

Complaints policy

Introduction

This policy statement sets out the school's approach to dealing with parental concerns and complaints. Further details of how we handle them are contained below.

We value good home/school and community/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 on what parents and other stakeholders 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 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 pupils.

All school staff and members of the governing body will receive a copy of this policy statement and will be familiar with the school's procedures for dealing with concerns and complaints, to which they will have access as required. The policy will be available on request to any affected party.

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 before 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 all concerns and complaints at school level wherever possible, in the interests of maintaining good home/community/school relations. The role of the LA in advising complainants and schools on the handling of concerns and complaints is set out in the school's procedures.

The difference between a concern and a complaint

A 'concern' may be defined as 'an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought'.

A complaint may be generally defined as 'an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action'.

It is in everyone's interest that complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. Many issues can be resolved informally, without the need to invoke formal procedures.

The school take informal concerns seriously and make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible. There are occasions when complainants would like to raise their concerns formally. In those cases, the school's formal procedure should be invoked through the stages outlined below.

Carlton Digby School Complaints Procedure

Stage One (Informal)

- If a parent is concerned about anything to do with the education that we are providing at our school, they should, in the first instance, discuss the matter with their child's class teacher. Most matters of concern can be dealt with in this way. All teachers work very hard to ensure that each child is happy at school, and is making good progress; they always want to know if there is a problem, so that they can take action before the problem seriously affects the child's progress.
- If you are not a parent at the school, then please address your concerns to the Head Teacher.

Stage Two (Formal)

- Where a parent feels that a situation has not been resolved through contact with the class teacher, or that their concern is of a sufficiently serious nature, they should make an *appointment* to discuss it with the Head Teacher. The Head Teacher considers any such complaint very seriously and investigates each case thoroughly. Most complaints are normally resolved at this stage.

Stage Three (Formal)

- If the complaint has not been resolved or should a parent have a complaint about the Head Teacher, s/he should write to the Chair of Governors at the school address, who is the nominated Governor for investigating complaints.
- The Chair of Governors will contact you to find out more about your complaint and will then investigate your complaint. He/she will write to you on behalf of the Governing Body with the results of the investigation.
- Complaints against the Chair of Governors or any individual governor should be made by writing to the Clerk to the Governing Body.

Stage Four (Formal)

- If you are still not satisfied, you may appeal to a committee of the Governing Body, which will listen to your complaint. This committee will be made up of Governors who have not had any previous knowledge of your complaint. You will be able to attend a meeting of the committee to put your case. The Head Teacher and nominated Governor for investigating complaints will also attend to explain what they have done to investigate and resolve your concerns. The committee will write to you after listening to all parties and coming to their conclusion.
- It is our aim that the committee considers written complaints within fifteen working days of receipt. The school will give the complainant at least three working days' notice of the meeting. It is hoped that this meeting will resolve the problem.

Complaint not resolved at school level

- You have the right to complain to the Local Authority or the Secretary of State for Education if you remain dissatisfied with the outcome of the schools' complaint process.

Recording complaints

As a school, we ensure that we comply with our obligations under the Equality Act 2010. It is common practice to ask for complaints to be made by using a complaint form or in writing, however the complainant may have communication preferences due to disability or learning difficulties and we allow alternative methods of contact:

- A complaint may be made in person, by telephone, or in writing
- In order to prevent any later challenge or disagreement over what was said, brief notes of meetings and telephone calls will be kept and a copy of any written response added to the record. Where there are communication difficulties, we may wish to use recording devices to ensure the complainant is able to access and review the discussions at a later point
- We will record the progress of the complaint and the final outcome. The head teacher will be responsible for these records and hold them centrally

Implementation and Monitoring

The section above 'The Complaints Procedures' will be made available for anyone making a complaint.

Complaints should not be shared with the whole governing body, except in very general terms, in case an appeal panel needs to be organised.

If the whole governing body is aware of the substance of a complaint before the final stage has been completed, we will arrange for an independent panel to hear the complaint. They may approach a different school to ask for help or the local Governor Services team at the LA

Complainants have the right to request an independent panel, if they believe there is likely to be bias in the proceedings. We will consider the request but ultimately, the decision is made by the governors.

The process of listening to and resolving complaints can contribute to school improvement. When individual complaints are heard, we will also identify underlying issues that need to be addressed. The monitoring and review of complaints can be a useful tool in evaluating a school's performance. The governing body will consider using complaints and review their handling at regular intervals to inform improvements and the effectiveness of the complaints procedure.

