

Beaufront First School

Complaints Policy & Procedure

Version history

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Complaints: Policy and Procedure

This document describes the Beaufront First School complaints *policy* and the complaints *procedure*, which will be used in the event of complaints by parents or members of the public.

It is a legal requirement that a school should publish its complaints procedure. At Beaufront, we hold copies of all policies in the School office to be available to all stakeholders on request. A list of the policies and procedures is on view in the entrance hall of the School. We give copies of this policy to all new parents in the pack they receive when their child starts at Beaufront. We also publish the policy on the school website.

Complaints Policy

As a small school, we strive to foster a family atmosphere at Beaufront. We have an “open door” policy, and hope that parents and others within the School Community will feel able to discuss any concerns with the Head Teacher, an appropriate member of staff or one of the school governors, as appropriate depending on the nature of the concern. Concerns ought to be handled, wherever possible, without the need for formal procedures. The requirement to have a formal complaints procedure should not in any way undermine efforts to resolve concerns informally, where that is appropriate.

Informal Complaints

1. In most cases, the class teacher, Head Teacher or, in the case of extended school provision, the individual delivering the service should be approached with any concern.
2. An informal complaint can be made in person, by telephone or by e-mail.
3. The distinction between an “issue” being raised and an informal complaint may be blurred. In many cases, we recognise that an issue can be resolved verbally, following an exchange of information. In other situations, it may be appropriate to provide a written response.
4. In a small school, like Beaufront, it is likely that the Head teacher will be made aware of most complaints, though will not necessarily be made aware of issues that are easily resolved. Members of staff are encouraged to discuss contentious issues with the Head Teacher. Similarly, the Head Teacher is encouraged to consult/inform a member of the School Governing Body, often likely to be the Chair of Governors, if that would be of assistance. In consulting a member of the Governing Body, care will be taken to ensure that no more members of the Governing Body are made aware of the complaint or issue than is necessary, so that sufficient numbers of governors are available to deal with any subsequent formal complaint.

5. Only if initial attempts to resolve an issue are unsuccessful should formal procedures be invoked.

Formal Complaints

6. The Head Teacher will usually have responsibility for the operation and management of the School complaints procedure, as complaints co-ordinator. In the event of a complaint against the Head Teacher, the School Governing Body will appoint another member of staff or a governor to act as complaints co-ordinator.
7. Formal complaints should be submitted by e-mail or via the School office using the form approved by Northumberland County Council, appended to this document.
8. The progress of all formal complaints and the final outcome will be recorded, to ensure that the complainant and the School have the same understanding of discussions and agreement.
9. In operating this policy, the School will keep in mind the variety of ways in which a complaint could be resolved. For example, it might be sufficient to acknowledge that the complaint is partly or wholly valid; it may be appropriate to offer an apology, explanation or an admission that the situation could have been handled differently; it may be appropriate to provide an assurance that the event complained of will not recur and to provide an explanation of the steps that have been taken to ensure it will not happen again; it may be appropriate to review school policies in the light of the complaint.
10. In summary, this policy and the procedure that follows has been developed to:
 - a. Encourage resolution of problems by informal means wherever possible;
 - b. Be easily accessible;

- c. Be simple to understand and use;
- d. Be impartial;
- e. Be non-adversarial;
- f. Allow swift handling of complaints with established time limits for action;
- g. Keep those involved in the process informed of progress;
- h. Ensure a full and fair investigation, by an independent person where necessary.
- i. Respect confidentiality;
- j. Address the identified issues;
- k. Provide an effective response and appropriate redress where necessary;
- l. Provide information to the School's management team so that services can be improved.

Complaints Procedure

This procedure is for use by parents and members of the public for complaints against the school, a member of staff or the governing body.

There are separate arrangements, laid down by law to cover the following:

- Complaints against the curriculum, collective worship and religious education.
- Appeals against admissions
- Appeals against exclusions
- Appeals about assessments and statements of special educational needs

For further guidance on any of the above please contact the Head Teacher.

We recognise that 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, all staff are made aware of the relevant procedures so that they know what to do in the event of receiving a report of an issue that may be considered a complaint.

The following procedures should be followed in accordance with the Complaints Policy set out above.

Stage One

Informal Complaint Heard by Staff Member/Head teacher/Chair of Governors.

1. In the first instance the complaint should be discussed between the person making the complaint and the member of staff involved.
2. If the complainant indicates that he/she would have difficulty discussing the complaint with that particular member of staff, he/she should be referred to another staff member (if the complaint concerns the head teacher, or a governor, the complainant should be referred to the Chair of Governors).
3. In the event that the complainant first approaches a governor, he/she should be referred to the appropriate person i.e. the member of staff concerned, the Head Teacher or the Chair of Governors. Governors must not act unilaterally on an individual complaint outside the formal procedure, or be involved at the early stages in case they are needed to sit on a committee at a later stage of the procedure.

