



## Complaints Policy

18 March 2018

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-	13/05/09	S Coleman	In Approval	Original Document
1.0	24/06/11	J Priest	Approved	Updated Document
2.0	6/2/13	A Peet	Approved	Revised policy to provide a more structured and detailed format for every eventuality, as well as take into account changes in process within county.
3.0	18/03/15	J Jennings	Approved	Policy renewed. No changes.
3.0	12/03/18	J Liddiard	Approved	No changes. Renewal only.

Last Reviewed By: Resources

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Expiry Date: March 2021

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## Complaints Policy

Buryfields Infant School is committed to encouraging the involvement of parents in the community of the school and in their children's education. One aspect of this commitment is the recognition that, from time to time, things may occur which cause parents concern. The vast majority of these concerns are dealt with immediately, satisfactorily and at an informal stage.

However, it is not always possible to predict how a minor concern can escalate into a major, stressful and time-consuming complaint. This policy document aims to ensure that all parties are aware of, and have confidence in, a clear process and channel of communication, and that it is important that parents or children know what steps to take to ensure that any problems are resolved.

### Types of Complaint/Issue

**This Complaints Policy, and following Procedure, covers the following types of issue:**

- Bullying.
- Special needs issues (provision).
- An incident in school.
- Pupil's progress/welfare.
- Action/decision of the Headteacher.
- Pupil/Staff/Governor behaviour.
- School policies, budget management, use of school facilities.

**This Complaints Policy and following Procedure does not cover the following type of complaints:**

- The Local Authority's decisions on special education needs assessments and school placements
- School admissions and transfers
- Exclusions
- Staff grievance
- Staff disciplinary issues
- Financial impropriety or other criminal activity
- Alleged child abuse
- Extended services, such as educational welfare, educational psychology, behaviour support, youth services.

### Framework of Principles

The Buryfields Infant School Complaints Procedure will:

- Encourage resolution of problems by **informal** means wherever possible;

- Be easily **accessible** and **publicised**;
- Be **simple** to understand and use;
- Be **impartial**;
- Be **non-adversarial**;
- Allow **swift** handling with established **time-limits** for action and keeping relevant people informed of the process;
- Ensure a **full** and **fair** investigation by an independent person where necessary;
- Respect people's desire for **confidentiality**;
- Address all points at issue and provide an **effective** response and **appropriate** redress where necessary;
- Provide **information** to the school's senior management team so that services can be improved.

### Purpose of this document

The School has a policy of encouraging parents and pupils to express their concerns on what goes on within the school, so that all staff receive an early warning of potential difficulties. The vast majority of these concerns are dealt with immediately, satisfactorily and at an informal stage.

However, should a concern escalate into a complaint, this policy aims to clarify governors' powers when responding to general complaints. This Policy document and the associated Complaints Procedures aims to:

- \* Resolve concerns through informal discussions at the earliest stage
- \* Efficient, with well-defined timescales and named contacts
- \* Focus on resolution and service review rather than blame
- \* Be accessible to people with disabilities, special needs or language barriers
- \* Promote confidentiality and discretion
- \* Include fair and transparent investigative processes for staff as well as complainants
- \* Be forthright in dealing with vexatious, abusive, malicious and anonymous complainants.

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## General Principles

### Publicity

Parents should always know how they could raise concerns or lodge a formal complaint. The complaints procedures should be easily accessible and well publicised.

A summary of how the school deals with complaints should be included in the information that is given to new parents when their children join the school. Existing parents should be reminded of the system at regular intervals.

If a parent contacts the Department for Education with their concerns when the school's internal complaints procedure has not been fully exhausted, they will be referred back to the school.

### Efficiency and Consistency

Each stage of the procedure will have publicised time limits. Where it is not possible to meet these, information about progress will be given to the complainant.

### Support for Complainant

Further information on raising a complaint can be offered from individuals and organisations who are clearly separate from those complained against, such as Parents Advice Centres, Citizens Advice Bureaux, Community Relations Councils, and other local advice centres, as well as the DfE website at <http://www.education.gov.uk>.

Parents raising concerns or complaints will be invited to be accompanied by a friend, a relative or a representative at all stages of the procedure, if they so desire.

### Support for the Plaintiff

Staff who may be questioned as part of a complaints procedure investigation must feel they are being treated in a fair way and that they too are given the opportunity to put their case.

Staff involved in a complaint procedure will be informed about the procedure at the earliest opportunity and kept up to date with progress. A balance must be maintained between supporting the individual so that his/her rights and reputation are protected and investigating a complaint thoroughly and impartially.

The complaints procedure is distinct from formal disciplinary proceedings for staff. There may be occasions where a complaint launches a disciplinary procedure that puts the complaints procedure on hold. If so, the complainant should be informed of this and any non-disciplinary aspects of the complaint should be dealt with by the usual complaints procedures; the complainant will then be updated every three weeks on any likely further delay.

It may be clear after the disciplinary procedures have been completed, that particular responses to the complainant are required, e.g. an apology or an explanation of new policies to avoid a similar problem again.

### Confidentiality

All conversations and resultant correspondence with respect to a concern will be treated with discretion at all times. It is vitally important that parents feel confident that their complaint will not penalise their child. However, from the outset all parties involved in a complaint will need to be made aware that some information may have to be shared with others involved in the operation of the complaints procedure.

Anonymous complaints will be disregarded unless somebody is prepared to substantiate them, although it is recognised that it may relate to something quite serious. If the foreseen eventuality occurs, to the detriment of the school, the complainant may surface subsequently and say that s/he alerted the school, even though the complaint was unsigned. Therefore, in the case of

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anonymous complaints, it lies with the Headteacher's and/or Governing Body's discretion whether the gravity of an anonymous complaint warrants an investigation.

### Redress

If the outcome of the complaint procedure shows the school was at fault, it is sufficient for the school to provide redress in the form of an acknowledgement that the complaint was valid.

If it is deemed appropriate, further information may be offered in the form of a written apology, explanation and resulting actions to prevent re occurrence. In line with the ethos of the school, fear of litigation will not prevent the school from admitting to parents that mistakes have been made, but the school will seek further advice from the LEA if litigation is considered possible.

### Staff Awareness and Training

Governors and School staff, including non-teaching staff, will be made familiar with the complaints procedure so that they can advise parents about the process. Confidence in handling complaints, especially at the informal level, depends on all members of the Governing Body and school staff having clear information about the procedures and reassurances that senior staff are committed to the procedure. This should be carried out through basic training in practical interpersonal skills in dealing with people who may be upset or angry. Guidance on how to listen to complaints is at Annex A.

Finally, all staff should be provided with clear information about which staff have which responsibilities at school so that parents do not get continually passed from one to another.

### Record Keeping

If complaints are to contribute to raising the quality of education, then they will be recorded and monitored each term by senior staff and governors.

Recording will begin at the point when a concern or initial complaint has become the kind of complaint that cannot be resolved on the spot and requires additional investigation and/or consultation with others in the school, resulting in either a verbal or written report to the parent.

Recording at the earliest stages will only be a basic record of the complaint, giving date, name of parent and a general summary of the complaint. An example of the complaints book into which all complaints must be recorded is at Annex B.

### Vexatious Complaints

Complaints become vexatious when they are:

- \* Repeatedly and obsessively pursued; or
- \* Unreasonable or seeking unrealistic outcomes; or
- \* Reasonable but pursued in an unreasonable manner.

Under these circumstances the Headteacher and/or Governing Body should be informed, whereby, a decision will be taken to either direct all future correspondence and dealings to a named individual and/or restrict to only one form of communication, e.g. letter only.

If a conclusion has been reached about a complaint, but the complainant continues to pursue it, the school will either:

- \* Reiterate that the matter has been concluded and that there will be no further correspondence with regard to the complaint.
- \* Inform the complainant that, if correspondence continues, it will be recorded/read and filed with no acknowledgement forthcoming.

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- \* Provide a short response referring to the previous documents that have already dealt with the matter.

### Abusive Complaints

Verbal aggression can be as intimidating as physical aggression, both of which the school will not tolerate. All parties have a right to be treated courteously and with respect at all times. If a member of staff feels threatened, they should report their fears to the Headteacher or Chair of the Governing Body immediately, whereby one of the following actions will be taken:

- \* A formal letter to the complainant requesting that the behaviour cease.
- \* Setting restrictions, in writing, for any further contact with staff.
- \* Report the incident to the Police.

If a telephone call becomes aggressive or offensive, the person taking the call should explain that they will end the call if the behaviour persists. If they need to hang up, they should record the action and any further incidents.

Repeated abusive behaviour or aggressive contact will be considered as harassment and reported to the Police.

### **Annex A – Guidance for staff on How to Listen to Complaints**

*As soon as you realise that you are listening to a complaint, remember these points:*

#### **Don't pass the buck**

Try not to keep transferring an angry person from one place to another. Make sure you know the contact person for anything you cannot deal with yourself.

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<b>Don't be flippant</b>	First impressions count. You and the school may be judged on your immediate reaction.
<b>Treat all complaints seriously</b>	However small or trivial it may seem to you, the complaint will be an important problem for anyone who takes the trouble to complain.
<b>Treat every complaint individually</b>	Even if you have already received several similar complaints the same day, it is probably the person's first chance to have their say.
<b>Be courteous and patient</b>	Be sympathetic and helpful, but do not blame other colleagues.
<b>Say who you are</b>	If you are unknown to the person, introduce yourself.
<b>Ask for their name and use it</b>	Anonymous complaints are acceptable only where there are special circumstances.
<b>Take time to find out exactly what the problem is</b>	It is easy for someone to forget to tell you an important detail, particularly if they are upset or annoyed.
<b>Don't take the complaint personally</b>	To an angry or upset person, YOU are the school, and the only one they can put their feelings to right now.
<b>Stay cool and calm</b>	Do not argue with the person. Be polite and try to find out exactly what the person thinks is going wrong, or has gone wrong.
<b>Check you are being understood</b>	Make sure that the person understands what you are saying. Don't use jargon- it can cause confusion and annoyance to someone "not in the know".
<b>Don't rush</b>	Take your time. Let people have their say, and let off steam if they need to. Listen carefully and sympathetically to their problems before replying and attempting to find a solution or offer a next step.

**Appendix B – Complaints Book**

Buryfield Complaints Book s Infant School							P a g e 1
Ref. No.	D a t e	Name	Address	Teleph one	Summary of complaint	Referred to	Date Resolved