

# Coopers Lane Primary School



## Complaints Policy

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# A Coopers Lane Learner...



## Complaints Policy Coopers Lane School

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#### Introduction

We believe that our school provides a good education for all children, and that the Head Teacher and other staff work very hard to build positive relationships with all parent(s)/carer(s). However, the school is obliged to have procedures in place in case there are complaints by parent(s)/carer(s). The following policy sets out the procedure that the school follows in such cases.

#### Aims and objectives

Our school aims to be fair, open and honest when dealing with any complaint. 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 child above all other issues. We provide sufficient opportunity for any complaint to be fully discussed, and then resolved.

#### Who can make a complaint?

This complaints procedure is not limited to parents or carers of children that are registered at the school. Any person, including members of the public, may make a complaint to Coopers Lane School about any provision of facilities or services that we provide. Unless complaints are dealt with under separate statutory procedures (such as appeals relating to exclusions or admissions), we will use this complaints procedure.

## The difference between a concern and a complaint<sup>1</sup>

- 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 defined as '*an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action*'.

It is in everyone's interest that concerns and complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. Many issues can be resolved informally, without the need to use the formal stages of the complaints procedure. Coopers Lane School takes concerns seriously and will make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.

If you have difficulty discussing a concern with a particular member of staff, we will respect your views. In these cases, the Head Teacher will refer you to another staff member. Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels unable to deal with a concern, the Head Teacher will refer you to another staff member. The member of staff may be more senior but does not have to be. The ability to consider the concern objectively and impartially is more important.

We understand however, that there are occasions when people would like to raise their concerns formally. In this case, Coopers Lane School will attempt to resolve the issue internally, through the stages outlined within this complaints procedure.

## How to raise a concern or make a complaint

A concern or complaint can be made in person, in writing or by telephone. They may also be made by a third party acting on behalf on a complainant, as long as they have appropriate consent to do so.

Concerns should be raised with either the class teacher or year group leader initially, as they are most likely to be able to resolve the concern. If the issue remains unresolved, the next step is to raise the concern with a member of the senior leadership team. If the issue is still not resolved, the next step is to make a formal complaint.

Complainants should not approach individual governors to raise concerns or complaints. They have no power to act on an individual basis and it may also prevent them from considering complaints at Stage 4 of the procedure.

Complaints against school staff (except the Head Teacher) should be made in the first instance, to the Head Teacher via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Complaints that involve or are about the Head Teacher should be addressed to the Chair of Governors, via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Complaints about the Chair of Governors, any individual governor or the whole governing body should be addressed to the Clerk to the Governing Body via the

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<sup>1</sup> [Best practice guidance for school complaints procedures](#)

school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

For ease of use, a template complaint form is included at the end of this policy. If you require help in completing the form, please contact the school office. You can also ask third party organisations like Citizens Advice to help you.

In accordance with equality law, we will consider making reasonable adjustments if required, to enable complainants to access and complete this complaints procedure. For instance, providing information in alternative formats, assisting complainants in raising a formal complaint or holding meetings in accessible locations.

### **Anonymous complaints**

We will not normally investigate anonymous complaints. However, the Head Teacher or Chair of Governors, if appropriate, will determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation.

### **Time scales**

You must raise the complaint within three months of the incident or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within three months of the last of these incidents. We will consider complaints made outside of this time frame if exceptional circumstances apply.

### **Complaints received outside of term time**

We will consider complaints made outside of term time to have been received on the first school day after the holiday period.

### **Scope of this Complaints Procedure**

This procedure covers all complaints about any provision of community facilities or services by Coopers Lane School other than complaints that are dealt with under other statutory procedures, including those listed below.

| <b>Exceptions</b>   | <b>Who to contact</b>   |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Admissions to schools</li> <li>● Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs</li> <li>● School re-organisation proposals</li> </ul> | <p>Concerns about admissions, statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs, or school re-organisation proposals should be raised with Lewisham Childrens' Services.</p>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation</li> </ul>  | <p>Complaints about child protection matters are handled under our safeguarding policy and in accordance with relevant statutory guidance.</p> <p>If you have serious concerns, you may wish to contact the local authority designated officer (LADO) who has local responsibility for safeguarding or the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH).</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Local Authority Designated Officer,<br/>London Borough of Lewisham,</p> |

