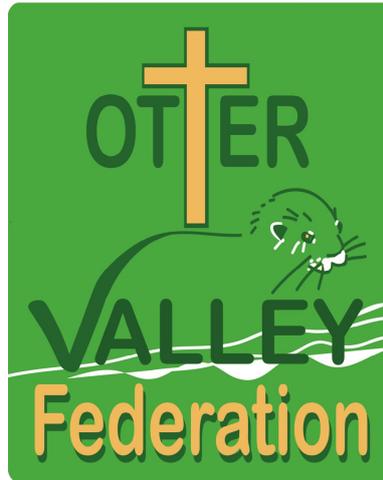


Believing and achieving together



*We aim to reflect God's love, "always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres"
1 Corinthians 13:7*

Complaints Policy

Policy dated 26th June 2015

This Policy was reviewed by Parent Community and Christian
Distinctiveness Lead Governor and Senior Management Team on behalf of
The Governing Board of The Otter Valley Federation

November 2017

Next Three Year Review Summer 2020

Practical advice for parents and carers who want to raise a concern about the school

The Otter Valley Federation Complaints Procedure

Whilst we are very proud of our Federation and the schools within it, we know that no one gets things right all of the time. We are committed to working with you to provide the absolute best for all of our children and this includes responding quickly and proportionately to concerns that you raise. We believe that learning is a lifelong endeavour, and we have systems in place to monitor any concerns and complaints received so that we can evaluate how quickly we resolved matters and how effective the resolution was and use this to improve our practices.

The following sets out how we will work with you to resolve any concerns that you raise as quickly and as informally as possible. Mediation can be considered at any point in the process (see below).

This procedure is appropriate for use not only by parents and carers but by any person who engages with one of the schools of the Federation, including members of the local community.

Stage 1 - School Resolution (Informal)

If you are concerned or unhappy with the way the school or a member of its staff has treated you, or you are concerned or unhappy with the way the school is operating its policies and procedures, then you can raise your concerns or make a complaint.

Usually the best way to deal with a concern or complaint is for the member of staff, head of school, or school governor to talk with you so that they can understand what your concern or complaint is about, and take any appropriate action to put things right. The school will determine who is most appropriate to carry this out depending on the nature of the concern.

The person dealing with your concern may also want to take the opportunity to explain what has happened from the perspective of the school or staff member involved. Low level concerns or complaints can be dealt with quickly and effectively by the head of school, or a governor, using this approach, which is known as a 'School Resolution'.

This way of dealing with your concern or complaint means solving, explaining, clearing up or settling your concern or complaint directly with you. It will not result in conduct or capability action being taken against an individual member of staff, and the complaint will be closed after the process is completed.

Resolving your complaint in this manner can help to improve the service your community receives from the school.

How does the School Resolution process work?

Once you have raised your concern or complaint, the person who is looking into it will contact you within 5 working days (in term time). They can arrange to talk to you face-to-face, on the telephone, or they can contact you by letter if you prefer.

For your part, you will need to:

- tell the school what happened and how you felt about it;
- say what action you would like to see taken as a result;
- agree the process for resolving your concern or complaint.

This School Resolution process is not about apportioning blame or about staff being dealt with through formal conduct or capability procedures – schools are centres of learning for everyone, and it is about learning from what has happened and working with you to make sure it doesn't happen again.

For its part, the school will:

- listen to your concerns
- explain what can happen to resolve your concern or complaint
- confirm with you the process that will be followed and who will deal with it
- if necessary, carry out a more detailed investigation into your concern or complaint. This is called a 'School Investigation' (see section on 'School Investigation' at the end of this document)
- provide information for parents and carers of children with SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disability) about how they can access support from The Devon Information Advice and Support service (this is a requirement in the SEND Code of Practice)
www.devonias.org.uk 01392 383080,
devonias@devon.gov.uk

What can I expect from the School Resolution?