4. We recognise that the ability to consider a complaint objectively and impartially is crucial to effective resolution. Accordingly, if a member of staff / the Head Teacher / the Chair of Governors feels compromised in dealing with a complaint (e.g. as a result particular personal knowledge), the complaint must be referred to another member of staff or another governor.
5. As Beaufront is a small school, it is likely that the head teacher will be made aware of most complaints, though will not necessarily be made aware of issues that are easily resolved. Members of staff are encouraged to discuss contentious issues with the Head Teacher. Similarly, the Head Teacher is encouraged to consult/inform a member of the School Governing Body, usually likely to be the Chair of Governors, if that would be of assistance. In consulting a member of the Governing Body, care will be taken to ensure that no more members of the Governing Body are made aware of the complaint or issue than necessary, so that sufficient numbers of governors are available to deal with any subsequent formal complaint.
6. It is hoped that the majority of complaints can be resolved at this stage by means of discussion between the complainant and the relevant member of staff, Head Teacher and / or governor. In many cases, these discussions may be informal. If it would be helpful, a more formal meeting can be arranged at a mutually convenient time, usually within 5 school days of the complaint being made.
7. The School will keep in mind that it may be useful to involve the Client Relations service, within the Children's Services Directorate of Northumberland County Council, which is available to advise parents on the complaints process and may on occasion help to facilitate contact within the school.
8. If either the complainant or the School considers that it is necessary or helpful, a written record will be made of the nature of the complaint, the discussions held, and the outcome of those discussions. Where such a

record is considered to be necessary or helpful, this will usually take the form of a letter at this stage.

9. In the event that the complaint or issue remains unresolved, then the Second Stage of the Complaints Procedure should be invoked.

Stage Two

Formal Consideration of Complaint.

10. If the complainant is dissatisfied with the way the complaint has been handled at Stage One and wishes to pursue their initial complaint further, a formal complaint should be submitted by e-mail or via the School office using the form approved by Northumberland County Council, appended to this document.
11. That complaint will then be investigated, usually by either the Head Teacher or the Chair of Governors. However, the Head Teacher or Chair of Governors may delegate the task of investigating the complaint to another member of staff or another governor.
12. The Head Teacher or Chair of Governors may also, in exceptional circumstances, commission an investigating officer report to be undertaken by an external consultant.
13. The person making the complaint should be informed that an investigation is underway and that they will receive a response within 25 working days, or a letter explaining the reason for any subsequent delay.
14. A written record of the investigation into the complaint will be made. In order to ensure that those providing information in the course of the investigation feel able to be frank and for reasons of confidentiality, this record of the investigation will not be provided to the complainant, save in exceptional circumstances.

15. Once the relevant facts have been established by means of the investigation into the complaint, the Head Teacher or Chair of Governors should advise the complainant in writing of the decision and reasons for the decision.
16. Details of the complaint and the resolution should be placed in the Complaints Log File.

Stage Three

Complaint Heard by Governing Body's Complaints Committee

17. If the complainant is still dissatisfied with the outcome he/she should write to the Head Teacher or Chair of Governors giving details of the complaint within 10 school days of receipt of the decision letter.
18. The Chair of Governors or another nominated governor will convene a Governing Body Complaints Committee (Complaints Committee), if they consider it appropriate after considering the report of the investigating officer.
19. The Complaints Committee will consist of a minimum of 3 governors with delegated powers. The Complaints Committee will be appointed by the Chair of Governors, with the Chair of the Committee being appointed when they first meet. Where possible, the Chair of the Committee and a majority of its members will not have been involved in an earlier stage of the complaints process.
20. The Complaints Committee has discretion as to any action to be taken in response to the complaint. For example, they may choose to:
 - a. Convene a hearing at which the complainant will be invited to put forward their case. This should be held within 20 school days of the decision to hold a hearing;
 - b. Dismiss the complaint in whole or in part;

- c. Uphold the complaint in whole or in part;
- d. Recommend changes to the School's systems or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not recur.

21. In reaching a decision the Complaints Committee may take the advice of such bodies as they see fit, in particular the Local Authority.

22. If it is decided that it is appropriate to hold a hearing, the clerk of the Complaints Committee will inform both parties in writing of the decision of the Committee within 5 school days.

23. If it is decided that it is unnecessary or inappropriate to hold a hearing, the Chair of the Complaints Committee will inform both parties in writing of the decision within 20 school days of receipt of the letter referred to in paragraph 18 above.

24. Details of the complaint and the resolution should be placed in the Complaints Log File.

25. If, after following the Beaufront First School Complaints Procedure, the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome, or if there are reasons why they cannot use that procedure (for example, they feel their complaint has not been or will not be given a fair consideration due to a conflict of interest), they can forward their complaint to the Department for Education, using the online school complaints form.

26. Making a complaint to the Department for Education should only happen once all other routes have been followed. The exception to this may be where there is a child protection concern, or where a child is missing education.

27. More information about making a complaint can be found on the DfE website:

<http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/leadership/schoolperformance/b00212240/making-complaint-school/how-to-complain>

Note: If a complaint has been made by a number of parents and it is about whole school issues parents may, at any stage of the procedure, ask the Chief Inspector of Schools to investigate their complaint. The Chief Inspector may or may not require the school's complaints procedure to be exhausted before he decides whether or not to investigate.

Complaints Form

Please complete and return this **complaints log form** to the Head Teacher (complaints co-ordinator) who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

Your name:

Pupils name (if applicable):

Your relationship to the pupil (if applicable):

Address:

Postcode:

Daytime telephone number:

Evening telephone number:

Email address:

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 the response)?

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

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

Official use only

Response given by _____ (which form
phone/letter/email/in person?)

Signed _____
date _____

Copy held in school _____ Copy given to complainant/ or verbal
response.

(Please delete as necessary)