



THE CORBET SCHOOL

Complaints Procedure

Associated Policies

Discipline & Grievance Procedures

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COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

INTRODUCTION

The Corbet School is dedicated to providing the best possible education and support for pupils. This means having a clear, fair, and efficient procedure for dealing with complaints, so that any issue can be dealt with as swiftly and effectively as possible.

Any complaint will be managed by a member of the School Senior Leadership Team except that at Stage Three the co-ordinator will be the Clerk to the Governing Body. The complaint will be dealt with in one of three ways:

- Stage One – complaint received by staff member (though not the subject of the complaint).
- Stage Two – complaint heard by the Headteacher or in his/her absence another member of the Leadership Team.
- Stage Three – complaint heard by the Governing Body's Complaints Committee.

These three stages are explained in detail below.

Stage One: Complaint received 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. All staff should therefore be willing to receive a complaint, which they should then refer to the Headteacher or a member of the senior Leadership Team.

As a school we must respect the views of a complainant who indicates that he/she would have difficulty discussing a complaint with a particular member of staff. Where the complaint concerns the Headteacher, the complainant will be referred to the Chair of Governors.

Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels too compromised to deal with a complaint, the complainant will be referred to another staff member. The ability to consider the complaint objectively and impartially is crucial.

Where the first approach is made to a governor, the next step would be to refer the complainant back to the appropriate person in school and advise the complainant about the procedure.

Stage Two: Complaint Heard by Headteacher or SLT Member

Where it has not been possible to resolve a complaint at Stage One or if the complainant is dissatisfied with the way the complaint was handled at Stage One, they may refer it to the Head. The Head may delegate the task of collating the information to another staff member but not the decision on the action to be taken.

Stage Three: Complaint Heard by Governing Body's Complaints Committee

If on the rare occasions that a complaint is not resolved at Stage One or Stage Two then the complainant must be asked to submit a written complaint to the Chair of Governors, c/o the Clerk to the Governors, the School Office, giving details of the complaint. The Chair, or a nominated governor, will convene a Governing Body Complaints Committee.

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

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

PROCEDURAL ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE COMPLAINTS COMMITTEE

- (1) The Complaints Committee, once set up, will follow the Terms of Reference of the Complaints Committee. They will acknowledge a formal written complaint, investigate it and send a suitable response to the complainant. Where the complainant requests it, the Complaints Committee will hear representations from the complainant, the Headteacher or Chairman of Governors and then send a suitable response to the complainant.
- (2) Where a complainant requests it, a formal meeting will be set up. The Clerk to the Governors sends a letter to the complainants indicating the date (within 15 school days of receipt of an official complaint) and time of the Complaints Committee Meeting and informing the complainants that they have the right to attend and/or write to the Complaints Committee (via the Clerk to the Governors) outlining the grounds for their complaint. The date of the meeting must be arranged with sufficient time for written material to be sent to the parties in advance of the hearing.

(3) **Committee - procedural arrangements**

- i) Chairman outlines the purpose of the meeting and the procedural arrangements to the Committee and the complainants.
- ii) The complainants put their case outlining the complaint. This can either be in person or via their detailed written complaint previously supplied to the Clerk to the Governors.
- iii) Members of the Committee and school staff may ask questions of the complainants.
- iv) Senior staff and/or the Head present the case for the school.
- v) Members of the Committee and the complainants (if present) may ask questions of the school staff.
- vi) The Chairman of the Committee asks any of the parties present whether there are any other points which they wish to have taken into consideration.
- vii) School staff and the complainants (if present) withdraw. The committee discusses the case and makes a decision about what outcome they feel is appropriate.

4) The Committee can:

- dismiss the complaint in whole or in part;
- uphold the complaint in whole or in part;
- decide on the appropriate action to resolve the complaint;
- recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not recur.

There are several points which any governor sitting on a Complaints Committee needs to remember:

- (a) It is important that that the appeal hearing is independent and impartial and that it is seen to be so. No governor may sit on the Committee if they have had a prior involvement in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it. In deciding the make-up of the Committee, governors need to try and ensure that it is a cross-section of the categories of governor (except staff) and sensitive to the issues of race, gender and religious affiliation.
- (b) The aim of the hearing, which needs to be held in private, will always be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant. However, it has to be recognised the complainant might not be satisfied with the outcome if the hearing does not find in their favour. It may only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations

which will satisfy the complainant that his or her complaint has been taken seriously.

- (c) An effective Committee will acknowledge that many complainants feel nervous and inhibited in a formal setting. Complainants often feel emotional when discussing an issue that affects their child. The Committee Chair will ensure that the proceedings are as welcoming as possible. The layout of the room will set the tone and care is needed to ensure the setting is informal and not adversarial.
- (d) Extra care needs to be taken when the complainant is a child. Careful consideration of the atmosphere and proceedings will ensure that the child does not feel intimidated. The Committee needs to be aware of the views of the child and give them equal consideration to those of adults. Where the child's parent is the complainant, it would be helpful to give the parent the opportunity to say which parts of the hearing, if any, the child needs to attend.
- (e) The governors sitting on the Committee need to be aware of the complaints procedure.

6) **Notification of the Complaints Committee's Decision**

- The Chairman of the Complaints Committee will communicate the decision to all parties, which must be confirmed to the complainant in writing.

7) **Checklist for a Complaints Committee Hearing**

The Committee needs to take the following points into account:

- The hearing is as informal as possible.
- Witnesses are only required to attend for the part of the hearing in which they give their evidence.
- After introductions, the complainant is invited to explain their complaint, and be followed by their witnesses.
- The Headteacher may question both the complainant and the witnesses after each has spoken.
- The Headteacher is then invited to explain the school's actions and be followed by the school's witnesses.
- The complainant may question both the Headteacher and the witnesses after each has spoken.

- The Committee may ask questions at any point.
- The complainant is then invited to sum up their complaint.
- The Headteacher is then invited to sum up the school's actions and response to the complaint.
- The Chair explains to both parties how they will be notified as to the Committee's Decision and within what set time scale.
- Both parties leave together while the Committee decides on the issues.