

# **BAR HILL PRIMARY SCHOOL**

## **GENERAL COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE**

November 2004

### **1. Introduction**

Our school is committed to developing a strong sense of partnership with parents/carers and other members of the local community. This provides a good basis for understanding and resolution when things go wrong.

This policy describes the procedure to be followed when complaints are made by parents/carers and others about the conduct of the school or the actions of any member of staff.

The procedure excludes complaints relating to the school's delivery of the National Curriculum. The procedure for curriculum complaints is summarised in the leaflet 'Complaints about the School Curriculum', which has been written specifically for governors and parents/carers. Copies of this are available to parents/carers and governors from the school or the Education, Libraries and Heritage Department.

### **2. What constitutes a complaint in our procedure?**

We accept the Local Government Ombudsman's definition of a complaint, which when applied to a school, covers the following areas:

"A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions, or lack of actions, by a school or its staff affecting an individual or a group."

Members of the public, parents/carers and pupils/students may legitimately express dissatisfaction about aspects of our work.

The consideration of a complaint will include all relevant statutory requirements, LEA advice and accepted good practice, together with the reasonableness of the actions or omissions giving rise to the complaint having regard to all the circumstances or the case.

### **3. Why have we adopted a general complaints procedure?**

We hope that the adoption of a clear complaints procedure will help to ensure that most complaints are resolved quickly and smoothly and as close to the source of the misunderstanding or problem as possible. In this way complainants can feel assured from the outset of a fair hearing, in line with a defined procedure for dealing with issues that have not immediately been resolved. We hope, also, that a staged framework might prevent an early and unnecessary escalation of the problem. In addition, we will ensure that lessons learned from the investigation of complaints will prove useful to improve the school's policy and practice.

### **4. The policy's guiding principles**

The guiding principles behind our complaints procedure include:

Simplicity	-	simple, well publicised stages;
Access complain	-	complainants knowing exactly where, how and to whom they should
Speed and clarity within	-	complainants being dealt with promptly, effectively and professionally stated time limits and at as early a stage as possible;
Action	-	action being agreed and reviewed, with complainants kept informed of

Objectivity	-	progress throughout each stage of the procedure; beyond the first informal stage of investigation of a complaint against an individual, the subject of the complaint will not deal with it but will instead refer it to his or her manager or Chair of governors where appropriate;
Development	-	opportunities for the school to consider changes to current practice on the basis of what complainants are saying.

## 5. Procedure for handling complaints.

### Response standards

We believe that most complaints can be resolved satisfactorily by informal discussion either over the telephone or through a meeting involving the key people involved.

We will acknowledge complaints within 5 working days and give a full response to complainants within 2 weeks. If the complaint is judged to involve complex issues, complainants will be informed within 2 weeks when they can expect a full response. Complainants will be kept informed of progress if a lengthy investigation is involved. The main aim throughout the process is to resolve the matter as quickly and effectively as possible, to everybody's satisfaction.

### Stage One: Informal complaints

- Parents/carers and other should raise informal complaints or concerns with the child's class teacher. Parents will be encouraged to make prior appointments to discuss any issues that are not of a routine nature. Criticisms of the professional conduct or competence of a member of staff which may be brought to a teacher's attention will be referred to the headteacher.
- If a parent believes that a complaint or concern is sufficiently serious or sensitive s/he should talk to the deputy head or the headteacher, who will investigate or arrange for the complaint to be investigated, and then report back in writing or, more usually at this informal stage, through a discussion with the complainant.
- Although parents are encouraged to raise their concerns/complaints with school staff we recognise that parents may, on occasion, bring their complaint to the attention of the LEA, by telephoning, or writing to the Director of Education, Libraries and Heritage or the local Education Officer. In such cases, school staff will work with the Education Officer in order to resolve the problem through explanation and /or contact/discussion with the parents and the school.
- Every effort will be made to resolve the problem at this informal stage. Complainants who remain dissatisfied at this stage will be informed that they have the opportunity to make a formal complaint.
- In some cases, matters affecting general school policy may be judged by the headteacher, in consultation with the Chair of Governors, to be an appropriate area for discussion at governing body level, in order to resolve the complaint. In these circumstances care will be taken to ensure that the identity of the complainant and the individual complained of are not disclosed in case further, more formal procedures are involved at a later stage.

### Stage Two: Formal complaints

- Formal complaints should be made in writing and will normally be investigated by the headteacher in the first instance. Parents may either use the form at the back of the leaflet - 'Do you have a complaint or a suggestion', (see appendix 1) or write directly to the headteacher. If the complaint directly concerns the headteacher, however, complainants should contact the Chair of Governors, who will consult the Education Officer (Schools).
- Any other governors in receipt of complaints will refer them to the headteacher or the Chair of Governors, as appropriate, and must not become further involved themselves.
- If the complainant is dissatisfied with the headteacher's response, they should contact the Chair of

Governors, or the Education Officer (Schools) who will consult with each other over how the complaint should be further pursued.

- The Chair of Governors will determine a method of further investigation and of formal response to the complainant. The Education Officer (Schools) will be available to advise the Chair of Governors over the investigation and response.
- If written complaints are received by the LEA, the Education Officer (Schools) will investigate the complaint in consultation with the headteacher and/or Chair of Governors. In circumstances when the local Education Officer has been extensively involved at an earlier stage, the Director of Education, Libraries and Heritage will be asked to arrange for an Education Officer from another area to advise the Chair of Governors.
- The complainant will receive a written response to his/her complaint. A meeting may also be arranged to convey the response to the complaint.
- In some cases, a complaint may lead to disciplinary action against an individual, for which there are separate procedures. If this is the case the complainant will be informed that the complaint will be pursued through disciplinary action. Under the Governing Body's disciplinary procedures, the outcome of these procedures is confidential.

### **Stage Three: Appeal**

- If the complainant remains dissatisfied after Stage Two investigations, complainants may appeal to the Grievance Panel / Hearings Committee of the Governing Body for a final resolution of their complaint.
- Under this complaints procedure there is no procedure for further appeal beyond a consideration by the Grievance Panel / Hearings Committee.

This policy is due for review: **November 2006**