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POLICY AND PROCEDURE FOR DEALING WITH PARENTAL CONCERNS AND COMPLAINTS

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Tranmere Park Primary School is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people and expects all staff and volunteers to share this commitment

POLICY AND PROCEDURE FOR DEALING WITH PARENTAL CONCERNS AND COMPLAINTS for Tranmere Park Primary School

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POLICY STATEMENT

This policy statement sets out our school's approach to dealing with parental concerns and complaints.

Further details of how we handle them are contained in the procedures section of this document. Please note that our dealings to resolve a complaint will only be conducted directly with parents / carers, not any third party. This does not affect the proviso, set out in the procedures, that parents may be accompanied in meetings.

At Tranmere Park Primary School we value good home/school relations and will, therefore, do everything we can to establish and maintain them. This includes seeking to resolve any concerns or complaints promptly, and to the satisfaction of all concerned.

We welcome feedback on what parents feel we do well, or not so well, as a school. We will consider carefully all feedback, whether positive or negative, and will review our policies and practices accordingly.

We will treat all concerns and complaints seriously and courteously and will advise parents and others of the school's procedures for dealing with their concerns. In return, we expect parents and other complainants to behave respectfully towards all members of the school community. In particular, any disagreement with the school should not be expressed inappropriately (e.g. through social media) or in front of students.

All school staff and members of the governing body will receive a copy of this policy statement, and will be familiar with the school's procedures for dealing with parental concerns and complaints, to which they will have access as required.

The school's procedures will be reviewed regularly and updated as necessary.

Staff and governors will receive training in handling parental concerns and complaints as appropriate. This may be on an individual basis, as a group activity for all staff, or for specific groups, such as the office staff or members of the governing body.

Whilst we will seek to resolve concerns and complaints to the satisfaction of all parties, it may not be possible to achieve this in every case. We will, therefore, use our option to close a complaint before all the stages of the school's procedures have been exhausted if this appears to be appropriate.

The government advocates resolution of parental concerns and complaints at school level wherever possible in the interests of maintaining good home/ school relations.

PROCEDURES

The majority of concerns from parents, carers and others are handled under the following general procedures. These procedures are divided into three stages;

- A) The **informal stage** aims to resolve the concern through informal contact at the appropriate level in school.
- B) **Stage 1** is the first formal stage at which written complaints are considered by the Head Teacher or an Investigating Officer
- C) **Stage 2** is the next stage once stage 1 has been worked through. It involves a Governors' Complaints Review Panel.
- D) **Stage 3** is referral to the Department for Education if you feel the governing body is acting or proposing to act unreasonably or illegally.

All complaints or concerns must be raised within three months of the event, incident or occurrence.

How each of these stages operates is explained below:

Informal stage – your initial contact with the school

Many concerns will be dealt with informally when you make them known to us and will be acknowledged by school **within three school days**. The first point of contact, in most cases, should be your child's Class Teacher. This may be via telephone, email or letter. If your concern relates to a specific class, then it would be best to contact the relevant Phase Leader directly. Please do not turn up at school without an appointment (unless there is a real emergency) as it is unlikely that anyone will be available to meet with you straight away.

If your complaint relates to Special Education Needs, please contact the Special Education Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) in the first instance. The details for the SENCO at Tranmere Park Primary School are on our website.

Phase Leaders and Class Teachers will know how to refer to the appropriate person with responsibility for your particular issues if referral is necessary. He or she will make a clear note of the details, and will check later to make sure the matter has been followed up.

Any actions or monitoring of the situation that has been agreed will be communicated clearly, and we will confirm this in writing to you if required.

If necessary, we will contact appropriate people who may be able to assist us with our enquiries into your concern. We will normally update you on the progress of our enquiries **within ten school days**. Once we have responded to your concern, you will have the opportunity to ask for the matter to be considered further.

If you are still dissatisfied following this informal approach, your concern will become a formal complaint and we will deal with it at the next stage.

Stage 1 - formal consideration of your complaint

This stage in our procedures deals with written complaints to the Head Teacher. It only applies where you are not happy with the informal approach to dealing with your concern, as outlined above.