Regular reviews of the policy and procedures will take place. This will enable the school to take into account any new guidance issued by the Department for Education or legislative changes.

Complaints not in scope of the procedure

The complaints procedure above should cover all complaints about any provision of facilities or services that a school provides with the exceptions listed below, for which there are separate (statutory) procedures.

Exceptions	Who to contact
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Admissions to schools• Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs (SEN)• School re-organisation proposals• Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation	Concerns should be raised direct with local authorities (LA). For school admissions, it will depend on who is the admission authority (either the school or the LA). Complaints about admission appeals for maintained schools are dealt with by the Local Government Ombudsman.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Exclusion of children from school	Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at: www.gov.uk/schooldiscipline-exclusions/exclusions
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Whistleblowing	Schools have an internal whistleblowing procedure for their employees and voluntary staff. Other concerns can be raised direct with Ofsted by telephone on: 0300 123 3155, via email at: whistleblowing@ofsted.gov.uk or by writing to: WBHL, Ofsted Piccadilly Gate Store Street Manchester M1 2WD. The Department for Education is also a prescribed body for whistleblowing in education.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Staff grievances and disciplinary procedures	These matters will invoke the school's internal grievance procedures. Complainants will not be informed of the outcome of any investigation.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Complaints about services provided by other providers who may use school premises or facilities	Providers should have their own complaints procedure to deal with complaints about service. They should be contacted direct.

Unreasonable complainants and serial and persistent complaints / complainants

Carlton Digby School is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, and to providing a high quality service to those who complain. We will not normally limit the contact complainants have with the school. However, we do not expect our staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour and will take action to protect staff from that behaviour, including that which is abusive, offensive or threatening.

Carlton Digby School defines unreasonable complainants as 'those who, because of the frequency or nature of their contacts with the school, hinder our consideration of their or other people's complaints'.

A complaint may be regarded as unreasonable when the person making the complaint:

- 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 complaints investigation process while still wishing their complaint to be resolved;

- refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of a complaints procedure;
- insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the adopted complaints procedure or with good practice;
- introduces trivial or irrelevant information which the complainant expects to be taken into account and commented on, or raises large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions, and insists they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales;
- makes unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues, and seeks to have them replaced;
- changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds;
- repeatedly makes the same complaint (despite previous investigations or responses concluding that the complaint is groundless or has been addressed);
- refuses to accept the findings of the investigation into that complaint where the school's complaint procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed including referral to the Department for Education;
- seeks an unrealistic outcome;
- makes excessive demands on school time by frequent, lengthy, complicated and stressful contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with.

A complaint may also be considered unreasonable if the person making the complaint does so either face-to-face, by telephone or in writing or electronically:

- maliciously;
- aggressively;
- using threats, intimidation or violence;
- using abusive, offensive or discriminatory language;
- knowing it to be false;
- using falsified information;
- publishing unacceptable information in a variety of media such as in social media websites and newspapers.

Complainants should limit the numbers of communications with a school while a complaint is being progressed. It is not helpful if repeated correspondence is sent (either by letter, phone, email or text) as it could delay the outcome being reached.

Whenever possible, the head teacher or Chair of Governors will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying an 'unreasonable' marking.

If the behaviour continues the head teacher will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and asking them to change it. For complainants who excessively contact Carlton Digby School causing a significant level of disruption, we may specify methods of communication and limit the number of contacts in a communication plan. This will usually be reviewed after 6 months.

In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, the concerns and actions taken will be put in writing immediately and the police informed. This may include banning an individual from Carlton Digby School.

Barring from the School Premises

Although fulfilling a public function, schools are private places. The public has no automatic right of entry. We will therefore act to ensure that the school remains a safe place for pupils, staff and other members of their community.

If a parent's behaviour is a cause for concern, we can ask him/her to leave school premises. In serious cases, the head teacher or the local authority can notify them in writing that their implied licence to be on school premises has been temporarily revoked subject to any representations that the parent may wish to make. We will always give the parent the opportunity to formally express their views on the decision to bar in writing.

The decision to bar should then be reviewed, taking into account any representations made by the parent, and either confirmed or lifted. If the decision is confirmed the parent should be notified in writing, explaining how long the bar will be in place.

Anyone wishing to complain about being barred can do so, by letter or email, to the head teacher or Chair of Governors. However, complaints about barring cannot be escalated to the Department for Education. Once the school's own complaints procedure has been completed, the only remaining avenue of appeal is through the Courts; independent legal advice must therefore be sought.

September 2018

To be reviewed September 2019 (or earlier if the need arises)