

# Devoran School Complaints Procedure

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## **INTRODUCTION.**

Devoran School is legally responsible for dealing with the majority of complaints. The purpose of this procedure is to lay out how complaints will be dealt with by the school.

The school governors must ensure that complaints are investigated thoroughly and fairly and that complainants are given a response within a reasonable time-scale.

Children as well as parents have legitimate rights to express concerns or to make complaints, but maturity and understanding will vary from child to child. Therefore, the school will consider a complaint on its merits. Please note that a person does not have to be a parent or a pupil of the school to make a complaint. Please also note that anonymous complaints cannot be examined under a complaints procedure.

Governors have an important role to play in considering complaints. However, it is important for parents to understand that individual governors must not investigate complaints outside this procedure.

Our complaints officer/coordinator, the headteacher, ensures that the complaints procedures are delivered and monitored satisfactorily.

## **Stage 1. - Informal Resolution.**

Many enquiries and concerns can be dealt with satisfactorily by the class-teacher, the headteacher or other members of staff, without the need to resort to a formal procedure. Devoran School values informal meetings and discussions.

There is no suggested time-scale for resolution at this stage given the importance of dialogue through informal discussion. However, if the face to face discussion seems unlikely to resolve matters, then proceed to the next stage of the procedure.

It is important to note that any complaint that relates to a diversity issue will also be recorded on the diversity incident report form.

## **Stage 2 - Formal Written Complaints.**

Where it has not been possible to resolve a complaint by way of informal discussion, the complainant should set out the precise nature of the complaint and return this to the headteacher. The school governors will not be involved at this stage. However, if the headteacher or a governor is the subject of a complaint, the complainant should send the form directly to the chair of governors. If a complaint against the headteacher is received by the headteacher, then s/he will pass it on to the chair of governors immediately.

Should a complaint be about a general matter, the headteacher may be able to respond immediately, e.g. if it only requires an explanation of school policy. For most other complaints, which are likely to relate to specific actions or events, there is likely to be a need for further investigation in order to clarify the facts. The headteacher or their nominee will normally undertake this investigation. However,

the headteacher may feel that to proceed to Stage 3 (below) is the best course of action, depending on the circumstances. The chair of governors will then convene a meeting of the governor panel (stage 3 below).

Should the complaint involve an allegation of a potentially serious criminal nature, the headteacher or the chair of governors will immediately inform the Director of Children, Young People and Families so that the allegation can be recorded and the school advised about further action.

In respect of complaints with respect to the conduct of a member of staff, a meeting will be arranged between the complainant and the headteacher (or relevant person) but this will not automatically include any member of staff named in the complaint.

All formal complaints that are received will be recorded in the school and acknowledged within 5 school days. Investigations at this stage should normally be completed within 40 school days of receipt of the complaint, unless there is an ongoing child protection investigation, or where the staff disciplinary procedure is involved or another exceptional circumstance. The school will aim to send a formal response within 9 school days of the completion of the investigation. This gives a target of 5 school weeks for the completion of this stage of the procedure. Please refer to Appendix 2 for the different timescales involved with complaints regarding the headteacher or a governor.

In the letter conveying the outcome of the investigation, the complainant should be informed of the process for referral to the chair of governors if they wish to take their complaint further. Should the Staff Disciplinary procedures or child protection procedures have been started then the complainant will be notified that other processes are being followed. Any notification shall be confidential to protect the member of staff.

The complainant may wish to proceed to consideration of the complaint by the governors as set out below. It is up to the complainant to make this decision within two weeks of being informed of the outcome of the stage 2 investigation unless there are exceptional reasons why this is not possible. It is up to the chair of governors to decide if there are any such circumstances.

### **Stage 3 - The Governing Body.**

In all cases where the headteacher is unable to resolve a complaint to the satisfaction of the complainant, the complainant should write to the chair of governors for the matter to be considered. All complaints that reach this stage will be recorded on existing records where available and acknowledged within five school days.

A panel of three governors must be convened by the chair of governors and given the task of checking over the facts of the case. Individual governors have no powers to investigate a complaint outside the complaints process. If necessary, a meeting with the complainant should be held in order to reach an appropriate solution.

The panel will normally review the investigations carried out under stage 2 and will decide whether or not any further investigation should be undertaken. However, in most cases where an investigation has been previously carried out, the panel may decide only to consider the evidence already presented. Where complaints have been referred directly to stage 3 (relating to the headteacher or a governor), the panel will undertake the initial investigation.

Investigations at this stage should normally be completed within 15 school days of receipt of the complaint, unless there is an ongoing child protection investigation or where the staff disciplinary procedure is involved or another exceptional circumstance. The school will aim to send a formal response within 5 school days of the completion of the investigation. This gives a target of 4 school weeks for the completion of this stage of the procedure.

Following the stage 3 investigation, the panel will decide on one of two outcomes:-

1. Recommend that appropriate remedial action necessary to resolve the complaint be undertaken, or
2. Confirm that all internal investigative measures have been exhausted and uphold the original response.

The decision of the governors' panel will be communicated in writing to the complainant within five school days of the meeting. The decision is confidential to the complainant and to the governing body. The panel will report all outcomes of their investigations to the governing body.

#### **Stage 4 - Referral to the Local Authority (LA) or the appropriate Diocesan Authority.**

If, after exhausting internal school procedures (stages 1 – 3), complainants consider that their complaint has not been investigated fairly, they can request, in writing, that the LA or the appropriate Diocesan Authority reviews how the school handled the complaint. This review will determine if the complaint was dealt with in a reasonable and fair manner. It will **not** investigate the original complaint. The LEA or Diocesan Authority will acknowledge this request within five school days and will normally complete the review within 15 school days. The addresses for correspondence are:

Director of Children Young People and Families  
New County Hall,  
Truro,  
Cornwall  
TR1 3AY

In all cases of Church of England and Roman Catholic voluntary aided and voluntary controlled schools, it is important that the appropriate Diocesan Director is in first receipt of the complaint but they will, of course, discuss all complaints with relevant staff of the LEA such as attached inspectors and advisers to particular schools.

#### **Stage 5 - Appeals to the Secretary of State or the Ombudsman.**

Finally, complainants have a right of appeal to the Secretary of State for Education. In such cases, the Department of Education and Skills (DfES) will examine the complaint and adjudicate. The DfES has the power to require the LEA or Diocesan Authority to take certain actions, including the issuing of instructions to the School Governing Body. It should be pointed out that the members of staff also have the same right of appeal.

If a complainant feels that there has been maladministration in the manner in which

a complaint has been dealt with, this can be referred to the Local Government Ombudsman.

Please note that the Ombudsman can look into complaints about how something has been done, but she/he cannot question what has been done simply because the complainant does not agree with it. The relevant addresses are:

The Secretary of State for Education  
Sanctuary Buildings  
Great Smith Street,  
Westminster,  
London  
SW1P 3BT  
Tel: 0171 925 5000

Local Government Ombudsman  
The Oaks,  
Westwood Way,  
Coventry  
CV4 8JB

Tel: 01203 695999

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