



Complaints Procedure

We want all pupils and their families to be happy with the education we offer and the policies and procedures we follow. Loughton Manor First School aims for all concerns raised to be dealt with promptly, openly, fairly and without prejudice. Most queries or concerns can be resolved satisfactorily through discussion or by providing clarification or further information. However, when a more serious concern is raised, the school has adopted a procedure that explains how to complain and what to expect in response.

The purpose of this procedure is to ensure, for all parties, a fair and consistent approach to dealing with complaints.

Range

A 'concern' may be defined as '*an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought*'. We welcome telephone calls or emails from anyone who wants to discuss a concern before it becomes a complaint.

A 'complaint' may be generally defined as '*an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action*'. It is expected that a complainant will have made reasonable attempts to seek an informal resolution prior to making a formal complaint.

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. Loughton Manor First 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 Headteacher will refer you to another staff member. Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels unable to deal with a concern, the Headteacher 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, Loughton Manor First School will attempt to resolve the issue internally, through the stages outlined within this complaints procedure.

Scope of this Complaints Procedure

It will be at the Headteacher's discretion to decide if an anonymous complaint warrants an investigation, but it is usually proper to disregard such complaints.

Parental/pupil complaints are only applicable to existing pupils and a complaint will cease if the child is voluntarily removed from the school roll.

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

Exceptions	Who to contact
- Admissions to schools - Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs - School re-organisation proposals	Concerns about admissions, statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs, or school re-organisation proposals should be raised with Milton Keynes Council. For admissions email primaryadmissions@milton-keynes.gov.uk For SEN email SEN@milton-keynes.gov.uk For re-organisation email schools@milton-keynes.gov.uk
Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation	Complaints about child protection matters are handled under our Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy and in accordance with relevant statutory guidance. 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). Call 01908 253169 or 253170. You can also email children@milton-keynes.gov.uk.
Exclusion of children from school*	Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at: www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions. <i>*complaints about the application of the behaviour policy (Relationships Policy) can be made through the school's complaints procedure.</i>
Whistleblowing	We have an internal whistleblowing procedure for all our employees, including temporary staff and contractors.

	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 directly with their employer. Referrals can be made at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus. Volunteer staff who have concerns about our school should complain through the school's complaints procedure. You may also be able to complain directly to the LA or the Department for Education (see link above), depending on the substance of your complaint.
• Staff grievances	Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the school's internal grievance procedures.
• Staff conduct	Complaints about staff will be dealt with under the school's internal disciplinary procedures, if appropriate. Complainants will not be informed of any disciplinary action taken against a staff member as a result of a complaint. However, the complainant will be notified that the matter is being addressed.
• Complaints about services provided by other providers who may use school premises or facilities	Providers should have their own complaints procedure to deal with complaints about service. Please contact them directly.
• National Curriculum - content	Please contact the Department for Education at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus
• Subject Access Requests	Please see the school's Data Protection Policy and Privacy Notices https://www.loughtonmanorschool.co.uk/gdpr

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 Loughton Manor First 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.

How to raise a concern or make a complaint

Concerns should be raised with either the class teacher or headteacher. They can be made in person, in writing, or by telephone. They may also be made by a third party acting on behalf of a complainant, as long as they have appropriate consent to do so. If the issue remains unresolved, 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 2 of the procedure.

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

Complaints that involve or are about the headteacher 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 Administrator to the Governing Body via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Complaints should be made in writing and a template complaint form is included at the end of this procedure that you must use to make a complaint. Using this form will help the school to understand the complaint and how you would like it resolved. If you require help in completing the form, please contact the school office. You can also ask third party organisations like the 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.

Time scales

We ask that complaints are raised as soon as possible, and this must be 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 only 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.

Resolving complaints

At each stage in the procedure, Loughton Manor First 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
- an apology.

Withdrawal of a Complaint

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

Stage 1 Complaints

Formal complaints must be made to the headteacher (unless they are about the headteacher – see page 2), via the school office. This should be done in writing using the attached Complaint Form.

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

Within this acknowledgement, the headteacher will summarise the nature of the complaint, ask what remains unresolved, and what outcome the complainant would like to see, if this is not clear in the form. The headteacher can consider whether a face to face meeting or a telephone call is the most appropriate way of doing this.

The headteacher will investigate the complaint.

Note: The headteacher may delegate the investigation to another member of the school's leadership team but not the decision to be taken. During the investigation, the headteacher (or investigator) will:

- if necessary, interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish
- if necessary, seek further information from the complainant and/or other advisers
- keep a written record of any meetings/interviews in relation to their investigation.
- If the complaint concerns a member of the school leadership team, consult a member of the governing board about the investigation

At the conclusion of their investigation, the headteacher will provide a formal written response within 30 school days of the date of receipt of the complaint.

If the headteacher 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 Loughton Manor First School will take to resolve the complaint.

The headteacher will advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 1.

If the complaint is about the headteacher, or a member of the governing body (including the Chair or Vice-Chair), a suitably skilled governor will be appointed to complete all the actions at Stage 1.

Complaints about the headteacher must be made to the Chair of Governors via the school office. Complaints about a member of the governing body should be sent to the administrator to the governing board via the school office.

If the complaint is:

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

Stage 1 will be considered by an independent investigator appointed by the governing body. At the conclusion of their investigation, the independent investigator will provide a formal written response.

Stage 2 Complaints

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome at Stage 1 and wishes to take the matter further, they can escalate the complaint to Stage 2 –where the complaint will be investigated by the governing body's complaints committee, which will be formed of the first three, impartial, governors available. This is the final stage of the complaints procedure.

A request to escalate a complaint to Stage 2 must be made to the Administrator to the Governing Board, via the school office, within 20 school days of receipt of the Stage 1 response, using the complaint template form..

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

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

The complaints committee will consist of at least three governors with no prior involvement or knowledge of the complaint and they will decide amongst themselves who will act as the Chair of the Complaints Committee. If there are fewer than three governors or associate members from Loughton Manor First School available, the Administrator 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 2.

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.

The Administrator will write to all parties to inform them how the committee intends to investigate the complaint. If meetings with the complainant and/or other parties are to take place, they will aim to convene these meetings within 25 school days of receipt of the Stage 2 request. If this is not possible, the Administrator will provide an anticipated date and keep the parties informed.

The Administrator will write to the complainant with a proposed date for the meeting. If the complainant is unable to attend the meeting, they must inform the Administrator within three days of

receipt so that a further date can be offered. If the complainant turns down an offered date three times, the Administrator 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.

If the complainant or another party is invited to attend a 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 5 school days before the meeting, the Administrator will:

- confirm and notify the complainant, or any other parties invited to the meeting, 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
- request copies of any further written material to be submitted to the committee at least 3 school days before the meeting.

Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least 2 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.

If the committee has decided to consider the complaint through written representation only, the members will meet within 25 school days of receipt of the Stage 2 complaint.

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

- uphold the complaint in whole or in part
- 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
- 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 Loughton Manor First School with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within 5 school days of their final meeting in respect of the complaint.

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 the 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 2 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 Loughton Manor First School will take to resolve the complaint.

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

Escalating a Complaint to the Department for Education

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 2.

The Department for Education will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by Loughton Manor First School. They will consider whether the 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, by telephone on: 0370 000 2288 or by writing to:

Department for Education
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

Unreasonable Complaints

Loughton Manor First School is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, and to providing a high quality service to those who complain. We will not normally limit the contact complainants have with our school.

However, if a complaint is made that raises an issue that has already been dealt with via the school's complaints procedure, and that procedure has been exhausted, the school will not re-

investigate the complaint unless there are exceptional circumstances, for example where new evidence has come to light.

If a complainant persists in raising the same issue, the headteacher will write to them explaining that the matter has been dealt with fully in line with the school complaints procedure, and therefore the case is now closed. The complainant will be provided with the contact details of the Department for Education (see the end of this document) if they wish to take the issue further.

Unreasonable complaints include the following scenarios:

- the complainant refuses to co-operate with the school's relevant procedures
- the complainant changes the basis of the complaint as the complaint progresses
- the complainant seeks an unrealistic outcome
- excessive demands are made on the time of staff and school governors and it is clearly intended to aggravate
- the complainant acts in a way that is abusive or offensive.

The headteacher will use their discretion to choose not to investigate these complaints. If they decide to take this course of action, the Chair of Governors must be informed, explaining the nature of the complaint and why they have chosen not to investigate. If the Chair deems it appropriate to, they can redirect the headteacher to investigate the complaint. The full complaints procedure will then commence from stage one on this direction.

If the Chair upholds the headteacher's decision not to look into the complaint, and the complainant deems this decision to be so unreasonable that no other rational body in the same position would have made that decision, then the complainant may write to the Department for Education (details above).

Complaint Form

For a Stage 1 Complaint please complete and return to the Headteacher, Loughton Manor First School. Please mark your envelope 'Private and Confidential'.

For a Stage 2 Complaint please complete and return to the Administrator to the Governing Board c/o/ LMFS office.

Your name:
Pupil's name (if relevant):

Your relationship to the pupil (if relevant):
Address:
Postcode:
Day time telephone number:
Evening telephone number:
Please give details of your complaint, including whether you have spoken to anybody at the school about it

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

Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details.

