

INFORMATION FOR PARENTS: PROCEDURE FOR DEALING WITH CONCERNS AND COMPLAINTS ABOUT YOUR CHILD'S EDUCATION

The staff and governors at Ashton West End Primary Academy are committed to providing a high quality education for your child in a secure and supportive environment. Whilst all concerned strive to achieve their best for the welfare of the pupils at the school, it is appreciated that there may be occasions when you have concerns about your child's education or about particular incidents which have occurred at school. If such a situation arises, we would ask you to follow the procedure outlined below.

GENERAL PROCEDURE FOR CONCERNS AND COMPLAINTS

The procedure is presented as a series of stages, in a question and answer format.

It is important that you follow through the various stages in the order in which they are given.

1. I am concerned about some aspect of my child's school life. Who should I speak to first?

In the first instance you should always address your concern to the member of staff who has direct responsibility for your child's welfare. At Ashton West End Primary Academy this is your child's class teacher. You can contact them to arrange an appointment to discuss your concern when you collect your child at the end of the school day or by telephoning the school, or writing a letter. It is always best to make contact at an early stage so that parents and school can work together to find a satisfactory solution to the problem.

2. I've spoken to the class teacher but the situation hasn't improved. What should I do next?

If you are not satisfied with the response you have received from the class teacher, you need to make an appointment to see the Headteacher, who has overall responsibility for the day-to-day management of the school. You can contact the Headteacher for an appointment either by telephone or in writing. He will listen to your concerns and an agreed statement of your concerns will be written down. He will then investigate the matter and report back to you. Do bear in mind that the Headteacher will have many other responsibilities to attend to and you may have to wait a few days before receiving a response. Obviously, if the matter is urgent, it will be attended to as soon as possible.

3. I've been to see the Headteacher but I'm not satisfied with the response I've received, is there anyone else I can talk to about the problem?

If you feel that your approach to the Headteacher has not resolved the issue as far as you are concerned, the next person you can discuss matters with is the Chair of Governors of the school. If you are not sure who this is, you can obtain the name and contact details of the Chair either directly from the school or by contacting Tameside Education Department's Governor and Management Services Section (Tel: 0161 342 3206). At this stage of the procedure, you will be asked to put your concerns in writing, if you have not already done so. The Chair of Governors will not interfere with

the Headteacher's day to day management of the school but will investigate whether your problem has been dealt with in an appropriate manner and report back as soon as possible.

4. *I've spoken to the Chair of Governors but am still not happy, is there anything more I can do?*

You are now reaching the stage when your original concern is turning into a complaint about the way matters have been dealt with by the school. If you wish to pursue this complaint, you have the opportunity of a formal hearing before a complaints panel of the Governing Body. Neither the Headteacher nor the Chair of Governors will be on this panel, which will normally consist of three governors appointed by the Governing Body as a whole. The complaints panel of the Governing Body will be impartial and will have been selected to make sure that individuals have no previous knowledge of the complaint. There are guidelines available about how such a hearing will be conducted and what you can expect to happen as a result. These guidelines are described in a separate information leaflet "Guidance for Parents on the Conduct of Governing Body Complaints Panel Hearings", which will be sent to you by the Chair of Governors if your complaint reaches this stage.

5. *The Governing Body Complaints Panel have not upheld my complaint. Is there anyone else I can refer to?*

The Local Government Ombudsman investigates complaints about "maladministration" i.e., cases where the recognised complaints procedure has not been properly used. However, the Ombudsman cannot investigate complaints about internal school matters and is not empowered to overturn the decision of a Governing Body Complaints Panel which has correctly followed procedures. If the Ombudsman decides to investigate your complaint, you could wait up to 6 months to hear the result of an investigation. A complaint form can be obtained from your local library or Citizen's Advice Bureau.

If you feel that the Governing Body have acted "unreasonably" or "illegally" in coming to their decision, you can complain to the Secretary of State for Education and Employment. If you feel this to be necessary, you will need to write to the Secretary of State, giving details of your complaint and referring to Section 496 ("unreasonably") or Section 487 ("illegally") of the 1996 Education Act. When you make a formal complaint in this way, the Secretary of State must fully investigate it and let you know the result. The Secretary of State has the power to issue directions to the Governing Body, but you should be aware that this power is very rarely used, and that an investigation can take up to 6 months or more.

Reference to the Local Government Ombudsman or Secretary of State will only occur under very extreme circumstances.

The vast majority of concerns and complaints will be dealt with by staff and governors of the school. Please remember that they, like you, only want to achieve the best they can for the children in their care.

OTHER COMPLAINTS PROCEDURES

In addition to this general complaints procedure, there are a number of statutory procedures which relate to specific aspects of the education system. These may need to be followed if you have concerns about the following:

- (a) The school curriculum and related matters.*
- (b) Admission of your child to school.*
- (c) Exclusion of your child from school.*
- (d) The assessment of your child's special educational needs.*

If you require more information about any of these procedures, you should contact either the Headteacher of your child's school.

Most concerns that parents have on a day-to-day basis do not necessarily fit into one of these categories and the general procedure outlined above should therefore be followed. In any case, the general procedure can still be used to deal with concerns which fall into categories (a)-(d) until it becomes clear that recourse to the statutory procedure becomes necessary.

I'm still unclear what to do, who can I turn to for help?

If you are not sure what to do, or feel you would like some advice on how best to proceed, please contact the Headteacher of your child's school in the first instance. If you feel you would like to speak to someone who is not directly involved with the school, you can contact Governor and Management Services Section at Tameside Education Department (Tel: 0161 342 2208).

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