

Mickle Trafford Village School



We care, we learn, we belong

Complaints Policy

Updated for Covid 19

Whole school reopening September 2020

Date of policy	Autumn 2020
Date for Review	Autumn 2021
Signed Headteacher	
Signed Chair of Governors	
Date policy approved by School Governing Body:	

Overview

Mickle Trafford Village School provides a high standard of education for all its pupils and actively promotes a caring and orderly environment. Part of the School's vision is to provide a tolerant and positive outlook on the world, its people and diverse cultures by building on traditions of inclusiveness, openness and creativity and we believe this ethos is summed up in our school motto "We care, we learn, we belong".

Pupils, parents, staff and governors are proud of their school and recognise the importance of respecting each other's views. Parents are encouraged to actively participate in the school community and to meet and discuss with class teachers on an informal basis as well as in formal meetings. **During Autumn term 2020, Covid 19 has reduced the ability for face to face meetings, therefore parents are asked to contact teachers by class emails or via telephone.**

As you can imagine in a busy school, from time-to-time there may be occasions when either you or your child may have concerns. All staff work very hard to ensure that each child is happy at school, and is making good progress. They also want to know if there is a problem, so that they can take action before the problem seriously affects the child's progress.

Governing Bodies of all maintained schools in England are 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. The law also requires the procedure to be publicised.

Aims

We will endeavour to be fair, open and honest when dealing with any complaint and will always put the interests of our children above all else. We will give careful consideration to all complaints and we aim to resolve any complaint through dialogue and mutual understanding.

Our complaints procedure will:

- 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

Initial concerns

At Mickle Trafford Village School we are clear about the difference between a concern and a complaint. Taking informal concerns seriously at the earliest stage reduces the numbers that develop into formal complaints. The 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.

These key messages deal with complaints but the underlying principle is that concerns ought to be handled, if at all possible, without the need for formal procedures. The requirement to have a complaints procedure need not in any way undermine efforts to resolve the concern informally. In most cases the class teacher or the individual delivering the service in the case of extended school provision, will receive the first approach. It would be helpful if staff were able to resolve issues on the spot, including apologising where necessary

Investigating Complaints

It is suggested that at each stage the person investigating the complaint makes sure that they:

- Establish **what** has happened so far, and **who** has been involved
- Clarify the nature of the complaint and what remains unresolved
- Meet with the complainant or contact them (if unsure or further information is necessary)
- Clarify what the complainant feels would put things right
- Interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish
- Conduct the interview with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning
- Keep notes of the interview or emails sent on EdAware.

Resolving Complaints

At each stage in the procedure we 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

It would be useful if complainants were 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 negligence.

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.

Vexatious Complaints

If properly followed, a good complaints procedure 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 governing body is able to inform them in writing that the procedure has been exhausted and that the matter is now closed. If the complainant writes again on the same issue, then the complainant may be regarded as serial or persistent (Please refer to Serial and Persistent Complaints Policy)

Time-Limits

Complaints need to be considered, and resolved, as quickly and efficiently as possible. An effective complaints procedure will have realistic time limits for each action within each stage. However, where further investigations are necessary, new time limits can be set and the complainant sent details of the new deadline and an explanation for the delay.

Dealing with Complaints – Formal procedures

Mickle Trafford Village School has nominated the Headteacher as the person responsible for the operation and management of the school complaints procedure.

Part 2: The Formal Complaints Procedure

The school complaints procedure has three defined stages. These stages are designed to enable complaints to be heard, dealt with or resolved expeditiously and at the most appropriate level within the school. 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 headteacher after a meeting with the complainant.

STAGE ONE: Complaint heard by staff member

It is in everyone's interest that complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. The experience of the first contact between the complainant and the school can be crucial in determining whether the complaint will escalate. To that end, our staff are made aware of the procedures and know what to do when they receive a complaint.