Most concerns or complaints are not likely to involve extensive or lengthy enquiries, and therefore you should expect an approach that is proportionate to the issue you have raised.

As the School Resolution process is aimed at quickly resolving your concern or complaint and learning from it, it won't lead to conduct or capability proceedings against a member of staff. However, where appropriate, the member of staff might receive further support or training as a result.

If your concern or complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction with something the school has either done or not done, and not about somebody - for example, about the way the school operates its policies or is directed to fulfil its statutory obligations - then it will still be resolved using this 'School Resolution' approach.

Mediation

Sometimes during the handling of a complaint, communication between parents and the school can become difficult. Mediation can be a very useful way of helping people to resolve their differences and find an agreed way forward. Both parties need to agree to mediation. The school (or the parent) may suggest mediation, if communication becomes a problem.

Mediation can be sought at any point during the processes of resolution and investigation. The mediation process is informal, impartial and voluntary, and aims to resolve conflicts to the benefit of all. It does not apportion blame and concentrates on developing a better understanding of each other's point of view and works to secure future relationships. For more information, please contact: roger.morris@devon.gov.uk 07966 474364.

For issues raised relating to SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disability) resources, specialist mediation is a requirement in the SEND Code of Practice. For more information please contact The Devon Information Advice and Support service: devonias@devon.gov.uk.

What happens next?

There are different ways of dealing with the concern or complaint using The School Resolution Process. These include:

- immediate resolution by providing information face-to-face or by telephone, as you choose;
- a letter from the school concluding the matter after proportionate consideration, explaining what has been done;
- individual communication between you and the person your concern or complaint was about, and/or a face-to-face meeting with the person your concern or complaint was about. The person your concern or complaint was about will need to agree to a face-to-face meeting taking place.

When the named person has looked into your concerns you will receive further communication from the school within 10 working days of the original concern being raised. However, if the concern is complex, the person working on the School Resolution may contact you to let you know that more time is needed to look more fully into the matter.

What might happen as a result?

The school could take the following actions to resolve your concern or complaint:

- give you information or an explanation to clear up a misunderstanding;
- apologise on behalf of the school;
- learn from the issue, accepting that something could have been handled better and explaining what has been done to stop the same thing happening again;
- arrange action by the Head of School (or Executive Headteacher) to address an issue with a member of staff through support and development;
- apologise on behalf of the person your concern or complaint was about (but only if they agree to this);
- arrange action by the governing body to address matters of policy or procedure.

Stages 2 and 3 - School Investigation – The Formal Complaints Procedure

If the complaint is about the Executive Headteacher, Head of School, or one of the governors, then any letter of complaint should be addressed to the chair of governors, c/o the school. If the complaint is about the chair of governors, then this should be addressed to the vice chair of governors.

Stage 2 will be carried out by the Head of School and Stage 3 by a governor. However if the complaint refers to either the Executive Headteacher or the Head of School, the investigation will go straight to Stage 3 for investigation by the chair of governors (or delegated to another impartial governor).

If following the School Resolution stage, you, or the person dealing with your concern considers that your concern needs a more detailed investigation, or where the School Resolution has not delivered a satisfactory conclusion, a School Investigation will follow.

Although this is a formal investigation into your complaint, it will still be in the spirit of quickly reaching an effective outcome and maintaining positive and productive relationships. All parties need to work together to maintain productive relationships, and establish a way forward in partnership. This investigation may call for more information to be gathered before the person investigating can explain what has happened from the perspective of the school or the staff member involved. This way of dealing with your concern or complaint means solving, explaining, clearing up or settling your complaint directly with you, but doing so with a more detailed investigation than at a School Resolution level.

How does the School Investigation process work?

Once you have raised your concern or made your complaint, the Head of School or governor who is looking into it will contact you within 5 working days (term time). They can arrange to talk to you face-to-face, on the telephone or they can contact you by letter if you prefer.

For your part, you will need to:

- tell the school what happened and how you felt about it;
- say what action you would like to see taken as a result;
- agree the process for resolving your concern or complaint;
- agree timescales and pathways for communication.

For its part, the school will:

- listen to your concerns;
- explain what can happen to resolve your concern or complaint;
- confirm with you the process that will be followed and who will deal with it;
- carry out a more detailed investigation into your concern or complaint;
- produce and supply all parties with a written report of the findings;
- ensure that any relevant findings are taken forward to influence school practice and policy.

What can I expect from a School Investigation

Some concerns or complaints may demand more detailed and perhaps time consuming enquiries, and therefore you should expect an approach that is proportionate to the complaint you have made. The person investigating your concern should keep in regular contact to keep you informed of progress on the matter.

Nevertheless, the School Investigation process aims to resolve quickly your concern or complaint, and identify any learning from it.

What happens next?

Your concern or complaint will be the subject of a proportionate investigation. This means that the amount of time dedicated to the matter will be in accordance with the seriousness of the matter.

At the conclusion, one of a number of things **may** follow. These include:

- resolution by providing information face-to-face or by telephone – as you choose;
- a letter from the school concluding the matter after a proportionate investigation and explaining what has been done;
- if your complaint was about an individual, individual communication between you and that person. This is organised through the head of school or the person dealing with your complaint;
- a face-to-face meeting with the person working on your concern or complaint and/or the person your complaint was about. The person your concern or complaint was about will need to agree to a face-to-face meeting taking place.

The School Investigation should be completed within 10 working days when you will receive a letter explaining the findings and any actions that may need to happen as a result. However, in complex matters it may take longer. The person investigating will keep in regular contact with you to keep you informed of progress.

What might happen as a result?

The school could take the following actions to resolve your concern or complaint and will provide feedback to you on such actions:

- give you information or an explanation to clear up a misunderstanding;
- apologise on behalf of the school;
- learn from the issue, accepting that something could have been handled better and explaining what has been done to stop the same thing happening again;
- arrange action by the governing body to address matters of school policy or procedure;
- arrange feedback and support by the head of school to address any issues arising about a member of staff and their actions or behaviour;
- apologise on behalf of the person your complaint was about (but only if they agree to this).

Appeal against the decision made following the School Investigation (Stage 4)

The School Investigation stage of this complaints procedure includes an appeal process should you not be satisfied with the outcome of the investigation. Following the initial investigation the school will write to you to let you know of your right to appeal. You will have 20 working days to let the school know if you would like to do so. (This does not include school holidays where there may be no one in school to respond to your request).

If you decide you would like to appeal, the school will invite you to attend an appeal meeting and if the date is inconvenient the school will provide an alternative date. You will also receive any paperwork that relates to the initial school investigation 7 days in advance of the appeal meeting.

At the meeting, a panel of three governors who have had no previous dealings with your complaint, will listen to your appeal, they will also listen to what the Head of School has to say, and then they will come to a decision whether to uphold the complaint fully or in part, or whether the school has acted appropriately and that no further actions are necessary. The panel will not be able to hear any other complaints or additional concerns at this meeting.

Whilst this is part of the formal complaints procedure, the school will aim to make the meeting as informal as possible so that all parties can put forward their views in a positive and respectful manner.

When the appeal panel has considered all the information made available to them, they will make a decision and inform you in writing of the outcome within 5 working days.

Sometimes when a complaint is very complex, and has taken a lot of time, it may be that the governing body may have difficulty assembling an appeal panel that fits the criteria of having had no prior knowledge of your complaint. In this case you may request that the school source an independent appeal panel to hear the final, appeal stage of your complaint.

Following the appeal panel meeting the complaints procedure is complete. If you are still unhappy with the way the school has managed your complaint, you can submit a complaint to the Department for Education online at www.gov.uk/complain-about-school

Or write to:

School Complaints Unit
Department of Education
2nd Floor, Piccadilly Gate
Manchester M1 2WD

Please remember that the school is committed to resolving your concerns wherever possible and that where this is proving complex, mediation is a powerful method of resolving matters. (see page 3).

Appendix One

OTTER VALLEY FEDERATION: Policy for Managing Unreasonable Behaviour

Policy on acceptable parent/carer behaviour: (this policy can be applied to any person engaging with one of the Otter Valley Federation schools)

The following policy can be used whether the unreasonable behaviour is as a result on an ongoing concern or complaint which the parent has expressed about the school, or not.

The schools in the Otter Valley Federation recognise that parents and carers are the single biggest influence on their children and their achievements. Therefore, the Federation and its schools are committed to building positive and responsive relationships with parents and carers so that together they can ensure that young people get the most out of their time with in the school.

The schools in the Federation encourage partnerships with parents and carers, and work hard to maintain mutual respect and recognition of shared responsibility for the children. However, in a very small minority of cases, the behaviour of a few parents or carers can cause disruption, resulting in abusive or aggressive behaviour towards staff, and this will not be tolerated. All members of the school community have a right to expect that their school is a safe place.

Schools are not public places and although parents and carers have rights to attend and enter school premises for legitimate proper purposes, The Education Act of 1996 states that it is an offence for a trespasser on school premises to cause a nuisance or disturbance. The school is entitled to withdraw the implied right a parent or carer has to enter the school, if that parent or carer is violent or aggressive. If the parent or carer then enters the premises, they are in breach of the law, and they can be prosecuted in the criminal courts.

This policy applies to all those that engage with the school and not just to parents.

Behaviours which can lead to a ban include:

1. physical or verbal threats towards staff, pupils, or other parents;
2. actual violence;
3. damage to property;
4. refusal to leave when asked;
5. disruption of the running of the school;
6. general abusiveness.

The head of school will decide whether the situation has been reached for proposing an actual ban. In extreme circumstances, i.e. if the incident is considered to be very serious, then s/he can issue a short-term temporary ban immediately, if required.

If the issue presents a less immediate threat then the head of school will consider issuing a warning letter which says that repeats of such behaviour will likely result in a ban. Events may occur in a number of stages and it may be that upon consideration by the head of school a warning letter should be issued.

The school will write to the parent/carer setting out:

- what has happened and why it is unacceptable;
- that the school will consider banning the parent/carer from the school premises;
- a clear explanation of why the ban is proposed;
- a deadline for the parent/carer of 5 working days to respond in writing, giving their own version of events;
- the length of the proposed ban and a proposed review date.

Following receipt of the written response (if one is received):

- the head of school will decide whether or not to ban the parent/carer;
- the parent/carer will be informed in writing within 3 working days of the decision taken;
- the terms of any ban will be clear, with explicit paths of communication between the school and the parent;
- pick up and drop off of children will be taken into consideration;
- a date for the review will be given, which will take into account what has happened in the interim period;
- if no further concerns have arisen regarding the parent's/carer's behaviour, a meeting date will be set which will seek to re-establish a productive working relationship between the school and the parent/carer.

In some cases the unacceptable behaviour is so extreme (for example, an assault on a member of staff) that the head of school may feel that there is no alternative but to impose a lengthy or permanent ban. In criminal cases the head of school will inform the police and contact their legal advisors (DCC Solicitors in maintained schools).

If a parent/carer wishes to appeal against a ban, they may do so in writing (following the complaints procedure). The first stage of this appeal will be undertaken by an appointed governor who would invite the head of school to review the matter with a view to lifting the ban. If the outcome of this stage is that the ban remains in place, then the parent may appeal further to a panel of governors according to the usual complaints process.

Following the appeal panel meeting the complaints procedure is complete. If the parent/carer is still unhappy with the way the school has managed the complaint, the parent/carer can submit a complaint to the Department for Education online at www.gov.uk/complain-about-school .

Or write to:

School Complaints Unit
Department of Education
2nd Floor, Piccadilly Gate
Manchester M1 2WD