

Information
for Parents:
Concerns and
complaints involving
a school

January 2018

Concerns and complaints involving a school

This information sheet provides advice on how to pursue general concerns and complaints about a Local Authority (LA) maintained school.

Please note: this leaflet does not cover advice for schools that are independent of the LA, or for the issues that affect your child's education listed below where formal procedures, and in some cases appeal arrangements, already exist.

- Admissions
- Criminal offences
- Exclusions
- Special educational needs assessments
- Child protection issues

For these issues contact the LA on 01228 221234 or via E-mail at complaints@cumbria.gov.uk and you will then be signposted to the relevant Team for appropriate advice.

Who can make a complaint?

The information in this leaflet applies to anyone who uses the school, whether a pupil, a parent or carer, a provider of a service to the school, or a visitor. If you wish to complain on someone else's behalf, schools will generally only engage with an advocate if the person on whose behalf you are complaining is unable to do so for themselves (for example, they are too young or they have a disability that prevents them from complaining on their own behalf).

If I have a complaint about my child's school, who would be responsible for dealing with it?

The responsibility for all aspects of management, including the employment of staff, rests with a school's governing body rather than the LA. Each governing body is, therefore, responsible for ensuring that there are arrangements in place to respond to any complaints. These would be detailed in the school's 'Complaints Procedure'. In the first instance the school staff, and if necessary the headteacher, would be responsible for dealing with any concerns you have.

What do I do if I become concerned about something at school?

It is better if any concerns can be resolved on an informal basis with the staff at the school as soon as the issue emerges.

Generally, a school's procedure is likely to be split into three stages, detailed below and in Appendix 1.

1. Informal Stage

If the complaint is about something that a person has or has not done, generally, the first step in a primary school, would be to talk to your child's class teacher; in a secondary school, the first point of contact is likely to be your child's form tutor. If it is about an aspect of school practice or policy, you should contact the headteacher. Schools will want to resolve the problem as quickly as possible, but it may not be possible to arrange an immediate meeting - an appointment within a few days may be necessary.

If you do need to talk to the headteacher or another member of staff, it is better to make an appointment. This way you can be sure that the person concerned has the time to talk to you. It can sometimes be a good idea to make a note of what you want to say. This will help you to cover all the points you want to raise.

What do I do if my concern cannot be resolved informally?

2. Formal Stage

Most problems will be sorted out satisfactorily on an informal basis. However, if you remain unhappy and wish to make a formal complaint, you should ask for a copy of the school's Complaints Procedure. This will explain how and who to contact and what you can expect from the school in response to a complaint.

You should put your complaint in writing and state that you are making a formal complaint. Your letter of complaint should include as many specific details as possible, as general statements are difficult to investigate.

The governing body will usually designate either the headteacher a senior member of staff or a governor to investigate the complaint and respond to you within a set timescale. A complaint would not be heard by a school's full governing body, to allow some governors to remain impartial if they are needed later on in the procedure. You should not attempt to involve members of the governing body who have not been designated to handle your complaint. This may damage your chances of a fair hearing.

3. Appeal Stage

If you are still dissatisfied, you should write to the clerk to the governing body (details would be in the school's Complaints Procedure). The governing body will usually respond by arranging for your complaint to be reviewed. After the review, the governing body will notify you of its decision. There is no further right of appeal to the school against the decision.

Is there anything else I should consider?

It helps the school to deal with your complaint, if you are clear what outcomes you are seeking. Occasionally, complainants do have unrealistic expectations about the outcome of a complaints investigation, for example, in relation to how an individual member of staff will be dealt with.

Persistent, abusive or harassing complainants

Some schools have adopted an addition to their procedure which states how they will deal with an unreasonably persistent complainant, or one who behaves in an abusive or harassing manner.

If your complaint is about an independent school or academy

If your complaint is about an independent school or academy you should follow its complaints procedure through their governing body. If you are still dissatisfied after this, you can pursue matters relating to your contract with the school through the courts. If you are dissatisfied with the response from an Academy you should contact the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA)

If your complaint is that the school is not complying with legal regulations governing independent schools, you can contact Department for Education public enquiries on 0370 000 2288 from 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday, or at atregistrationenquiries@education.gsi.gov.uk. The Department is happy to take information from you, but will not investigate individual complaints, only look at regulatory issues.

Further advice on complaining about private schools can be obtained from the Independent Schools Inspectorate on 020 7710 9900, or at concerns@isi.net.

What can I do if I remain dissatisfied once the school's procedures have been exhausted?

If your complaint is unresolved and you feel that the school has behaved unreasonably about your concerns, as a final step you can write to the Secretary of State for Education.

The Secretary of State for Education
Department for Education
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0370 000 2288
www.education.gov.uk

Or refer to Ofsted, if your complaint affects the school as a whole.

You can contact Ofsted by calling the following helplines are open from 8.00am to 6.00pm, Monday to Friday on 0300 123 1231 or by email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk. Staff on its helpdesk will discuss your concerns with you and advise you whether or not to put your complaint in writing.