If a parent is concerned about anything to do with the education or support that we are providing at our school, they should, in the first instance, discuss the matter with their child's classteacher; most matters of concern can be resolved positively in this way. All teachers work very hard to ensure that each child is happy at school, and is making good progress; they naturally want to know if there is a problem, so that they can take action before it seriously affects the child's progress.

We respect the views of a complainant who indicates that he/she would have difficulty discussing a complaint with a particular member of staff. In these cases, the complaints co-ordinator can refer the complainant to another staff member. Where the complaint concerns the headteacher, the complaints co-ordinator can refer the complainant to the chair of governors.

Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels too compromised to deal with a complaint, the complaints co-ordinator may consider referring the complainant to another staff member. The member of staff may be more senior but does not have to be. The ability to consider the complaint objectively and impartially is crucial.

STAGE TWO : Complaint heard by Headteacher

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 will consider all matters of concern very seriously and investigate each case thoroughly. Most complaints would normally be resolved at this stage.

STAGE THREE: Complaint heard by Governing Bodies Complaints Appeal Panel

Only when a complaint fails to be resolved by the head teacher should a formal complaint be made to the governing body. This complaint must be made in writing, stating the nature of the complaint, who has been spoken to already and the preferred outcome. The parent should send this written complaint to the chair of governors via the school office. The Chair, or a nominated governor, will convene a governing body complaints panel. The governing body must consider all written complaints within 21 school working days of receipt.

The chair of governors will nominate a governor to co-ordinate the procedure and will appoint a complaints panel consisting of 3 governors who are not employees of the school. The nominated coordinator will chair the complaints panel.

The co-ordinator will arrange a meeting of the complaints panel to discuss the complaint and will invite the person making it to attend the meeting so that they

can explain the complaint in more detail. The school will give the complainant at least five days' notice of the meeting. If the complainant cannot attend the suggested date, a further date will be set. If the complainant does not attend the second date, a third and final date will be set, at which time the meeting will proceed without the complainant present.

The head teacher will write a report addressing the complaint and ensure that the complaints panel members and the complainant receive a copy 4 days before the meeting. (If it is a complaint about the head teacher, the Chair of Governors will write the report).

The complainant is invited to write a report addressing the issue and must ensure that the complaints panel members and the head teacher (or Chair of Governors) receives a copy 2 days before the meeting. Other written evidence will be not be accepted at the meeting, except in exceptional circumstances.

The governors' appeal hearing is the last school-based stage of the complaints process, and is not convened to merely rubber-stamp previous decisions.

Notification of the Panel's Decision

The chair of the panel needs to ensure that the complainant is notified of the panel's decision, in writing, with the panel's response; this is usually within a set deadline which is publicised in the procedure. The letter needs to explain if there are any further rights of appeal and, if so, to whom they need to be addressed.

When the panel has fully investigated the complaint, the chair of the panel, on behalf of the governing body, will write to the complainant confirming the outcome of the complaint and any agreed action to be taken. The panel can:

- Dismiss the complaint in whole or in part;
- Uphold the complaint in whole or in part;
- Decide on appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint;
- Recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not recur.

Individual complaints will not be heard by the whole governing body at any stage, as this could compromise the impartiality of any panel set up for a disciplinary hearing against a member of staff following a serious complaint.

Where the first approach is made to a governor, the next step would be to refer the complainant to the appropriate person and advise them about the procedure. It would be useful if governors did not act alone on an individual complaint outside the formal procedure or be involved at the early stages in case they are needed to sit on a panel at a later stage of the procedure.

Regardless of how many stages we choose, an unsatisfied complainant can always take a complaint to the next stage. Some procedures may allow for an additional

stage if the LEA or other external agency provides an independent appeal or review.