Normally, your written complaint should be in the form of a letter addressed to the Head Teacher. If, however, your complaint concerns the Head Teacher personally, it should be sent to the school marked "*For the attention of the Chair of Governors*".

We will acknowledge your complaint in writing as soon as possible after receiving it. This will be **within three school days**. The Head Teacher may appoint an Investigating Officer to investigate your complaint. If the complaint concerns the Head Teacher, the Chair of Governors will appoint an Investigating Officer to investigate your complaint.

Normally we would expect to respond in full **within fifteen school days**, but if this is not possible we will write to explain the reason for the delay, and let you know when we hope to be able to provide a full response.

As part of our consideration of your complaint, we may invite you to a meeting to discuss the complaint and fill in any details required. If you wish, you can ask someone to accompany you to help you explain the reasons for your complaint (not acting in a legal capacity). The Head Teacher, or Chair of Governors, may also be accompanied by a suitable person if they wish.

Following the meeting, the Head Teacher or Investigating Officer will, where necessary, talk to witnesses and take statements from others involved. If the complaint centres on a student, we will talk to the student concerned and, where appropriate, others present at the time of the incident in question.

If the complaint is against a member of staff, it will be dealt with under the school's internal confidential procedures, as required by law.

The Head Teacher or Investigating Officer will keep hand or typewritten records of all meetings and telephone conversations, and other related documentation.

Once we have established all the relevant facts, we will send you a written response to your complaint. This will give an explanation of the Head Teacher's or Investigating Officer's decision and the reasons for it. If follow-up action is needed, we will indicate what we are proposing to do. We may invite you to a meeting to discuss the outcome as part of our commitment to building and maintaining good relations with you.

The person investigating your complaint may decide that we have done all we can to resolve the complaint, in which case we may use our discretion to close the complaint at this point.

Further details about the closure of complaints are given later in this document.

If you are unhappy with the way in which we reached our conclusions, you may wish to proceed to stage 2.

Stage 2 - consideration by a Governors' Complaints Review Panel

If the complaint has already been through stage 1 and you are not happy with the outcome as a result of the way in which the complaint has been handled, you can take it further to a Governors' Complaints Review Panel. This is a formal process, and the ultimate recourse at school level.

The purpose of this arrangement is to give you the chance to present your arguments in front of a panel of governors, who have no prior knowledge of the details of the case and who can, therefore, consider it without prejudice. The panel will consist of three persons not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint and one of whom shall be independent of the management and running of the school.

The aim of this panel is not to re-hear the complaint – they will not go through the case again. It is there to review how the complaint has been investigated and to determine whether this has been conducted fairly and that the correct procedure has been followed. It is there to establish facts and make recommendations, which will reassure you that we have taken the complaint seriously.

The Governors' Complaints Review Panel operates according to the following formal procedures:

- The governing body will convene a panel and will aim to arrange for the panel meeting to take place **within twenty school days** from the point of receipt of your request for a Governors' Panel. Your request for a review should be lodged with the Chair of Governors **within ten working days** of receiving the school's response to your initial complaint.
- You will be asked whether you wish to provide any further written documentation in support of your appeal.
- The complaint investigator (Head Teacher or Investigating Officer) will be asked to prepare a written report for the panel highlighting the process followed as part of the investigation and any recommendations made. The panel can request additional information from other sources if necessary.
- You will be informed at least five school days in advance, of the date and the time and place of the meeting. We hope you will feel comfortable with the meeting taking place in the school, but we will do what we can to make alternative arrangements if you prefer.
- With the letter, you will receive any relevant correspondence or reports regarding stage 1 and you will be asked whether you wish to submit further written evidence to the panel.
- The letter will explain what will happen at the panel meeting and that you are entitled to be accompanied to the meeting. The choice of person to accompany you is your own, but it is usually best to involve someone in whom you have confidence but who is not directly connected with the school. They are there to give you support, but also to witness the proceedings and to speak on your behalf if you wish.
- If it is necessary in the interests of ratifying the investigative process, the complaint investigator may, with the agreement of the Chair of the panel, invite relevant witnesses directly involved in matters raised by you to attend the meeting.
- The Chair of the panel will bear in mind that the formal nature of the meeting can be intimidating for you, and will do his or her best to put you at your ease.
- As a general rule, no evidence or witnesses previously undisclosed should be introduced into the meeting by any of the participants. If either party wishes to do so, the meeting will be adjourned so that the other party has a fair opportunity to consider and respond to the new evidence.
- The chair of the panel will ensure that the meeting is properly documented by way of minutes. You will receive the written outcome of the panel meeting, which should give you all the information you require. If you would like to receive a copy of the minutes, please indicate this in advance of the meeting. Please understand that any decision to share the minutes with the complainant is a matter for the panel's discretion and it is not an automatic right to see or receive a copy of the minutes, as they are the property of the Governing Body.
- During the meeting, you can expect there to be opportunities for:
 - The panel to hear you explain your case and your argument for why it should be heard at stage 2;
 - The panel to hear the complaint investigator's case in response;
 - You to raise questions via the Chair;
 - You to be questioned by the complaint investigator through the chair;
 - The panel members to be able to question you and the complaint investigator;
 - You and the Head Teacher to make a final statement.
- In closing the meeting, the chair will explain that the panel will now consider its decision, and that written notice of the decision will be sent to you and the Head Teacher **within three school days**. All participants other than the panel and the Clerk will then leave.