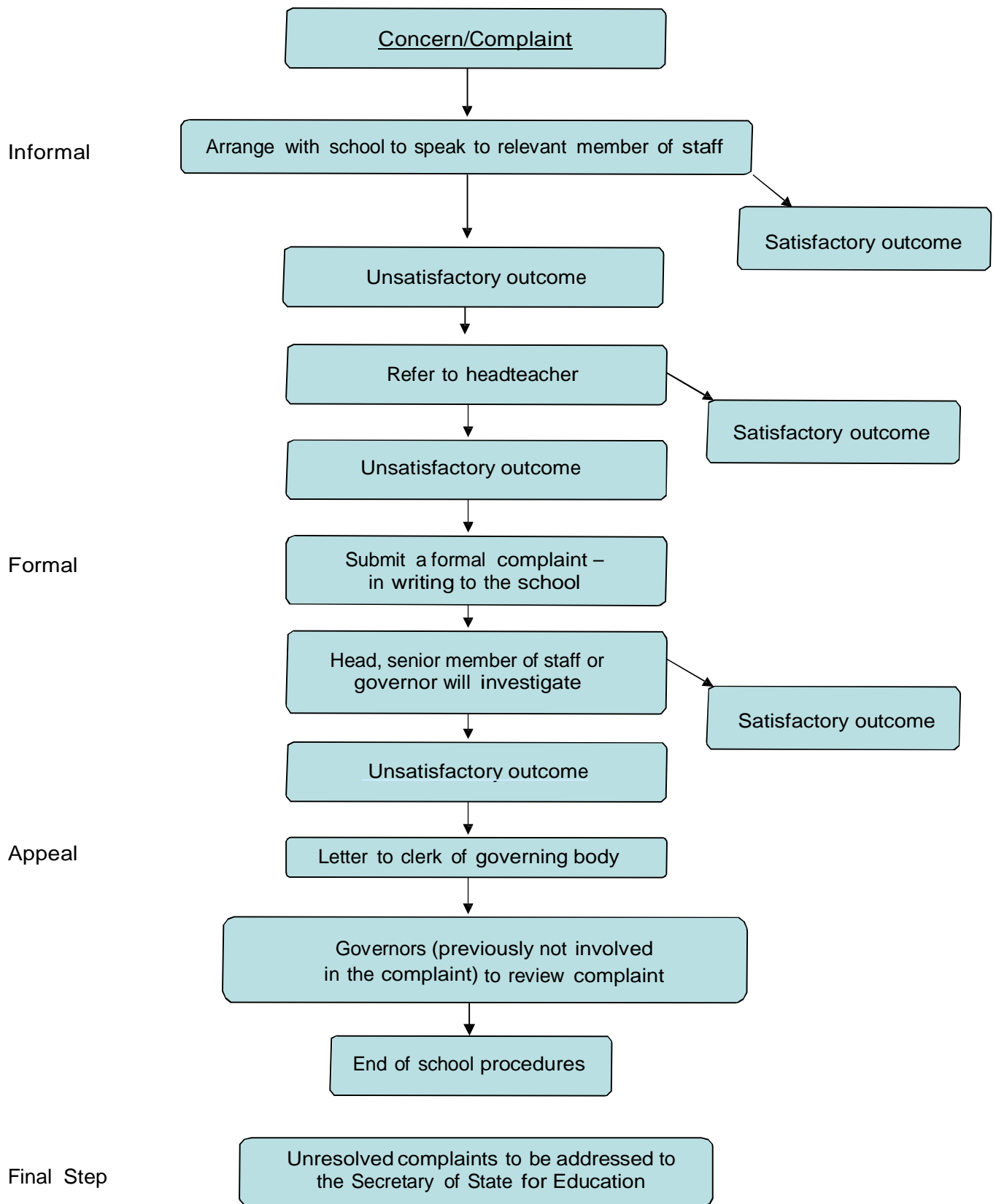
To make a formal complaint you can write to:

Ofsted
Piccadilly
GateStore Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

Further advice and information is available from:

- The Information Governance Team, Cumbria House, 117 Botchergate, Carlisle CA1 1RD, Tel: 01228 221234 or E-mail: complaints@cumbria.gov.uk
- Directgov website at www.direct.gov.uk/en/Parents
- Ofsted website at <https://contact.ofsted.gov.uk/online-complaints>
- Education Act at <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2011/21/contents/enacted>

Appendix 1: General Complaints Procedure



Translation services

If you require this document in another format (e.g. CD, audio cassette, Braille or large type) or in another language, please telephone 01228 606060.

আপনি যদি এই তথ্য আপনার নিজের ভাষায় পেতে চান তাহলে অনুগ্রহ করে 01228 606060 নম্বরে টেলিফোন করুন।

如果您希望通过母语了解此信息，
请致电 01228 606060

Jeigu norétumète gauti šią informaciją savo kalba,
skambinkite telefonu 01228 606060

W celu uzyskania informacji w Państwa języku proszę
zatelefonować pod numer 01228 606060

Se quiser aceder a esta informação na sua língua,
telefone para o 01228 606060

Bu bilgiyi kendi dilinizde görmek istiyorsanız lütfen
01228 606060 numaralı telefonu arayınız

cumbria.gov.uk