

*"I have
something to
say to the
school"*



**ADVICE_{to}
PARENTS**

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Introduction

Often parents and other members of the public would like school to know their views. Sometimes there are meetings when this is possible. On other occasions a personal comment is more appropriate. Communication, written or spoken, is valued as part of the partnership between home and school. Co-operation between parents, staff and governors leads to a shared sense of purpose and a good atmosphere in the school. This leaflet aims to answer some of your questions about this.

Should I pay a compliment?

Yes - those at the school are always pleased to learn that things have gone well and are appreciated.

Should I tell them my concerns?

Yes - all members of staff want to know as soon as possible if something concerns you or your child. They can then investigate and give you a response. If need be, they can also take steps to remedy a situation. Misunderstandings can be cleared up. An apology can be given if something is found to be wrong. Everyone benefits from the speedy resolution of difficulties and from suggestions for improvement.

What is a complaint?

It is an expression of serious dissatisfaction. This could be about an event which has happened, or failed to happen, or the way in which something was handled. Fuller information about your school's complaints procedure can be obtained from the headteacher, who will provide you with a copy.

Should I complain?

Yes - if you believe that something is seriously wrong. Your view can then be considered and an investigation can establish whether there is something wrong which needs to be corrected. The school's response will be based on the governing body's agreed policy and will seek to be fair to all concerned. Writing down your complaint helps to clarify exactly what you are complaining about.

Whom do I contact?

That depends on the particular situation. Often the teacher is able to deal with the matter. More serious problems will require a senior member of staff or the headteacher. Mutual courtesy is expected and ensures things go smoothly. There should always be discussion in the hope of solving difficulties informally. Most problems are solved in this way. A complaint about the headteacher goes to the chair of governors. Certain specific complaints (e.g. about admissions to school) are dealt with separately. Staff at the school or within Devon County Council can advise you about where to direct your complaint.

What if the matter is still unresolved?

It will be necessary to write to the school to inform them about this. In response the school will investigate the matter and may invite you to a meeting to talk about it. The school may arrange for a suitable mediator to be present. After trying all other ways, you may decide to make a formal complaint to the governing body.

Who will deal with my complaint?

At first, school staff will respond, and others may help. If you proceed further with your complaint, a panel of governors (not previously involved with the case) will listen carefully to both sides before reaching a decision.

How do I make a complaint to the governing body?

You submit a copy of your complaint in writing to the clerk of the governors, including a request for a hearing. You cannot introduce new or different complaints at this stage. You will receive an acknowledgement within five school days.

A meeting will follow, with all the relevant paperwork having been circulated in advance to everyone involved. You may bring a friend if you wish - this could be anyone you think will be able to represent you. The headteacher may also be accompanied by a friend or professional representative. You will be invited to speak to the panel (which will have three governors on it) and to ask and answer questions. The panel normally allows witnesses to attend part of the meeting. A governing body may decide not to consider a complaint about something which has occurred more than three months previously.

What happens next?

You will be informed in writing of the panel's decision. This decision will usually be final. If you are not happy with this decision you can ask the County Council (by writing to the Director of Children and Young People's Services) whether your complaint is one which can be heard by them. If you consider that the Governors have acted wrongly you may write to the Secretary of State for Education and Skills.

Remember

This whole process exists so that your views, and the views of others, can be heard. You have rights. Pupils have rights. Staff and governors have rights. The aim is that the complaint should be properly and fairly dealt with. Communications with school are frequent and are welcome. The later stages of the complaints procedure are used rarely but remain part of the process. Services are improved by a positive response to compliments, concerns and complaints.



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