Signature:

Date:

Official use

Date acknowledgement sent:

By who:

Complaint referred to:

Date:

The following Section is taken from the DfE's Model Complaints Procedure

Roles and Responsibilities

Complainant

The complainant will receive a more effective response to the complaint if they:

- explain the complaint in full as early as possible
- co-operate with the school in seeking a solution to the complaint
- respond promptly to requests for information or meetings or in agreeing the details of the complaint
- ask for assistance as needed
- treat all those involved in the complaint with respect
- refrain from publicising the details of their complaint on social media and respect confidentiality.

Investigator

The investigator's role is to establish the facts relevant to the complaint by:

- providing a comprehensive, open, transparent and fair consideration of the complaint through:
 - sensitive and thorough interviewing of the complainant to establish what has happened and who has been involved
 - interviewing staff and children/young people and other people relevant to the complaint
 - consideration of records and other relevant information
 - analysing information
- liaising with the complainant and the complaints co-ordinator as appropriate to clarify what the complainant feels would put things right.

The investigator should:

- conduct interviews with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning
- keep notes of interviews or arrange for an independent note taker to record minutes of the meeting
- ensure that any papers produced during the investigation are kept securely pending any appeal
- be mindful of the timescales to respond
- prepare a comprehensive report for the headteacher or complaints committee that sets out the facts, identifies solutions and recommends courses of action to resolve problems.

The headteacher or complaints committee will then determine whether to uphold or dismiss the complaint and communicate that decision to the complainant, providing the appropriate escalation details.

Complaints Co-ordinator (this could be the headteacher / designated complaints governor or other staff member providing administrative support)

The complaints co-ordinator should:

- ensure that the complainant is fully updated at each stage of the procedure
- liaise with staff members, headteacher, Chair of Governors, Administrator and LAs (if appropriate) to ensure the smooth running of the complaints procedure
- be aware of issues regarding:
 - sharing third party information
 - additional support. This may be needed by complainants when making a complaint including interpretation support or where the complainant is a child or young person
- keep records.

Administrator to the Governing Body (or appointed Clerk)

The Administrator is the contact point for the complainant and the committee and should:

- ensure that all people involved in the complaint procedure are aware of their legal rights and duties, including any under legislation relating to school complaints, education law, the Equality Act 2010, the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act (DPA) 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)
- set the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that the dates are convenient to all parties (if they are invited to attend) and that the venue and proceedings are accessible
- collate any written material relevant to the complaint (for example; stage 1 paperwork, school and complainant submissions) and send it to the parties in advance of the meeting within an agreed timescale
- record the proceedings
- circulate the minutes of the meeting
- notify all parties of the committee's decision.

Committee Chair

The committee's chair, who is nominated in advance of the complaint meeting, should ensure that: both parties are asked (via the Administrator) to provide any additional information relating to the complaint by a specified date in advance of the meeting

- the meeting is conducted in an informal manner, is not adversarial, and that, if all parties are invited to attend, everyone is treated with respect and courtesy
- complainants who may not be used to speaking at such a meeting are put at ease. This is particularly important if the complainant is a child/young person
- the remit of the committee is explained to the complainant
- written material is seen by everyone in attendance, provided it does not breach confidentiality

or any individual's rights to privacy under the DPA 2018 or GDPR.

If a new issue arises it would be useful to give everyone the opportunity to consider and comment upon it; this may require a short adjournment of the meeting

- both the complainant and the school are given the opportunity to make their case and seek clarity, either through written submissions ahead of the meeting or verbally in the meeting itself
- the issues are addressed
- key findings of fact are made
- the committee is open-minded and acts independently
- no member of the committee has an external interest in the outcome of the proceedings or any involvement in an earlier stage of the procedure
- the meeting is minuted
- they liaise with the Administrator

Committee Member

Committee members should be aware that:

- the meeting must be independent and impartial, and should be seen to be so

No governor may sit on the committee if they have had a prior involvement in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it.

- the aim of the meeting should be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant

We recognise that the complainant might not be satisfied with the outcome if the meeting does not find in their favour. It may only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations.

- many complainants will feel nervous and inhibited in a formal setting

Parents/carers often feel emotional when discussing an issue that affects their child.

- extra care needs to be taken when the complainant is a child/young person and present during all or part of the meeting

Careful consideration of the atmosphere and proceedings should ensure that the child/young person does not feel intimidated.

The committee should respect the views of the child/young person and give them equal consideration to those of adults.

If the child/young person is the complainant, the committee should ask in advance if any support is needed to help them present their complaint. Where the child/young person's parent is the complainant, the committee should give the parent the opportunity to say which parts of the meeting, if any, the child/young person needs to attend.

However, the parent should be advised that agreement might not always be possible if the parent wishes the child/young person to attend a part of the meeting that the committee considers is not in the child/young person's best interests.

- the welfare of the child/young person is paramount.