COMPLAINTS POLICY AND PROCEDURE

At Bond Primary School we are committed to working in partnership with parents and carers to create confident lifelong learners. We are a vibrant community and a welcoming school where everyone matters and where everyone takes responsibility for their learning and their actions. Our complaints policy contributes to the partnership that we seek to forge with our parents.

Head teachers and governing bodies are responsible for the management and day to day running of their schools. Merton, as a council, has adopted a complaints procedure which gives the opportunity for the complaint to be dealt with by the school.

At Bond, there are a number of stages to our complaints policy and it is hoped that complaints can be dealt with at the first informal stage. We expect that each stage will be addressed before progressing to the next. We do welcome and appreciate views and feedback from parents and carers. If the feedback is critical, we take parental concerns seriously and take steps to address the issues which have been raised.

COMPLAINTS POLICY AND PROCEDURES

General Principles

1. An effective complaints procedure should be accessible and simple to understand.
2. Complaints should be dealt with confidentially.
3. Wherever possible, a complaint should be resolved informally. This procedure is designed to support this aim.
4. Informal concerns registered should be taken seriously where possible, to prevent them escalating into formal complaints. In the first instance if the complaint is in relation to a learning matter, this should be dealt with by the Class Teacher. If this is not appropriate then it should be dealt with by the Phase Leader. Should this not resolve the concern then the matter will be investigated by the Head Teacher.
5. All stages of the complaints procedure should be investigatory rather than adversarial.
6. An anonymous complaint will not be investigated under this procedure unless there are exceptional circumstances. These would include serious concerns such as child protection issues or allegations of bullying, where the school would involve the appropriate external agencies or else conduct its own internal review to test whether there is any evidence which might trigger a formal investigation.
7. Vexatious complaints: It is advisable that, prior to deciding that a complainant is vexatious, the Head Teacher should discuss the matter with the Chair of Governors. Furthermore, care should be taken to ensure that all complaints made by such a complainant are carefully considered, as any new issues that arise should be addressed via the school’s procedure.
8. Any Governors involved in dealing with complaints should receive training for that role.
9. Schools should be aware that if the complainant feels that the school is acting unreasonably, they may progress the complaint to the Secretary of State for Education.
10. The school should recognise that it is important that any potential complainant is aware of the correct channel through which to pursue their complaint. Therefore it is essential that the school publicises their complaints procedure, and ensures that it is readily available to complainants.
11. This procedure deliberately excludes a “Governor Panel” or “hearing” stage where all parties are questioned at the same time. This is in accordance with guidance by the Department for Education that complaint investigation should not be adversarial.

12. Schools should give an indication of the timescales involved in dealing with complaints. It is recommended that each stage of the complaint is dealt with within fifteen school days wherever possible. If this is not possible, then the complainant should be fully briefed on when they will receive a response.

13. Schools will keep a record of the complaint and have procedures for monitoring complaints.

14. Although the procedure states that complainants should put their case in writing if possible, schools should be sensitive to the needs of all individuals, and accept verbal complaints where appropriate.

15. Most complaints made about schools relate to actions or decisions made by members of staff, and this procedure is designed to deal with these. It is intended that any other complaints, such as those about school policy, should be dealt with under part b) of the procedure.

School Complaints Procedure (see page 5 for table)

a) Complaints about the actions of a member of staff other than the Head Teacher

Informal Stage: The complainant should communicate directly with the member of staff concerned, either by letter, by telephone or in person by appointment.

Formal Stage: If the complaint is not resolved at the informal stage, the complainant must put the complaint in writing (if possible) and pass it to the Head Teacher who will be responsible for its investigation. The complainant should include details which might assist the investigation, such as names, dates and times of events and copies of relevant documents. The Head Teacher will conduct the investigation and inform the complainant of the outcome, which may be one of the following:

- There is insufficient evidence to reach a conclusion so the complaint cannot be upheld;
- The concern is not substantiated by the evidence;
- The concern was substantiated in part or in full (some details may then be given of an action the School may be taking to review procedures, but details of any disciplinary procedures will not be released);
- The matter has been fully investigated and that appropriate procedures are being followed, which are strictly confidential (e.g. where staff disciplinary procedures are being followed).

b) Complaints about the actions of the Head Teacher or school policy

Informal Stage: The complainant should arrange to speak directly with the Head Teacher.

If the matter is not resolved, if both parties agree, then a third party (e.g. the Deputy Head Teacher) could be invited to act as mediator at a further meeting.

Formal Stage: If not resolved at the informal stage, the complaint should be put in writing (if possible) and passed to the Chair of Governors who will investigate the complaint.

The complainant should include all relevant details to assist the investigation. In addition, the complainant could be invited to meet the Chair to present oral information or clarify the complaint, or this could be given by telephone.

Also, if necessary the Chair should interview witnesses and collect any further information. The Head Teacher should be provided with a copy of the complaint and any additional evidence provided. Once
s/he has received this information, s/he will be invited to discuss the complaint with the Chair.

Once the investigation has been carried out, all parties will be notified of the outcome in writing. The complainant will not be informed of any disciplinary action.

If the complainant is not satisfied with the manner in which the process has been followed, or considers that the action of the Chair is perverse, or that the Chair has acted unreasonably, then s/he should request that the Governing Body review the Chair’s handling of the complaint. Any such request should be made in writing (if possible) within two weeks or receiving notice of the outcome from the Chair, and include a statement detailing perceived failures.

c) Review process

The review should be conducted by a panel of three members of the Governing Body. It will normally be a paper review, but reasonable requests for oral representation should be considered. No member of the panel should have had any previous involvement in consideration of the complaint.

The panel will first receive written evidence from the complainant.

The panel will invite the Head Teacher and/or Chair of Governors to respond in writing to the evidence.

The panel may also access the records of the entire complaint.

All parties will be notified in writing of the outcome. This may be to the effect that:

- There is insufficient evidence to reach a conclusion so the complaint cannot be upheld;
- The concern is not substantiated by the evidence;
- The concern was substantiated in part or in full, but the procedural failure did not affect the outcome significantly, so the matter is now closed;
- The concern was substantiated in part or in full, and Governors will take steps to prevent a recurrence or to rectify the situation.

Further Action

Merton Council no longer deals with complaints relating to schools.

If the complainant has already followed the school’s own complaints procedure or if there are reasons why they cannot use that procedure - for example, they feel their complaint has not been or will not be given a fair consideration due to a conflict of interest - they can forward the complaint to the Department for Education, using the online school complaints form.

For comprehensive guidance (updated 22 October 2015) on making a complaint to the Department for Education visit: https://www.gov.uk/complain-about-school where there is a link to the online school complaints form.