

**Whybridge Junior School**

**COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE POLICY**

**Subject Leader** : Mr C W Hobson

**Updated:** December 2017

**Review Date:** December 2018

**1. Introduction:**

This policy should be read in conjunction with the notes in **APPENDIX 1**

<p><b>SECTION 1. Complaints about the actions of a member of staff other than the headteacher</b></p>
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**Informal Stage**

Most parental concerns can be adequately resolved by discussion with the class teacher (or form teacher in secondary schools) or with other members of staff who may be the object of the complaint. There will be no need for the complaint to be put in writing, which would formalise matters and parents may feel less willing to articulate concerns, perhaps because of fear that such action may prejudice the interests of their child. In the case of serious concerns, it may be appropriate to address them directly to the headteacher or a designated member of the Senior Management Team.

**Formal Stage**

If the complainant is not satisfied with the response received, s/he should put the complaint in writing, using the form in **APPENDIX 2**. This may be to the headteacher or a designated member of the senior management team. **The complainant should normally receive a response within 15 school days of contacting the senior member of staff.**

The complaint should include details, which might assist the investigation, such as names of potential witnesses, dates and times of events, and copies of relevant documents. In addition, the headteacher may meet with the complainant to clarify the complaint. It is good practice to have a colleague with the headteacher during any such meeting, although this should not be

anyone who is the object of the complaint or who has had any prior dealings with the matter.

The headteacher or other designated member of staff will collect any other evidence, as s/he deems necessary. Where this involves an interview with a member of staff, s/he may be accompanied by a friend or representative if they wish.

The investigation will begin as soon as possible and when it has been concluded the complainant, and the member of staff concerned, will be informed in writing of the outcome, using the model letter in **APPENDIX 3**, (if the complaint is considered to be spurious), or **APPENDIX 4**. This may be to the effect that:

- There is insufficient evidence to reach a conclusion, so the complaint cannot be upheld.
- The concern is not substantiated by the evidence.
- The concern was substantiated in part or in full (some details may then be given of action the school may be taking to review procedures but details of any disciplinary procedures must not be released).
- The matter has been fully investigated and appropriate procedures are being followed, which are strictly confidential.

The complainant will be told that consideration of their complaint by the headteacher is now concluded.

If the complainant is not satisfied with the manner in which the process has been followed, the complainant may request The Board of Trustees' complaints panel to review the process followed by the headteacher (**see section 2**). Any such request must be put in writing within 10 school days of receiving notice of the outcome from the headteacher, and include a statement specifying any perceived failures to follow procedure.

If the complainant considers that the decision of the headteacher is perverse, or that the headteacher has acted unreasonably in considering the complaint, then the complainant may bring a complaint against the headteacher as detailed in **section 3** below.

## **SECTION 2      Review of Complaint's Process by The Board of Trustees Panel**

Any review of the process followed by the headteacher or the chair of governors (or investigator) shall be conducted by a panel of **three members of The Board of Trustees**. It should be noted, however, that if any of the governors have been involved directly or indirectly with the case then they must not form part of the panel.

The panel is established to **review the process *not* the decision taken** by the headteacher or chair of governors/investigator, following the receipt of a formal complaint. However, when a parent writes to the panel seeking a review it may not be clear until the panel meets, whether or not this is only a matter of process or simple dissatisfaction with the decision reached.

**The first task of the panel, therefore, is to determine the nature of the request.**

If the panel forms the view that it is a matter of the complainant being dissatisfied with the decision reached then the panel will not take the matter any further\*.

### **APPENDIX 5**

If however, the complainant is concerned that the process undertaken by the headteacher or the chair of governors was not in accordance with the published process then the panel will continue their review.

\*The nature of the complaint may give the panel cause to consider it in the best interests of the school to review even if it is clear that it is not about due process. It must be made clear to all parties that the panel is not empowered to overturn the judgement of the headteacher or chair but could refer it back for further consideration if they feel uneasy about the initial judgement. Should they review the case on this basis they will follow the same procedure as laid down for the chair of governors in investigating a complaint against the headteacher. Further guidance is offered below.

## **APPENDIX 6**

The panel may receive evidence from the complainant orally, who may be accompanied by a friend or relative, or representative if they wish, and/or in writing. The complainant may submit relevant documentary evidence. In addition, the panel will meet separately with the headteacher or the chair/investigator, as appropriate, to receive an account of the procedure which has been followed. This account may be presented orally and in writing. The panel will also have access to the records kept of the process followed.

It is good practice to have a note taker to assist the panel during any such meeting, although this should not be anyone who is the object of the complaint or who has had any dealings with the case. The person will only act as a brief note taker to aid the review. These will not be formal minutes but brief notes describing the issues under review.

The complainant and the headteacher or the chair/investigator, as appropriate, will be informed in writing of the outcome, normally within 20 school days from the beginning of the review. This may be to the effect that:

- There is insufficient evidence to reach a conclusion, so the complaint cannot be upheld.
- The concern about applying procedures correctly is not substantiated by the evidence.
- The above concern was substantiated in part or in full, but that the procedural failure did not affect the outcome significantly, so the matter is now closed.
- This concern was substantiated in part or in full and The Board of Trustees will take reasonable steps where practical to prevent a recurrence or to rectify the situation.

## **MODEL PANEL MEETING PROCEDURE**

**(This will only apply if the panel decides to go ahead with the review as articulated above).**

1. Introductions - the members of the panel will introduce themselves. The complainant and the friend, relative, representative (if attending) will introduce themselves.
2. The chair of the panel will outline the process.
3. The complainant or person in attendance has the opportunity to present evidence. Depending upon the level of detail of the submission received, it may be reasonable to advise the complainant that s/he must focus on where the process was not followed and s/he is limited to new material rather than simply restating what has already being submitted. Panel Members may ask questions both during the presenting of evidence and at the end of the presentation.
4. The complainant should be advised that the panel will next see the headteacher or the chair of governors (or investigator) to receive an account of the procedures that have been followed, together with access to records kept of the process followed.

When the complainant has presented his/her evidence, s/he leaves.

5. The above procedure will then be explained to the headteacher/chair of governors (or investigator) prior to presenting his/her account. This can be either at the same or a separate meeting. Please note that the headteacher and chair (or investigator) do not attend at the same time as the complainant.
6. The panel will then deliberate with neither the complainant nor headteacher/chair of governors/investigator taking any further part.
7. Both the complainant and the headteacher/chair of governors (or investigator) must be advised that the panel is not empowered to overturn the judgement but could refer it back for further consideration.
8. The complainant and the headteacher/chair of governors (or investigator) will be advised in writing of the outcome.

## **REVIEW OUTCOME NOTIFICATION**

### **APPENDIX 7**

Both the complainant and the headteacher/chair of governors (or investigator) will be informed in writing of the outcome, normally within twenty (20) school days from the beginning of the review.

Review Outcome notification-examples of text for these letters are contained within the complaint procedure.

## **SECTION 3      Complaints about the actions of the headteacher**

### **Informal Stage**

The complainant is usually expected to arrange to speak directly with the headteacher, except in the case of serious concerns when it may be appropriate to raise them directly with the chair of The Board of Trustees. Many concerns can be resolved by simple clarification or the provision of information. However, in certain circumstances it may be appropriate to encourage parents to put their concerns in writing, for example where there is continuing/constant verbalising of concerns even when the headteacher considers they have been appropriately dealt with.

### **Formal Stage**

If the complaint is not resolved at the informal stage, the complainant must put the complaint in writing to the chair of The Board of Trustees who is responsible for investigating it. In certain circumstances it may be more appropriate for the investigation to be conducted by the vice-chair, for example if the complainant is well known to the chair. In such cases, this person is termed ‘the investigator’ (see **section 2**).

The complainant should include details which might assist the investigation, such as names of potential witnesses, dates and times of events and copies of relevant documents. In addition, the complainant will be invited to meet with the chair to present oral evidence or to clarify the complaint. The chair will collect such other evidence as is deemed necessary. This may include the interviewing of witnesses and others who may provide relevant information. It is good practice to always have another person with the chair present during any such meeting, although this should not be anyone who is the object of the complaint or who has any connection with the complaint. The person could act as a brief note taker to aid the chair’s investigation. These will not be formal minutes but brief notes describing the issues under review.

The headteacher will be provided with a copy of the complaint and any additional evidence presented by the complainant or collected by the chair. Once there has been an opportunity for the headteacher to consider this,

he/she will be invited to meet separately with the chair, in order to present written and oral evidence in response. A friend or representative may accompany the headteacher at this meeting.

When the investigation has been concluded, the complainant and the headteacher will be informed in writing of the outcome. The complainant will not be informed of any disciplinary/capability action. The whole process should be concluded within 20 school days.

The complainant will be told that consideration of their complaint by the chair is now concluded. If the complainant is not satisfied with the manner in which the process has been followed, the complainant may request that The Board of Trustees' complaints panel review the process followed. Any such request must be made in writing within 2 school weeks of receiving notice of the outcome from the chair, and include a statement specifying any perceived failures to follow the procedure. (use **APPENDICES 2,3 AND 4 AS MODEL LETTERS**)

## **APPENDICES**

Attached to this model policy are a model complaint form, model letters and a model paragraph for inclusion in the school prospectus.

Additionally, model letters concerning aggressive behaviour on the part of the parents are attached.



## **NOTES FOR GUIDANCE**

### **London Borough of Havering- Children's Services**

#### **General (non-statutory) Complaints Procedure for Maintained Schools:**

##### **Background and Legal Framework**

The 2002 Education Act determined that all governing bodies must have complaints procedures in place by September 2003 and must have regard to guidance given by the Secretary of State. The DfES issued via its website, guidance regarding a model policy for governing bodies to consider and to adopt or adapt as appropriate. Havering LA, in consultation with schools decided to recommend a different model and the DfES subsequently confirmed that it met statutory requirements. Most governing bodies adopted this model. However, in the light of outcomes of specific cases this model has now been revised and is attached to assist governing bodies when they review their current arrangements.

In terms of LA statutory duties or powers, procedures are already in place to deal with such issues as child protection, admissions, the provision of an appropriate curriculum, SEN and exclusions. In relation to a non-statutory complaint, there is no statutory right of appeal by a complainant to an LA or Diocesan Board. Parents often do not appreciate this, and indeed schools need to bear in mind that the LA has an advisory role for both schools and parents alike. The LA has to be even handed in this dual involvement with schools and parents. However, once complaints procedures have been exhausted, and if parents are still refusing to accept the outcomes the LA can assist schools to achieve closure sometimes in close discussion with the council's legal advisers.

In considering the issues involved in reviewing complaints procedures, Havering LA would like to offer the following advice and guidance to schools and governing bodies.

- It would seem reasonable to limit the right of access to any procedure to parents of registered pupils and those with parental responsibility.
- Procedures should be designed to ensure that, wherever possible, resolution is achieved through an informal process, although there may be times when progression to the formal stage might be more appropriate.
- All stages of the complaints procedure must be investigatory rather than adversarial.
- Wherever possible, the headteacher or the chair of governors acting alone should not conduct any meeting with complainants.
- Procedures should include provision that “it would not be appropriate to investigate an anonymous complaint unless there are exceptional circumstances”.
- The responsibility for dealing with general complaints lies with the school. Any non-statutory complaint received by the LA will be re-directed to the school and the complainant informed accordingly.
- There should be a mechanism for terminating spurious complaints and those brought by vexatious complainants.
- Advice to complainants of the outcome of their complaint must not include confidential information, as this could be prejudicial in terms of employer/employee relationships. It is important, therefore, to be circumspect in the information provided.
- In the event that a complainant believes that the appropriate investigative procedures have not been followed, the complainant may request The Board of Trustees to review the matter. A review panel of three governors should be established for this purpose from a pool of, for example, five.

Any request that is based purely on dissatisfaction with the outcome should be rejected although there could be limited exceptions to this position.

- Governors involved in the process should, wherever possible, receive training and/or seek advice from the LA for their role. This is important to avoid the risk that governors, especially the chair, may become involved at a stage that is inappropriate.
- There should be clear time scales for lodging and processing complaints with a definite end-point to any procedure. After this, the matter is closed as far as the school is concerned.
- It is important that any potential complainant is aware of the correct channel through which to pursue their complaint. This will reduce the likelihood of complaints being sent to the LA, Secretary of State, Councillors, MPs, local press etc.

**It is essential that the School Prospectus and the Home to School Agreement includes information about the General Complaints Procedure.**

## Whybridge Junior School Complaint Form

Please complete this form and return it to headteacher who will acknowledge its receipt and inform you of the next stage in the procedure.

Your name: .....

Relationship with school [e.g. parent of a pupil on the schools roll]:

.....

Pupil's name [if relevant to your complaint]:

.....

Your Address:

Daytime telephone number: .....

Evening telephone number: .....

Please give details of your complaint, [including dates, names of witnesses etc...], to allow the matter to be fully investigated:

You may continue on separate paper, or attach additional paperwork, if you wish. If you have already provided information it would be helpful if you could summarise the main points above.

Number of Additional pages attached =

What action, if any, have you already taken to try to resolve your complaint? [I.e. whom have you spoken with or written to and what was the outcome?]

What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?

Signature:

Date:

School use:

Date Form received:

Received by:

Date acknowledgement sent:

Acknowledgement sent by:

Complaint referred to:			
Date:			

### **Model Response from headteacher to spurious complaints**

Dear Complainant

Following receipt of your communications and my careful consideration of their content, I am unable to deal with this matter under The Board of Trustees's General Complaints Procedure as:

- You have not identified any specific actions of which you might complain

**OR**

- The concerns that you identify relate to historical actions and any evidence, which might have enabled an objective investigation of your complaint, is no longer available.

**OR**

- The substance of your complaint has been addressed under this procedure already.

**OR**

- The concerns that you raise do not fall within the scope of this procedure.

**OR**

- You have not identified any potential sources of evidence that might allow the matter to be investigated.

**OR**

- The school offered to resolve the matter informally and in my judgement you refused unreasonably to take advantage of this.

If you are not satisfied with the *manner in which the complaints* process has been followed, then you may write to the chair of The Board of Trustees with your reasons. This must be within 10 school days from the date of this letter.

Yours sincerely,

Headteacher



## **NOTIFICATION OF DECISION REGARDING GENERAL PARENTAL COMPLAINT**

Dear Complainant

Following receipt of your complaint and careful consideration of all the available relevant evidence, I have concluded that:

- There is insufficient evidence to reach a conclusion, so the complaint cannot be upheld

**OR**

- The concern is not substantiated by the evidence

**OR**

- The concern was substantiated in part/in full. The school will review its practices/procedures with the intention of avoiding any reoccurrence. Parents will be informed in due course of any policy changes.

**OR**

- In order to address fully the matters investigated, the school has initiated appropriate internal procedures, the nature of outcome of which must remain strictly confidential.

If you are not satisfied with the *manner in which the complaints process* has been followed, then you may write to the chair of the governing body with your reasons. This must be within 10 school days from the date of this letter.

I hope, however, that we may now put this matter behind us and work together for the benefit of your child's progress

Yours sincerely

Headteacher

## **Model Response from Governing body to spurious complaints about procedures**

Dear Complainant,

I am writing to advise you that the Governing Body of Whybridge Junior School has established a panel to consider whether to undertake a review of the complaints procedure followed in respect of your original complaint.

Having considered the detailed nature of your request for a review, which you submitted, we have decided that a review should *not* take place.

Following receipt of your communications and my careful consideration of their content, we are unable to deal with this matter under the Governing Body's General Complaints Procedure as:

- You have not identified any specific actions of which you might complain

**OR**

- The concerns that you identify relate to historical actions and any evidence, which might have enabled an objective investigation of your complaint, is no longer available.

**OR**

- The substance of your complaint has been addressed under this procedure already.

**OR**

- The concerns that you raise do not fall within the scope of this procedure.

**OR**

- You have not identified any potential sources of evidence that might allow the matter to be investigated.

**OR**

- The school offered to resolve the matter informally and in my judgement you refused unreasonably to take advantage of this.

Yours sincerely,

Chair of Governors

**MODEL LETTER INVITING THE COMPLAINANT TO A MEETING OF A REVIEW PANEL**

Dear (Name of Complainant)

I am writing to advise you that the Governing Body of Whybridge Junior School has established a panel to undertake a review of the complaints procedure followed in respect of your complaint about the headteacher/chair of governors/investigator.

Having considered the detailed nature of your request for a review, which you submitted, we have decided that a review should take place.

The panel will meet on (date, time, place).

You have the opportunity to attend and present evidence orally and may bring a friend, relative or representative if you wish.

If you wish to attend, please contact me, together with details of any one you wish to bring with you. You should also submit any other written evidence to me by (date), c/o the school office.

Yours sincerely,

Name, Chair of Review Panel

Dear (Name of Complainant)

Having carefully considered your representations in the context of the relevant evidence, the Governing Body Complaints Review Panel has concluded that the General Complaints Procedure was followed appropriately in respect of your complaint.

Therefore, the matter is now closed as far as the school is concerned.

**Or**

Having carefully considered your representations in the context of the relevant evidence, the Governing Body Complaints Review Panel has concluded that the headteacher/ chair of governors/investigator followed the General Complaints Procedure except .....

Therefore, the following action will be taken .....

Once this action has been completed the school will consider the matter to be closed.

**Or**

Having carefully considered your representations in the context of the relevant evidence, the Governing Body Complaints Review Panel has concluded that the headteacher/ chair of governors/investigator followed the General Complaints Procedure accept that .....

Fortunately, this procedural failure did not, however, affect the outcome of the consideration of your complaint so, while we regret this error, we will now consider this matter to be closed as far as the school is concerned.

**Or**

Having carefully reviewed the process leading to the decision of the headteacher or chair of governors/investigator, the panel have concluded that: There is insufficient evidence to reach a conclusion, so the complaint cannot be upheld.

**Or**

The concern about applying the procedures correctly is not substantiated by the evidence.

**Or**

The concern was substantiated in part/in full. The school will review its practices/procedures with the intention of avoiding any reoccurrence. Parents will be informed in due course of any policy changes.

**Or**

In order to address fully the matters investigated, the school has initiated appropriate internal procedures, the nature of which must remain strictly confidential.

Yours sincerely



Chair of Complaints Review Panel

c.c. Headteacher, Chair of Governors

## APPENDIX 8

### GUIDANCE ON DEALING WITH AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOUR

#### MODEL LETTER FROM THE HEADTEACHER

#### DISAPPROVAL OF BEHAVIOUR

Dear (Name)

I am writing to you following an incident that took place on ..... between yourself and staff at the above school. I find this behaviour totally unacceptable. (**Summarise what the unacceptable behaviour was**). Not only was it extremely distressing to myself and the other staff involved, but also it was worrying for children and parents who witnessed it. I am also very concerned that such a sudden deterioration in the relationship between you and the school will not help (name)'s progress.

Any parent who has serious concerns about the school should bring the matter to my attention either by speaking to me or in writing. If you are then not satisfied with my response you may contact or write a letter of complaint to the Chair of the Governing Body. I recommend you continue to pursue your concerns about the school in this way.

Meanwhile, I must warn you that any repetition of what happened will lead to me taking further action. This could involve your being prohibited from coming onto the school site and referral to the Local Authority or the Police, **with a view to criminal and/or civil legal proceedings being commenced against you if necessary without further notice to yourself.**

I hope this will not be necessary.

Yours sincerely,

Headteacher

c.c Chair of Governors

## **MODEL LETTER FROM HEADTEACHER**

### **PROHIBITION FROM SCHOOL SITE**

Dear (Name)

In view of what happened when you came into school and (brief details of incident), **I am prohibiting you from entering the school site until further notice.**

**The only exception to this prohibition will be on those occasions when you are specifically invited by me to come into school to discuss your child's progress.**

**If you wish to communicate with the school on any matter, you must do so by telephone or writing.**

If you do not abide by this prohibition I will refer to the Local Authority, **with a view to criminal and/or civil legal proceedings being commenced against you, if necessary without further notice to yourself,** although I hope this will not be necessary.

**I regret taking this action, but your recent behaviour has left me no alternative.**

Yours sincerely,

Headteacher

c.c. Chair of Governors

London Borough of Havering

**Children's Services**

**MODEL LETTER FROM LA**

Head of Pupil and Student  
Services

**WITHDRAWAL LETTER 1**

**Scimitar House**

**23 Eastern Road**

**Romford RM1 3NH**

Telephone: 01708 **773849**

Fax: 01708 773837

Date:

Your reference:

Our reference:

Dear

**Re: NOTICE OF WITHDRAWAL OF PERMISSION TO ENTER A SCHOOL SITE**

I am writing to you following an incident that took place on .....between yourself and staff at the above school.

I understand that during the incident you were abusive, adopted an aggressive manner and made a number of threats. I further understand that you refused to adopt a reasonable manner, despite the presence of other children and parents, and refused to leave the premises until the police were called to the scene.

Havering Council places great importance on the security of staff and pupils on school sites. In view of your unacceptable behaviour, I am writing to inform you that you no longer have permission to enter the school, or its grounds, without the permission of the headteacher until further notice. If you do, and cause a nuisance or disturbance, then the Police will be called to remove you. In addition, the Council will not hesitate to bring proceedings against you under the various sections of the appropriate Acts of Parliament as necessary.



If you do have any concerns about your child's education, you should telephone the school and request an appointment with staff to discuss them.

Yours sincerely

Head of Pupil and Student Services

**MODEL LETTER FROM LA  
WITHDRAWAL  
LETTER 2**

London Borough of Havering

**Children's Services**

Head of Pupil and Student  
Services

**Scimitar House**

**23 Eastern Road**

**Romford RM1 3NH**

Telephone: 01708 **773849**

Fax: 01708 773837

Date:

Your reference:

Our reference:

Dear

**Re: NOTICE OF WITHDRAWAL OF PERMISSION TO ENTER A SCHOOL SITE**

I am writing to you following an incident that took place on ..... I understand that you were abusive to pupils at the school gates.

The safety and welfare of all pupils is of paramount importance to the school and the Council and your behaviour during this incident was wholly unacceptable.

I am, therefore, writing to inform you that you no longer have permission to enter the school, or its grounds, without the permission of the headteacher, until further notice. If you do, and cause a nuisance or disturbance, then the Police will be called to remove you.

Yours sincerely,

Head of Pupil and Student Services

London Borough of Havering

**Children's Services**

Head of Pupil and Student  
Services

**Scimitar House**

**23 Eastern Road**

**Romford RM1 3NH**

Telephone: 01708 **773849**

Fax: 01708 773837

Date:

**MODEL LETTER FROM LA**

**WITHDRAWAL**

LETTER 3

Your reference:

Our reference:

Dear

**Re: NOTICE OF WITHDRAWAL OF PERMISSION TO ENTER A SCHOOL SITE**

I am writing to you following several incidents when you were apprehended on the site of .....School.

I understand that you entered the school site on ..... You had no reason to do so and I am, therefore, informing you that you do not have permission to enter the school site in future. If you do, it will be considered that you are trespassing and the police will be called to remove you. In addition, the Council will consider bringing legal proceedings against you.

Staff at the school have been advised of the position and will not hesitate to call the Police and contact the Council if you enter the school site again.

Yours sincerely,

Head of Pupil and Student Services