



THE FOREST FEDERATION

Complaints Policy

The document has been updated using 'Best Practice Advice for School Complaints Procedures 2016 Departmental advice for maintained schools, maintained nursery schools and local authorities January'

Part 1 complaints policy

Part 2 unreasonable complaints

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Part 1

Introduction

We believe that our schools provide a good education for all our children, and that the Executive Headteacher, senior leaders and other staff work very hard to build positive relationships with all parents, however sometimes things may seem to go wrong which may lead you to express concerns. The following policy sets out the procedures that we follow in such cases.

We believe that all people have a right to raise issues of concerns and make complaints when they feel it is necessary. We aim to be fair, open and honest when dealing with any complaint and solve problems giving people a means to raise issues of concerns and have them addressed. We give careful consideration to all complaints and deal with them as swiftly as possible. We aim to resolve any complaint through dialogue and mutual understanding and, in all cases; we put the interests of the people involved above all other issues. We provide sufficient opportunity for any complaint to be fully discussed, and then resolved. We deal with all complaints in accordance with procedures set out by the LA they will be treated respectfully during and after the course of any complaints investigation.

All Federation staff are aware of the complaints procedure and understand:

- The importance of attempting to resolve problems before they become formal complaints.
- The importance of treating all complaints respectfully.

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. We 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, our formal procedure are invoked through the stages outlined below.

Who can make a complaint?

Any person, including members of the general public, may make a complaint about any provision of facilities or services that a school provides, unless separate statutory procedures apply (such as exclusions or admissions). We do not limit complaints to parents or carers of children that are registered at our schools.

COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE – Guidance for Parents (as outlined in guidance by the LA)

Expressing Concerns informally before a formal complaint is made.

If any person with parental responsibility is unhappy with the education that their child is receiving, or has any concern relating our schools, we encourage them to talk to the relevant personnel. Any concerns should be raised with the member of staff concerned in the first instance and then in the following order as appropriate. Some complaints may warrant a conversation with senior leadership in the first instance.

- Their child's Class Teacher
- The Deputy Headteacher
- The Executive Headteacher

If a concern is brought to the attention of the Executive Headteacher or Deputy Headteachers, they may consider it appropriate another member of staff may be asked to respond because they have a particular responsibility or are familiar with the circumstances that have caused you concern. We hope that this would be sufficient to resolve the difficulty.

Making a Formal Complaint

If it has not been possible to resolve a difficulty informally then you can ask to use the formal complaints procedure.

• Step 1 - the Executive Headteacher

Having discussed your concerns you may feel it necessary to inform the Executive headteacher that you wish to make a formal complaint. You can do this by telephoning, writing a letter or arranging an appointment to meet him/her. You will receive a written response.

- **Step 2 - The Governing Body**

If you are dissatisfied with the response you can make a formal complaint to the governing body. We will provide you with a form that you can choose to fill in for this purpose. The form will need to be sent to the Chair of Governors. Details of how the complaint will be investigated will be included with form. You will receive a written response from the governing body. When considering your complaint the Chair of Governors may seek advice from officers of the Local Authority. However, you should not contact the LA or the Secretary of State direct until Step 2 is complete.

- **Step 3** - If you remain dissatisfied with how the complaint has been dealt with you may wish to refer your complaint to the Secretary of State for Education. Please write to:

The Secretary of State. Department for Education, Sanctuary Buildings, Great Smith Street, London, SW1P 3BT
Please note: This procedure does not apply where the complaint may lead to disciplinary proceedings against a teacher or child protection procedures. These matters have separate procedures.

Part 2

Policy for Unreasonable Complainants

The Forest Federation 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.

The Forest Federation 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 headteacher or Chair of Governors will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying an 'unreasonable' marking.

If the behaviour continues the headteacher will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and asking them to change it. For complainants who excessively contact The Forest Federation 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.

Revised March 2016

(Who did you speak to and what was the 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: