

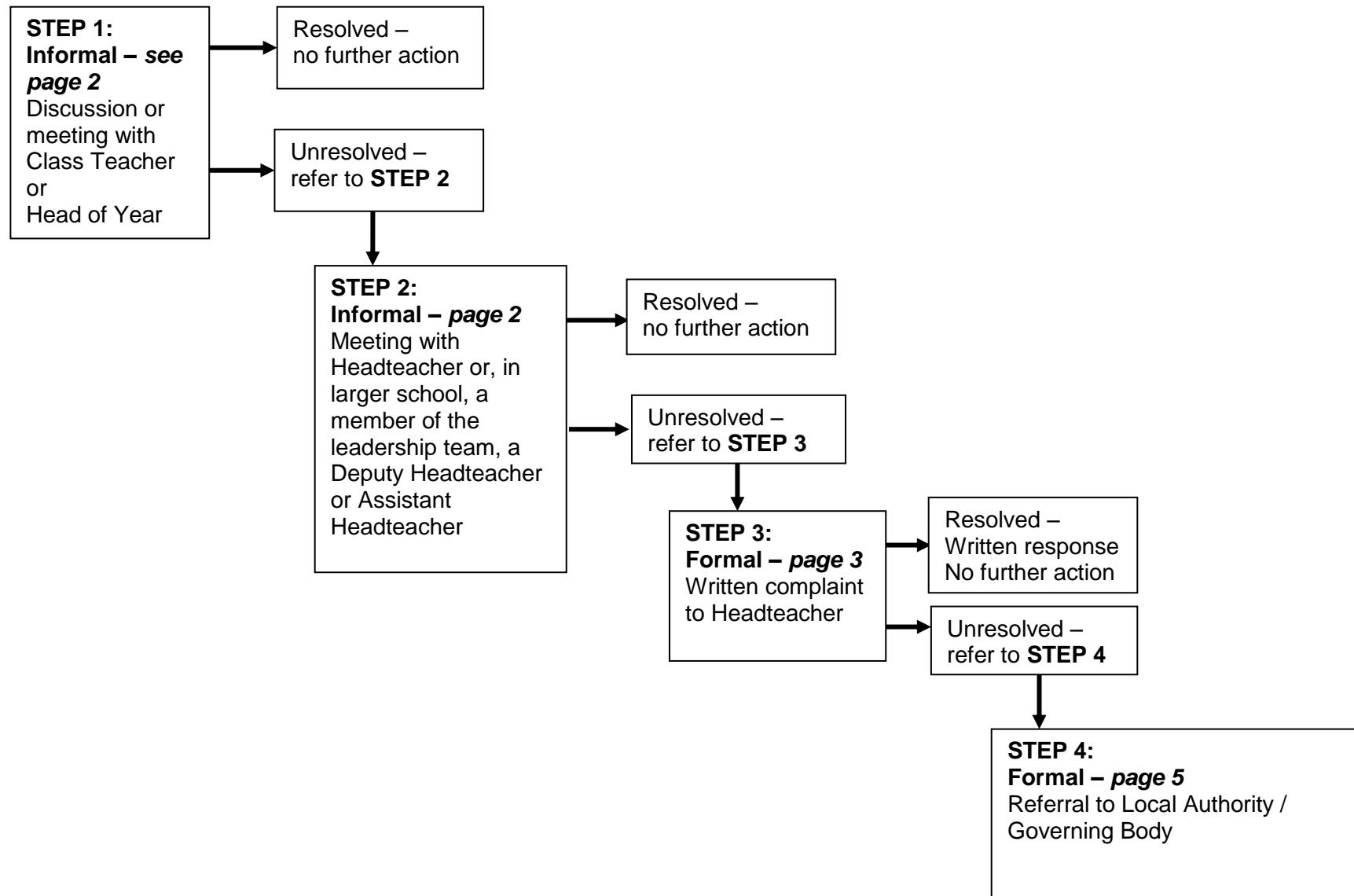


Suffolk County Council

School Complaints Procedure



Flowchart of procedure for handling concerns and complaints:



SCHOOL COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

All schools in Suffolk are committed to providing the best education for our young people and want our pupils to be healthy, happy and safe and to do well. We recognise the importance of establishing and maintaining good relationships with parents, carers and the wider community. We are aware that there may be occasions where people have concerns or complaints and the following procedure sets out the steps that should be followed in order to resolve these as quickly and informally as possible.