|   |  |
|---|--|
|   | <p>1<sup>st</sup> Floor Laurence House,<br/>1 Catford Road,<br/>London,<br/>SE6 4RU</p> <p>LADO: 020 8314 7280<br/><a href="mailto:LewishamLADO@Lewisham.gov.uk">LewishamLADO@Lewisham.gov.uk</a></p> <p>MASH: 020 8314 6660<br/><a href="mailto:mashagency@lewisham.gov.uk">mashagency@lewisham.gov.uk</a></p>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Exclusion of children from school*</li> </ul>  | <p>Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at: <a href="http://www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions">www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions</a>.</p> <p>*complaints about the application of the Behaviour Policy can be made through the school's complaints procedure.</p>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Whistleblowing</li> </ul>  | <p>We have an internal whistleblowing procedure for all our employees, including temporary staff and contractors.</p> <p>The Secretary of State for Education is the prescribed person for matters relating to education for whistleblowers in education who do not want to raise matters direct with their employer. Referrals can be made at: <a href="http://www.education.gov.uk/contactus">www.education.gov.uk/contactus</a>.</p> <p>Volunteer staff who have concerns about our school should complain through the school's complaints procedure. You may also be able to complain direct to the LA or the Department for Education (see link above), depending on the substance of your complaint.</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Staff grievances</li> </ul>  | <p>Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the school's internal grievance procedures.</p>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Staff conduct</li> </ul>   | <p>Complaints about staff will be dealt with under the school's internal disciplinary procedures, if appropriate.</p>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Complaints about services provided by other providers who may use school premises or facilities</li> </ul> | <p>Providers should have their own complaints procedure to deal with complaints about service. Please contact them direct.</p>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● National Curriculum - content</li> </ul>   | <p>Please contact the Department for Education at:<br/><a href="http://www.education.gov.uk/contactus">www.education.gov.uk/contactus</a></p>  |

If other bodies are investigating aspects of the complaint, for example the police, local authority (LA) safeguarding teams or Tribunals, this may impact on our ability to adhere to the timescales within this procedure or result in the procedure being suspended until those public bodies have completed their investigations.

If a complainant commences legal action against Coopers Lane School in relation to their complaint, we will consider whether to suspend the complaints procedure in relation to their complaint until those legal proceedings have concluded.

### **Resolving complaints**

At each stage in the procedure, Coopers Lane School wants to resolve the complaint. If appropriate, we will acknowledge that the complaint is upheld in whole or in part. In addition, we may offer one or more of the following:

- an explanation;
- an admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better;
- an assurance that we will try to ensure the event complained of will not recur;
- an explanation of the steps that have been or will be taken to help ensure that it will not happen again and an indication of the timescales within which any changes will be made;
- an undertaking to review school policies in light of the complaint; and/or
- an apology.

### **Withdrawal of a Complaint**

If a complainant wants to withdraw their complaint, we will ask them to confirm this in writing.

### **Persistent, unreasonable or vexatious complaints**

Coopers Lane School is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, and to providing a high-quality service to those who complain (as covered in the Complaints Policy).

We will not normally limit the contact complainants have with our 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.

Coopers Lane School defines unreasonable behaviour as that which hinders our consideration of complaints because of the frequency or nature of the complainant's contact with the school, such as, if the complainant:

- 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;
- refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of the complaints procedure;
- insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the complaints procedure or with good practice;
- introduces trivial or irrelevant information which they expect to be taken into account and commented on;
- 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 and complicated contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with;
- uses threats to intimidate;
- uses abusive, offensive or discriminatory language or violence;
- knowingly provides falsified information;
- publishes unacceptable information on social media or other public forums.

Complainants should try to limit their communication with the school that relates to their complaint, while the 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 head teacher 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 ask them to change it. For complainants who excessively contact Coopers Lane School causing a significant level of disruption, we may specify methods of communication and limit the number of contacts in a communication plan. This will be reviewed after six months.

In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, we will immediately inform the police and communicate our actions in writing. This may include barring an individual from Coopers Lane School.

## **Stages of Complaint**

### **Stage 1 – Contact the appropriate member of staff**

The complainant should start by meeting with the class teacher or the year group leader and discuss their concern. This is usually the best and quickest way of resolving issues.

- It is recommended that an appointment be made to speak to the class teacher or the 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 the head of year to make a brief written record of the concern raised and any actions agreed.



## **Stage 2 – A written complaint to the Head Teacher**

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of discussions with the member of staff, a formal complaint can be made to the Head Teacher (unless the complaint is about the Head Teacher), via the school office. This may be done in person, in writing (preferably on the Complaint Form), or by telephone.

The Head Teacher will record the date the complaint is received and will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 5 school days.

Within this response, the Head Teacher will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, ask what remains unresolved and what outcome the complainant would like to see. The Head Teacher can consider whether a face-to-face meeting is the most appropriate way of doing this.

*Note: The Head Teacher may delegate the investigation to another member of the school's senior leadership team but not the decision to be taken.*

During the investigation, the Head Teacher (or investigator) will:

- if necessary, interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish
- keep a written record of any meetings/interviews in relation to their investigation.

At the conclusion of their investigation, the Head Teacher will provide a formal written response within 10 school days of the date of receipt of the complaint.

If the Head Teacher is unable to meet this deadline, they will provide the complainant with an update and revised response date.

The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions Coopers Lane School will take to resolve the complaint.

The Head Teacher will advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 2.

## **Stage 3 – A formal letter of complaint to the Chair of the Governing Body**

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 2, or if the complaint is about the Head Teacher, or regarding the conduct of another governor, a formal complaint can be written to the Chair of the Governing Body via the school office.

