



## The Local Education Authority (LEA)

### Concerns and Complaints: A Guide for Parents and Carers

This leaflet aims to answer some of the questions you may have about approaching your child's school when you feel that things are going wrong. It also tells you the process for making a complaint about something that has happened in your child's school.

***This document is also available on request in Braille, large print, tape and disc/CD and can be translated into different languages. Please contact the school.***

“Working together for equalities”



Language Line

## **Introduction**

All schools, parents and carers in Somerset want their children to do well and be happy.

Schools aim to provide as many opportunities to keep you informed and involved in your child's progress as they possibly can - with regular reports, open days and visits all helping the process. Questions and concerns are usually dealt with quickly and helpfully.

However, we understand there are times when things go wrong, when concerns continue and differences of opinion develop.

These can usually be resolved by speaking to the right person. Most concerns can be settled without too much trouble, but whatever the issue, even where you are seriously concerned about your child's future at the school, it's always important to try to find an answer. Disruption to a child's education would be the most damaging result of all.

### **Q1. What should I do first?**

**It would be useful to think through your concerns.**

- **What actually happened?**

Remember there is often more than one view about an incident or situation. For example, your child may well be telling the truth but it may not be the whole story.

It would be useful to ask yourself the following questions:

- **What do you want to raise your concern/s about?**
- **What do you hope will happen as a result of raising your concern/s?**

It might help to talk this through with a friend or relative. Alternatively you can talk with the Parent Partnership Manager on 01823 355578.

Remember that although you may want to change a situation, you want it to end on a positive note with no bad feelings. Because of this you should try to follow the process and not back yourself or anyone else into a corner.

When you are clear as to what you believe has happened, you need to speak to someone at the school - usually the teacher concerned.

Although some schools, particularly for younger children, can see parents who just "pop in", this is not generally possible. Always try to make an appointment where you can sit and talk things through calmly and without interruption.

Tell them as soon as something concerns you or your child. Talk to the class teacher or, in a secondary school, you might also contact the Year Head. They can then look into your concerns and take any action that may be necessary to put things right and make improvements.

**Everyone benefits from concerns being sorted out quickly.**

### **Q2. What if I am still unhappy?**

Ask for an appointment with the Headteacher (or Head of Year/Deputy Head/Head of Department in a Secondary School).

They may not be able to see you straightaway, as they will of course have to talk to the member/s of staff concerned.

Do try to be patient, as every effort will be made to see you as soon as possible.

Before attending the appointment it would be useful for you to put your concerns down in writing, to clarify them. Enabling both you and the school to focus on the problem and finding a solution. If you need help with this you can contact the Parent Partnership Manager on 01823 355578.

When attending the appointment you may take a friend or family member with you, if you wish. Alternatively, you can contact the Parent Partnership Manager who may be able to attend the meeting with you.

The Headteacher may not be able to resolve your concerns straight away. They may need to speak to other staff before responding. You can agree a convenient time to be contacted again.

Any solutions that are agreed need time to work, therefore, it is useful to meet with the school again to discuss how things are working out.

**Experience has shown that the vast majority of concerns are resolved through this process.**

### **Q3. What if I am still unhappy?**

Once you have discussed your concerns with the school, you will be advised of the outcome and suggestions made to provide a solution. If you are still unhappy you may, if you wish, **ask the governing body to review** the way your complaint was handled.

**As this a serious step to take, it is important that you have thought things through carefully and that every possible attempt has been made to solve your concern by informal means.**

### **Q4. How do I proceed?**

**You will need to:**

Write to the Clerk of the Governors, making clear what it is you are complaining about and what you would like the governors to do. (The school can give you a form that can be used for this purpose).

You will need to write or complete the form within 10 days of receiving the Headteacher's response.

Again, if you need help with this contact the Parent Partnership Manager on 01823 355578 who will be able to help you.

Your complaint will be acknowledged and a panel of governors (with no previous knowledge of the case) will consider it.

You will be invited to meet with the panel within 15 school days to explain your concerns.

The panel will then review/investigate the Headteacher's handling of/response to your complaint and decide if the outcome/response is appropriate.

They will provide a written response within a further 15 school days. This will explain their decision, the reasons for it and include any action taken or recommended. The Local Education Authority (LEA) Parental Complaints Co-ordinator will also be sent a copy of the letter.

#### **Q5. What if I am still unhappy?**

If you remain dissatisfied you can ask the LEA to look at the way the governors handled your complaint.

To do this you need to write to the Parental Complaints Co-ordinator in the LEA within 10 school days of receipt of the governors' panel response. Again, if you need help with this please contact the Parent Partnership Manager.

Your letter will be acknowledged. An Investigating Officer will usually be appointed and arrange to meet with you, within 15 school days of your written request, if possible.

The process will be reviewed to see if it was thorough/fair and whether the results reached were reasonable. This could take some time to complete but you will be kept informed of the progress.

Exceptionally, the LEA could decide not to proceed with a review where there is no realistic prospect of resolving the complaint to your satisfaction, or there is an alternative, more appropriate, means of addressing it.

#### **Remember**

This process exists so that your views can be heard. You have rights. Pupils have rights. School staff and governors have rights. The aim is that complaints are properly and fairly dealt with.

#### **Summary**

The complaints procedure has three elements:

Informal - consideration by school staff and/or investigation by the Headteacher.

Governors' Review - if you feel that your concerns have not been addressed satisfactorily by the school staff.

Review by LEA - if you have been through the school elements of the procedure but remain dissatisfied.

***LAST UPDATED JANUARY 2005***

