

Agreed September 2020  
Review date: September 2023

**Woolenwick Infant and Nursery School**

# **Guidance for Parents**

## **Complaints Procedure**



**Learning Growing Achieving  
Together**

## **Mission Statement:**

Learning Growing Achieving Together

## **Aims and objectives**

Woolenwick Infant and Nursery School is committed to openness and is always willing to listen to concerns and anxieties and be ready to learn from them if appropriate. We recognise that parental concerns are of particular importance.

## **Concerns and Complaints**

There is a difference between a concern and a complaint. A concern can be defined as a cause of worry, whilst a complaint can be defined as an expression of dissatisfaction. Taking informal concerns seriously at the earliest stage will reduce the numbers that develop into formal complaints.

Nearly all concerns or questions can be resolved very quickly and informally if parents voice them as soon as they arise. Parents' feedback is always welcome and you are warmly encouraged to voice any concerns straightaway, preferably to the person concerned. In most cases, discussion, explanation, further information – or an apology if appropriate – will resolve the issue. Our aim is that no concern should ever become a formal complaint.

The Head teacher or other senior teachers will happily meet parents or guardians if that would help to resolve concerns.

However, should a concern be too serious to be handled in this way, perhaps needing greater investigation; or the person concerned may not feel that the answers given so far have been acceptable or adequate, the concern will become a complaint. In that case, the formal procedure in the Complaints policy will be followed. Even in these cases, we will make every effort to resolve the issue at the lowest possible level of the procedure.

Please follow the procedure and refrain from discussing your complaint with individual Governors. Although this seems like an ideal approach it can actually be unhelpful. Governors who sit on the panel to hear a complaint must be impartial.

## **Our promise to you**

When we receive a complaint we will :

- encourage resolution of problems by **informal** means wherever possible deal with honestly, politely and in confidence
- look into the issue **thoroughly** and **fairly**
- allow **swift** handling with established **time-limits** and keep you up to date with progress at each stage
- **apologise** if we have made a mistake
- explain what we are going to do to **put things right**
- provide **information** to the school's Senior Management Team so that services can be improved.

## **Your promise to us**

Our Home-School-Child Agreement states that parents and carers will:

- **communicate openly with the school on any issues of concern, in a calm, understanding and helpful manner.**

We request that in the first instance you always approach the member of staff who is responsible for the area of school life related to your concern.

Complainants are encouraged 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 liability.

An effective procedure will identify areas of agreement between the parties. It is also of equal importance to clarify any misunderstandings that might have occurred as this can create a positive atmosphere in which to discuss any outstanding issues.

Please acknowledge all members of our school community including staff have a right to feel safe and to work in an environment free from aggression and verbal abuse. Any aggressive or abusive behaviour is unacceptable and will not be tolerated.

## **The INITIAL Stage - INFORMAL**

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. 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. We hope that most complaints can be settled quickly and informally, either by putting matters right or by giving you an explanation. Please follow the ABC below:

- A.** In the first instance, please come in and discuss the problem with the relevant member of staff. This may be the class teacher or another appropriate member of staff, such as the Inclusion Leader if it is about special needs.
- B.** If the first person you talk to cannot help you, then speak to the Senior Leadership team. Make an appointment with the school office team. Generally, all worries and concerns are resolved this way.
- C.** If you still feel that the situation is unresolved, please make a further appointment to see the headteacher, in order to discuss making a formal complaint.

## **The FIRST Stage – FORMAL COMPLAINTS**

If you decide to make a formal complaint, you need to complete the form titled 'Formal Complaint form - Stage 1'. Forms are available from the school office and on the school website. This form will provide a basis for a meeting with the Headteacher. This stage must be used even if you have already met with the Headteacher about your concern.

If your complaint is about the Headteacher, the form may be addressed to the Chair of Governors. 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. When your complaint has been fully investigated you will be told of the outcome in writing. This process can take up to 28 working days.

## **The SECOND Stage – COMPLAINING TO GOVERNING BODY**

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome at Stage 1 and wishes to take the matter further, they can escalate the complaint to Stage 2 where the complaint is heard by a Panel of Governors. You need to complete the form titled 'Formal Complaint form - Stage 2'. The Chair of Governors (or Clerk if the Chair was involved in Stage 1) will arrange for your complaint to be investigated and considered, by a panel of Governors.

## **The THIRD Stage – COMPLAINING TO LOCAL AUTHORITY**

Most complaints are the responsibility of the governing body of the school and will be resolved by them. A small number of complaints cannot be resolved by this process. If you want advice once you have received the final response from the Governing Body you may wish to contact the Customer Focus Team Helpline on 01992 588542.

In the case of complaints about **Special Educational Needs**, the **National Curriculum** or **Collective Worship**, in LA maintained schools, you can complain further to the Local Authority. This should be done by writing to the Head of the Conciliation and Appeals Unit.

### **Serial, Unreasonable & Vexatious Complaints**

Woolenwick Infant & Nursery reserves the right to review all complaints and based on the circumstances may class a complaint/complainant as serial/unreasonable or vexatious. Examples of this could include (but not limited to):

- refuses to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcomes sought by raising the complaint, despite offers of assistance
- refuses to co-operate with the complaint's investigation process
- refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of the complaint's procedure
- insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the complaint's procedure or with good practice
- introduces trivial or irrelevant information which they expect to be taken into account and commented on
- raises large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions, and insists they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales

In cases such as this and behaviour continues, the headteacher will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and ask them to change it. For complainants who excessively contact Woolenwick Infant & Nursery causing a significant level of disruption, we may specify methods of communication and limit the number of contacts in a communication plan. This will be reviewed after six months. In extreme cases the school can withdraw access to the school site.

## **USEFUL CONTACTS**

### **Chair of Governors – Mr Steve Akers**

You can communicate with the Chair of Governors by contacting the school office. They will pass on any written correspondence for you or make an appointment.

### **Local Authority Complaints Team**

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

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

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

**Phone:** 01992 588542