The letter should be marked as 'urgent, private and confidential'.

The Chair of Governors should acknowledge receipt of the letter within 5 school days.

The Chair will investigate the complaint and determine if the Head Teacher has adhered to the schools' policies, procedures and values whilst handling the complaint. The Chair will then attempt to resolve the complaint or advise if it should be escalated to Stage 4.

#### **Stage 4 – A formal letter of complaint to the Clerk of the Governing Body**

A request to escalate to Stage 4 must be made to the Clerk, via the school office, within 10 school days of receipt of the Stage 3 response.

The Clerk will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 10 school days.

Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.

The Clerk will write to the complainant to inform them of the date of the meeting. They will aim to convene a meeting within 20 school days of receipt of the Stage 4 request. If this is not possible, the Clerk will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed.

If the complainant rejects the offer of three proposed dates, without good reason, the Clerk will decide when to hold the meeting. It will then proceed in the complainant's absence on the basis of written submissions from both parties.

The complaints committee will consist of at least three governors with no prior involvement or knowledge of the complaint. Prior to the meeting, they will decide amongst themselves who will act as the Chair of the Complaints Committee. If there are fewer than three governors from Coopers Lane School available, the Clerk will source any additional, independent governors through another local school or through their LA's Governor Services team, in order to make up the committee. Alternatively, an entirely independent committee may be convened to hear the complaint at Stage 4.

The committee will decide whether to deal with the complaint by inviting parties to a meeting or through written representations, but in making their decision they will be sensitive to the complainant's needs.

If the complainant is invited to attend the meeting, they may bring someone along to provide support. This can be a relative or friend. Generally, we do not encourage either party to bring legal representatives to the committee meeting. However, there may be occasions when legal representation is appropriate.

For instance, if a school employee is called as a witness in a complaint meeting, they may wish to be supported by union and/or legal representation.

*Note: Complaints about staff conduct will not generally be handled under this complaints procedure. Complainants will be advised that any staff conduct complaints will be considered under staff disciplinary procedures, if appropriate, but outcomes will not be shared with them.*

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

At least 10 school days before the meeting, the Clerk will:

- confirm and notify the complainant of the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that, if the complainant is invited, the dates are convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible; and

- request copies of any further written material to be submitted to the committee at least 10 school days before the meeting.

Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least 5 school days before the date of the meeting. The committee will not normally accept, as evidence, recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.

The committee will also not review any new complaints at this stage or consider evidence unrelated to the initial complaint to be included. New complaints must be dealt with from Stage 1 of the procedure.

The meeting will be held in private. Electronic recordings of meetings or conversations are not normally permitted unless a complainant's own disability or special needs require it. Prior knowledge and consent of all parties attending must be sought before meetings or conversations take place. Consent will be recorded in any minutes taken.

The committee will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented. The committee can:

- uphold the complaint in whole or in part; or
- dismiss the complaint in whole or in part.

If the complaint is upheld in whole or in part, the committee will:

- decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint; and
- where appropriate, recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future.

The Chair of the Committee will provide the complainant and Coopers Lane School with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within 5 school days.

The letter to the complainant will include details of how to contact the Department for Education if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled by Coopers Lane School.

If the complaint is:

- jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair or
- the entire governing body or
- the majority of the governing body

Stage 4 will be heard by a committee of independent governors.

The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions Coopers Lane School will take to resolve the complaint.

The response will also advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied.

### **Next Steps**

If the complainant believes the school did not handle their complaint in accordance with the published complaints procedure or they acted unlawfully or unreasonably in the exercise of their duties under education law, they can contact the Department for Education after they have completed Stage 4.

The Department for Education will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by Coopers Lane School. They will consider whether Coopers Lane School has adhered to education legislation and any statutory policies connected with the complaint.

The complainant can refer their complaint to the Department for Education online at: [www.education.gov.uk/contactus](http://www.education.gov.uk/contactus), by telephone on: 0370 000 2288 or by writing to:

Department for Education,  
Piccadilly Gate,  
Store Street,  
Manchester,  
M1 2WD.

## Complaint Form

Please complete and return to (via school office):

Head Teacher, Chair of the Governing Body or the Clerk to Governors

who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

|  |
|--|
| <b>Your name:</b>  |
| <b>Pupil's name (if relevant):</b>   |
| <b>Your relationship to the pupil (if relevant):</b>   |
| <b>Address:</b>  |
| <b>Postcode:</b><br><b>Day time telephone number:</b><br><b>Evening telephone number:</b>                          |
| <b>Please give details of your complaint, including whether you have spoken to anybody at the school about it.</b> |
| <b>What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?</b>   |
| <b>Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details.</b>  |
| <b>Signature:</b>  |
| <b>Date:</b>   |
| <b>Official use</b>  |
| <b>Date acknowledgement sent:</b>  |
| <b>By who:</b>   |
| <b>Complaint referred to:</b>  |
| <b>Date:</b>   |