- The panel will then consider the complaint and all the evidence presented in order to:
 - reach a unanimous, or at least a majority, decision on the case;
 - decide on the appropriate action to be taken, if necessary;
 - recommend, where appropriate, to the governing body, changes to the school's systems or procedures to make sure similar problems do not happen again.
- The Clerk will send you and the Head Teacher a letter outlining the decision of the panel. The outcome, including any recommendations, may be helpful to you in seeking resolution of the complaint through the Secretary of State for Education if necessary.
- We will keep a copy of all correspondence and notes on file in the school's records, but separate from students' personal records.

Stage 3 – referral to the Department for Education

Where you have been through the school's internal complaints procedures and are still unhappy with the outcome or decision from the governing body, you can write to the Secretary of State for Education at the address shown below:

**Secretary of State
Department for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BT**

Please enclose a copy of the Governors' Complaints Review Panel Outcome. This will save time in that the Department for Education will not need to ask for our view of what has happened.

We would advise parents that unless the school is shown to have behaved unreasonably or not to have followed their own procedures, there is likely to be little further action that can be taken. Governing bodies are empowered to deal with many issues without reference to or the Secretary of State.

CLOSURE OF COMPLAINTS

Regrettably, and very occasionally, the school will need to close a complaint where the complainant is still dissatisfied.

Where appropriate, the school will do all we can to help to resolve a complaint against the school, but sometimes it is simply not possible to meet all of the complainant's wishes. Sometimes it is simply a case of 'agreeing to disagree'.

If a complainant persists in making representations to the school – to the Head Teacher, Chair of Governors, or to other people linked to the school, this can be extremely time-consuming and can detract from our responsibility to look after the interests of all the children in our care. For this reason, we are entitled to close correspondence on a complaint (including personal approaches, as well as letters and telephone calls), where we feel we have taken all reasonable action to resolve the complaint, and that the complaint has exhausted our official process.

If a complainant continues to make representations to the school or attempts to re-open the same issue, the Chair of Governors will inform them in writing, that the procedures have all been followed and that all reasonable action has been taken to try to resolve the issue and that the matter is now closed.

In exceptional circumstances, closure may occur before a complaint has reached stage 2 of the procedures described in this document. This is because a Governors' Complaints Review Panel takes considerable time and effort to set up, and we must be sure it is likely to assist the process of investigating the complaint.

The Chair of Governors may decide, therefore, that every reasonable action has been undertaken to resolve the complaint and that a Governors' Complaints Review Panel would not help to move things forward. This does not, of course, prevent you from referring your complaint to the Secretary of State for Education.

OTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION AND ADVICE

If your concern is about an aspect of **special educational needs provision**, which might include information about relevant voluntary organisations and support groups in Leeds, you might like to talk to the Leeds City Council **parent partnership service** on their helpline, phone **0113 395 1200**.

PARENTAL CONCERNS AND COMPLAINTS – FLOWCHART

Please see the flowchart marked as "Annex 1" for the process.



