

General Guidance on making a Complaint

What to do when you have a complaint about a Ceredigion school

Most parents have a positive relationship with schools but sometimes things may go wrong. All complaints should be taken seriously and schools will have procedures in place for dealing with them. You can ask the school for a copy of their complaints procedure so that you know exactly how they will handle matters. School governors have a responsibility under the Section 29 of the Education Act 2002 to deal with all complaints about the school. If you need any help in understanding this leaflet, contact your child's school or the Education and Community Services Department. (There are more details at the end of this leaflet.)

Where do I begin?

Whether you are a parent or a member of the public the place to start is the school. It is much better if matters can be sorted out within school. There is usually more than one side to any dispute or misunderstanding and it is important that any misunderstandings are resolved and all the facts are known so that the best solution can be found. In the first instance therefore please contact the school. In a primary this may be your child's class teacher or the headteacher. In a secondary school you may be advised to contact the form tutor, head of year or complaints officer.

What do I need to do?

Think about the nature of your complaint. If there has been a specific incident, gather the facts and try to separate what may have happened from what actually happened. You might want to write down the details. In particular, be clear about:

- what it is you are complaining about;
- when and where the incident happened;
- who else was involved;
- whether anyone saw it happen;
- who you have spoken to already; and
- what you want to happen as a result of your complaint.

Alternatively you may want to raise concerns of a more general nature.

The school will look into the issues you have raised and respond once they have established what has happened.

It is important that you raise your concerns as soon as you can. By taking positive steps early on, the school is more likely to be able to sort out your complaint.

What if my complaint is about the headteacher?

If the complaint is about the headteacher you should contact the chair of governors of the school.

The school or the Education and Community Services Department will give you the name of the chair of governors and tell you how you can contact

him or her. The chair or a nominated person will investigate your concerns and respond directly to you.

What if my complaint is about the governing body or an individual governor?

If the complaint is about a governor, please contact the Chairman of the Governing Body first of all. The Chairman will arrange for an investigation of your concerns.

If the complaint is about the Chairman of the Governing Body, the Vice Chairman should be contacted who will arrange for an investigation of your concerns

The school or the Education and Community Services Department will give you the name of the chair or vice chair of the governing body and tell you how you can contact them. The chair or a nominated person will investigate your concerns

If you have a complaint about the governing body as a whole, please contact the Education and Community Services Department.

What can I expect to happen?

Your complaint will be fully considered. Complaints need to be investigated and the headteacher or chair of governors will need some time to do this. A reasonable amount of time for investigating most complaints is 20 school days. You should be told if it will take longer than this.

If the school agrees that your complaint is justified, they should tell you what action will be taken. In some cases, disciplinary action may be taken against a member of staff. This is a decision for the governing body, not the Local Education Authority (LEA). There is an entirely separate procedure for schools to follow in dealing with staff disciplinary matters.

If the school does not support your complaint, they should tell you the reasons for this decision, and you can ask for these in writing.

What if I am not satisfied with the way in which the school has dealt with my complaint?

If the headteacher, chair of governors or the investigating person have not been able to resolve your complaint to your satisfaction, you can request that your complaint to be considered by the Governing Body Complaints Committee. If you are still not satisfied, you can contact the Director of Education and Community Services or the Welsh Assembly Government (You will find the addresses at the end of this leaflet.)

What if my complaint is about a voluntary-aided school?

In voluntary-aided schools, religious education is directed by the school governors in line with each school's trust deed and instrument of government. These schools are linked to a particular church, foundation, for example Church of Wales or Catholic.

Your complaint will generally be handled in the same way as above. However, if the governing body is not able to resolve your complaint to your satisfaction, it will refer it to the diocesan (church) board for education. You can get the address of the diocesan board from the school. If you are not satisfied with the way the diocesan board handles your complaint, you should then contact the LEA.

How long will it take?

Complaints should be handled quickly and most issues should be resolved in a few days. The school should complete most investigations within 20 school days but if a complaint moves through all the above stages, it may take several months to resolve.

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