School governing bodies are required, under Section 29 of the Education Act 2002, to have in place a procedure for dealing with complaints. It is expected that all complaints will be referred to the school in the first instance. In situations where it has not been possible to settle a complaint through this process the Local Authority may be able to advise parents/carers and the school in order to help resolve difficulties, but will not be able to become involved if the steps set out below have not been followed.

STEP 1: Informal

Please start by telling the class teacher or head of year about your concern. This is usually the best and quickest way of resolving issues.

- *It is recommended that you make an appointment to speak to the class teacher or head of year as soon as possible as this will give both parties the opportunity to talk about the issue in an appropriate manner and without being interrupted.*
 - *It is important to recognise that schools are busy organisations and it may not be possible to offer an appointment straight away.*
 - *The purpose of this meeting should be to establish the nature of the concern and to seek a realistic resolution to the problem.*
 - *It is good practice for the class teacher or head of year to make a brief written record of the concern raised and any actions agreed.*
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STEP 2: Informal

If you feel dissatisfied with the outcome of discussions with the class teacher or head of year, please ask for an appointment to meet with the Headteacher or, in a larger school, a member of the leadership team, a Deputy Headteacher or Assistant Headteacher.

- *The purpose of this meeting should be to establish the nature of the ongoing concern, what has been discussed with the class teacher so far and any actions arising from the initial meeting*
- *It is in everyone's interest, particularly the child or children, for concerns to be sorted out quickly and smoothly. However, it may be that the Headteacher or*

leadership team member will need to look into what has happened since the initial meeting before they can suggest how your concern might be resolved. If this is the case, it should be agreed how and within what timescale they will contact you to let you know the outcome of their enquiries and what actions they have taken/propose to take.

- *It is good practice for the Headteacher or leadership team member to make a brief written record of the concern discussed and what has been agreed and to write to parents summarising this.*

It is hoped that most problems will have been resolved at this stage through the informal process.

STEP 3: Formal - complaint letter to the Headteacher

If you feel that the issue you have raised has not been resolved through the informal process and you wish to pursue it further you may raise it through the formal procedure. To do this you must write a formal letter of complaint to the Headteacher (*you may use the form attached as Appendix 1, page7*). Your letter should set out clearly the concern which has previously been discussed and why you feel that the issue is unresolved. It is also helpful if you can set out in your letter what resolution you are seeking.

- *Moving to the formal complaints procedure is a serious step. In consideration of future home/school relationships everyone concerned will need to concentrate on finding a resolution to the issue and negotiate an agreement as to how this can best be achieved.*
- *The Headteacher will consider the complaint and in doing so should:*
 - *establish what has happened so far, and who has been involved;*
 - *clarify the nature of the complaint and what remains unresolved;*
 - *meet or contact you if they need further information;*
 - *clarify what you feel would put things right if this has not been set out in your letter;*
 - *interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish;*
 - *conduct any interview with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning;*
 - *keep notes of any interview for the record.*
- *The Headteacher will keep in mind ways in which a complaint can be resolved. It might be sufficient to acknowledge that the complaint is valid in whole or in part. In addition, it may be appropriate to offer one or more of the following*
 - *an apology;*
 - *an explanation;*
 - *an admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better (n.b. this is not an admission of negligence);*
 - *an assurance that the event complained of will not recur;*

- *an explanation of the steps that have been taken to ensure that it will not happen again;*
 - *an undertaking to review policies in light of the complaint.*
- It may also be the case that the complaint may nor have any substance and is therefore considered to be unfounded or unsubstantiated.*
- *The Headteacher will discuss the outcome of their consideration of your complaint with you and should send a detailed written response within 20 school days. Where this proves unrealistic you will be informed in writing and given an estimate of how long it will take to provide a detailed response.*
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Concerns or complaints specifically about the Headteacher

Where you are unhappy about the decision the Headteacher has made about your complaint, this does not become a complaint about the Headteacher. If you feel that the complaint has not been resolved you should move to Step 4 of the procedure.

If you have a concern or complaint that is specifically about the Headteacher and which has not been resolved at the informal stage, then you must write a formal letter of complaint to the Chair of Governors. The school will provide you with the Chair of Governors' name and you should write to him or her at the school address, marking the envelope 'urgent, private and confidential'.

- *The Chair of Governors should acknowledge receipt of the letter within 5 school days and contact the Area Officer, Learning and Improvement at the Local Authority for advice.*
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Time-limits, exclusions and vexatious complaints

Time limits:

Complaints need to be considered and resolved as quickly and efficiently as possible. As such, complaints made under this procedure must only relate to incidents or concerns occurring within the last **12 months**. Your complaint will not usually be able to be considered if your child no longer goes to the school.

Exclusions to the policy:

- **Curriculum Complaints** – Local Authorities are required to have arrangements for considering complaints about the school curriculum and collective worship under the terms of Section 23 of the Education Reform Act 1988. The school will refer you to this procedure where appropriate.
- **Safeguarding referrals** – schools have a duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of their pupils under section 175 of the Education Act 2002. This includes making referrals to the appropriate organisation, usually local authority children's social care services, if they have a concern about the welfare of a child. It is not for the school to investigate or make a judgment about possible abuse or neglect but they must refer any concerns they may have. As such,

complaints about safeguarding referrals made in accordance with a statutory duty will not be considered under this procedure.

- **Allegations of abuse** – allegations of abuse against a member of school staff must be reported to the Headteacher immediately. Allegations of abuse against the Headteacher must be reported to the Chair of Governors immediately. In all cases the Suffolk Safeguarding Children Board [Arrangements For Managing Allegations Of Abuse Against People Who Work With Children Or Those Who Are In Positions Of Trust](#) must be followed.

Vexatious complaints:

The majority of complaints are resolved through a properly managed complaints procedure. However, there are occasions when:

- despite all stages of the procedure having been followed, the complainant remains dissatisfied. If a complainant tries to reopen the same issue the Chair of Governors may write informing them that all stages of the procedure have been exhausted and the matter is considered to be closed.
 - complainants behave in an unreasonable manner when raising and/or pursuing concerns. In these circumstances the school may take action in accordance with Appendix 2 of this procedure (page 9).
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STEP 4: Complaints not resolved through the formal procedure

If you believe that the school has not properly followed its complaints procedure or has not acted fairly or reasonably in responding to your complaint you may refer the matter to the Local Authority. The Local Authority has no legal right or duty to deal with most complaints about schools but will provide advice to the parent/carer and governing body in the event that a complaint which has been considered under the formal procedure remains unresolved or if the complaint is specifically about the Headteacher.

You will need to write to the Local Authority giving the details of your complaint, what action you have already taken to try and resolve your complaint and attaching a copy of the written response from the school.

- *The Local Authority will contact you to confirm the details of your complaint and seek further information where necessary.*
- *Initial consideration will be given to the circumstances of the complaint and the procedure followed by the school.*
- *The Local Authority will come to a recommendation – either:*
 - *that a thorough investigation has been fairly undertaken by the school and that an appropriate response has been made in accordance with the findings; or*
 - *that the complaint merits further investigation (it will be referred back to the school in this case)*
- *The Local Authority will notify you in writing of the recommendation and what will happen next.*

- *On conclusion of Step 4, you may ask for your complaint to be heard by a committee of the governing body. The Local Authority officer will advise you how this can be arranged.*
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Finally, if on conclusion of all 4 steps of this procedure you feel that the school's governing body and/or the Local Authority has acted unreasonably you may make a complaint in writing to the Secretary of State for Education. You may contact the Department for Education by writing to:

Department for Education
Castle View House
East Lane
Runcorn
Cheshire
WA7 2GJ

or by telephoning: 0870 000 2288

This procedure is based upon DfES guidance School Complaints Procedure toolkit, LEA/0180/2003, issued in 2003

COMPLAINT FORM- STEP 2, FORMAL COMPLAINT

Please complete and return to.....who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

Your name:

Pupil's name:

Your relationship to the pupil:

Address:

Postcode:

Day time telephone number:

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.

Signature:

Date:

Official use

Date acknowledgement sent:

By whom:

Complaint referred to:

Date: