the complainant to establish what has happened and who has been involved
 - interviewing staff and children/young people and other people relevant to the complaint
 - consideration of records and other relevant information
 - analysing information
- liaising with the complainant and the complaints co-ordinator as appropriate to clarify what the complainant feels would put things right.

The investigator should:

- conduct interviews with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning
- keep notes of interviews or arrange for an independent note taker to record minutes of the meeting
- ensure that any papers produced during the investigation are kept securely pending any appeal
- be mindful of the timescales to respond

- prepare a comprehensive report for the headteacher or complaints committee that sets out the facts, identifies solutions and recommends courses of action to resolve problems.

The headteacher or complaints committee will then determine whether to uphold or dismiss the complaint and communicate that decision to the complainant, providing the appropriate escalation details.

Complaints Co-ordinator

The complaints co-ordinator should:

- ensure that the complainant is fully updated at each stage of the procedure
- liaise with staff members, headteacher, Chair of Governors, Clerk and LAs (if appropriate) to ensure the smooth running of the complaints procedure
- be aware of issues regarding:
 - sharing third party information
 - additional support. This may be needed by complainants when making a complaint including interpretation support or where the complainant is a child or young person
- keep records.

Clerk to the Governing Body

The Clerk is the contact point for the complainant and the committee and should:

- ensure that all people involved in the complaint procedure are aware of their legal rights and duties, including any under legislation relating to school complaints, education law, the Equality Act 2010, the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act (DPA) 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)
- set the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that the dates are convenient to all parties (if they are invited to attend) and that the venue and proceedings are accessible
- collate any written material relevant to the complaint (for example; stage 1 paperwork, school and complainant submissions) and send it to the parties in advance of the meeting within an agreed timescale
- record the proceedings
- circulate the minutes of the meeting
- notify all parties of the committee's decision.

Committee Chair

The committee's chair, who is nominated in advance of the complaint meeting, should ensure that:

- both parties are asked (via the Clerk) to provide any additional information relating to the complaint by a specified date in advance of the meeting

- the meeting is conducted in an informal manner, is not adversarial, and that, if all parties are invited to attend, everyone is treated with respect and courtesy
- complainants who may not be used to speaking at such a meeting are put at ease. This is particularly important if the complainant is a child/young person
- the remit of the committee is explained to the complainant
- written material is seen by everyone in attendance, provided it does not breach confidentiality or any individual's rights to privacy under the DPA 2018 or GDPR.
- If a new issue arises it would be useful to give everyone the opportunity to consider and comment upon it; this may require a short adjournment of the meeting
- both the complainant and the school are given the opportunity to make their case and seek clarity, either through written submissions ahead of the meeting or verbally in the meeting itself
- the issues are addressed
- key findings of fact are made
- the committee is open-minded and acts independently
- no member of the committee has an external interest in the outcome of the proceedings or any involvement in an earlier stage of the procedure
- the meeting is minuted
- they liaise with the Clerk (and complaints co-ordinator, if the school has one).

Committee Member

Committee members should be aware that:

- the meeting must be independent and impartial, and should be seen to be so No governor may sit on the committee if they have had a prior involvement in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it.
- the aim of the meeting should be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant We recognise that the complainant might not be satisfied with the outcome if the meeting does not find in their favour. It may only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations.
- many complainants will feel nervous and inhibited in a formal setting Parents/carers often feel emotional when discussing an issue that affects their child.
- extra care needs to be taken when the complainant is a child/young person and present during all or part of the meeting

Careful consideration of the atmosphere and proceedings should ensure that the child/young person does not feel intimidated.

The committee should respect the views of the child/young person and give them equal consideration to those of adults.

If the child/young person is the complainant, the committee should ask in advance if any support is needed to help them present their complaint. Where the child/young person's

parent is the complainant, the committee should give the parent the opportunity to say which parts of the meeting, if any, the child/young person needs to attend.

However, the parent should be advised that agreement might not always be possible if the parent wishes the child/young person to attend a part of the meeting that the committee considers is not in the child/young person's best interests.

- the welfare of the child/young person is paramount.