Checklist for a Panel Hearing

The panel needs to take the following points into account

- The hearing is as informal as possible;
- After introductions, the complainant is invited to explain their complaint (with the support of an advocate if required);
- The panel members and head teacher (or Chair of Governors) may ask questions;
- The head teacher (or Chair of Governors) is then invited to explain the school's actions (with support of DHT, SENCo or other supporter if required);
- The panel members or complainant may ask questions;;
- The complainant is then invited to sum up their complaint;
- The head teacher (or Chair of Governors) is then invited to sum up the school's actions and response to the complaint;
- The chair of the panel explains that both parties will hear from the panel within 3 working days;
- Both parties leave the meeting while the panel decides on the issues.

For a complaint about the head teacher:

If a parent is concerned about anything to do with the behaviour, leadership or management of the head teacher, they should, in the first instance, discuss the matter with the head teacher; most matters of concern can be resolved positively in this way.

Where a parent feels that a situation has not been resolved through contact with the headteacher, or that their concern is of a sufficiently serious nature, they should make an appointment to discuss it with the chair of the governing body. The chair will consider all matters of concern very seriously and investigate each case thoroughly. Most complaints would normally be resolved at this stage.

Only when an informal complaint fails to be resolved by the chair should a formal complaint be made to the governing body. This complaint must be made in writing, stating the nature of the complaint, who has been spoken to already and the preferred outcome. The parent should send this written complaint to the governing body via the clerk to the governors (Mrs Catherine Oakes) via the school office.

Recording Complaints

We record the progress of the complaint and the final outcome. A complaint may be made in person, by telephone, or in writing. An example of a complaint form can be found in Annex B. 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 can be kept and a copy of any written response added to the record. The Headteacher/ Chair of Governors is responsible for the records, and could hold them centrally.

Governing Body Review

The governing body monitor the level and nature of complaints and review the outcomes on a regular basis to ensure the effectiveness of the procedure and make changes where necessary. Preferably, complaints information shared with the whole governing body will not name individuals.

As well as addressing an individual's complaints, the process of listening to, and resolving complaints will contribute to school improvement. When individual complaints are heard, we may identify underlying issues that need to be addressed. The monitoring and review of complaints by us can be a useful tool in evaluating our performance.

Publicising the Procedure

There is a legal requirement for the Complaints Procedures to be publicised. It is up to the governing body to decide how to fulfil this requirement but details of the Complaints Procedures could be included in:

- The school prospectus
- Governors' report to parents
- The information given to new parents when their children join the school
- The information given to the children themselves
- The home-school agreement
- Home school bulletins or newsletters
- Documents supplied to community users including course information or letting agreements
- A specific complaints leaflet which includes a form on which a complaint can be made
- Posters displayed in areas of the school that will be used by the public, such as reception or the main entrance
- The school website

Annex A: The Act

Section 29 of the Education Act 2002 requires that:

- (1) The governing body of a maintained school (including a maintained nursery school) shall –
 - (a) establish procedures for dealing with all complaints relating to the school or to the provision of facilities or services under section 27, other than complaints falling to be dealt with in accordance with any procedures required to be established in relation to the school by virtue of a statutory provision other than this section, and
 - (b) publicise the procedures so established.
- (2) In establishing or publicising procedures under subsection (1), the governing body shall have regard to any guidance given from time to time (in relation to England) by the Secretary of State.

Section 39 of the Education Act 2002 provides the following:

“maintained school” means a community, foundation or voluntary school, a community or foundation special school or a maintained nursery school;

“maintained nursery school” means a nursery school which is maintained by a local education authority and is not a special school;

Annex B:

Mickle Trafford Village School Complaint Form

Please complete and return to the Headteacher who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

Your name:

Pupil's name:

Your relationship to the pupil:

Address:

Postcode:

Day time telephone number:

Evening telephone number:

Please give details of your complaint.

**What action, if any, have you already taken to try and resolve your complaint
(who did you speak to and what was their response)?**

What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?

Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details.

Signature:

Date:

Official use

Date acknowledgement sent:

By who:

Complaint referred to:

Date: