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Parent guide to school complaints

Your checklist to resolving concerns quickly, easily and positively with your school

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Working together to resolve issues

Parents and schools share the same goal: supporting children's education. Sometimes questions or concerns arise. This guide gives you clear steps to share your views and resolve issues quickly and positively.

Why this matters

We know you value clear communication and want your feedback to make a difference.

When the process feels unclear or slow, it can be frustrating and leave you feeling unsure about what to do next. By giving you simple, transparent steps for raising issues, we aim to help you feel heard and supported.

How this guide helps

Most issues can be resolved quickly when you know who to speak to and what to expect.

This guide will support you to follow your school's complaint procedure. Our goal is to keep the focus on your child's education while building positive, supportive partnerships between you and the school.

Five steps to making a school complaint

When issues come up, you need to know how to raise these with the school to get an outcome that supports you and your child.

Relationships between parents and schools last for several years. Ensuring mutual trust and respect is essential to making them work in the best interests of your child.

Let's build parent and school partnerships based on our shared commitment to a great education for all. We know these matters are incredibly important to parents, but everything is founded on good intentions.

The best way to resolve concerns is through clear, respectful communication.

1 What kind of issue is it?

Complaints come in different shapes and sizes. The best first step is to identify what kind of issue it is, to make sure you can get the quickest action with your school.

Is it feedback?
You need to be heard

Sometimes you will want to share your voice with your school without needing them to respond, but you expect them to listen and take it on board. Feedback is often sought by schools who want to hear and adapt to parents' views.

Is it a concern?
You need an answer

Sometimes you have a worry or doubt over an important issue and you are looking for reassurance. Schools should take informal concerns seriously and make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.

Is it a complaint?
You need action

Sometimes you are dissatisfied with the school's actions or lack of action. Your school will have a formal complaints procedure that is available to you (likely published on their website) with the steps you need to take to complain.

2 Who in the school do I go to?

Often issues can be best resolved by the person closest to your child. Who is best to hear your view at your school?

Discuss with their teacher/form tutor

Go to them first for anything that directly involves your child's classroom experience. Teachers know your child best and can usually sort things quickly.

Examples: homework, friendships, behaviour, day-to-day concerns.

Raise to a middle or senior leader

Take it here if the issue is wider than just one lesson, or if it can't be resolved by the teacher. Leaders have oversight across classes and can coordinate support.

Examples: bullying, additional support, repeated behaviour issues.

Escalate it with the headteacher

Go here for whole-school issues, serious concerns, or if earlier steps haven't worked. The head is responsible for the school and final decisions before governors are involved.

Examples: safeguarding, school policies, staff conduct, health and safety.

Remember - always check your school's complaint policy.

3 How do I raise my complaint?

Concerns are best resolved in discussion with your school. Complaints are best resolved when documented with your school. Follow these tips as you raise your issue.

Follow one level at a time
Start with a query aimed at resolving things quickly with those closest to your child, and only escalate if you truly need to.

Keep a record
Note when you've spoken to a teacher or leader, so you can show you have followed the right steps.

Suggest a clear outcome
Be clear on what you are looking for from the school and ensure it is realistic, so they can see if it is possible.

Start with the facts
Write down what happened, when, and who was involved. Be clear, relevant and avoid long stories.

Stay objective
Avoid accusations against individuals, direct your issue toward the processes or decisions that led to the issue.

Be positive
Make your complaint constructive, focused on solutions, and trust your school to listen.

4 When to expect a response?

Different schools have different policies for handling complaints. You can trust that they are following their policy as they look into your complaint.

Check the school's policy for timescales

Your school's complaints policy will be published on their website. Schools will normally outline how long they expect an outcome to take in that policy. Your school's policy should always be the best guidance to follow.

Ask for a written acknowledgement

If you have written a formal complaint to your school, they will usually acknowledge it quickly. Normally they will detail the timescales for investigating and responding to you and may ask for more details.

Complaint resolution times will vary

Complex complaints may take weeks of investigation. You may not always get updates, but trust that the school is following their policy, investigating and deciding the best action. You should always get a response to your complaint.

5 Where to escalate a complaint?

Once you have fully followed your school's complaint procedure, you may still feel you need action from your school and there are a few ways that may apply to you. It's best to check who it should be escalated with to get it resolved quickly: contacting several people at once could slow things down.

Is it for your school's governing body or trustees?

To be considered if you are unhappy with the school's response. Schools will normally have an escalation process that allows parents to seek a further review of their complaint by a panel which may involve governors or trustees.

Is it for the Department for Education (DfE)?

To be considered if you are unhappy with the way your complaint has been handled or the school is preventing you from following the complaints process. In some circumstances, DfE can consider if the school has followed relevant statutory guidance and education law.

Is it for Ofsted?

Ofsted do not resolve disputes between parents and schools. They may keep your complaint on file for their next inspection but don't always provide a response to parents.

How complaints go wrong

Tensions can run high when you're concerned about your child, but some approaches make matters worse.

Using social media
Sharing your complaint on social media can be harmful to those involved and will not lead to a quicker resolution.

Building a crowd
Other parents may share your views, but your complaint should be specific to you and your child.

Targeting people
Making it personal to individual school staff members can take things too far, keep it to challenging school policy.

Behaving aggressively
Abusive and aggressive behaviour will never be tolerated by a school and can lead to consequences for you.

Only use AI with caution
AI doesn't always get it right when citing laws and can make a complaint more complex than necessary.

Lacking partnership
Having a good relationship with your school is important and it benefits all to move on after complaints are resolved.

The outcome of a formal complaint is often a resolution, where parents and the school have worked together to listen and take action to support the child's education.

Where parents act unreasonably

In extreme circumstances, there can be consequences for parents where there is bullying and harassing behaviour towards the school. If parents use abusive language, are threatening or use intimidation, the school could:

Pause complaints

Typically the first step is for the school to pause the complaints process until the unacceptable behaviour stops, and the school can resume the process.

Issue a verbal or written warning

This sets clear expectations for future conduct and the school may issue a communications plan to reduce risk of confrontation.

Ban parents from school grounds

In persistent or extreme cases of abusive behaviour, a school may take action by placing a ban on parents. The ban is usually issued in writing by the headteacher, though in some cases the local authority, academy trust or governing body may write one instead. Parents will have the right to appeal.

Powering positive partnerships between families and schools

This guide has been created to further support parents. Built with wisdom, research and care by expert partners and members of the Improving Education Together board (IET), led by the Secretary of State for Education.

- Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL)
- The Catholic Education Service
- The Confederation of School Trusts (CST)
- GMB Union
- The Local Government Association (LGA)
- The National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT)
- The National Education Union (NEU)
- National Governance Association (NGA)
- The Sixth Form Colleges Association (SFCA)
- Unison
- Community Trade Union
- NASUWT
- The Department for Education
- Ofsted

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Parentkind is on a mission to enrich the educational experience for every child - both at home and at school. We empower anyone with parental or educational responsibility with the knowledge, ideas and resources to give young people the very best start in life. As one of the largest federated charities in the UK, Parentkind has a network of 23,500 Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs), parent councils and schools, and mobilises more than 100,000 volunteers to raise vital funds for schools.

www.parentkind.org

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