

# COMPLAINTS POLICY

PHONE: 72008 16345

EMAIL: [admin@grassrootsschool.in](mailto:admin@grassrootsschool.in)

WEBSITE: [www.grassrootsschool.in](http://www.grassrootsschool.in)

GRASSROOTS  
SCHOOL  
2017

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## COMPLAINTS POLICY AND PROCEDURES

Grassroots School aims to provide good quality education to all children and that the Management, Leadership teams, teachers and other staff work very hard to build and maintain positive relationships with all parents. Grassroots School is committed to developing a strong sense of partnership with parents/guardians and other members of the local community. However, there may on occasion be times when parents are unhappy with an event/aspect of the school. The School hopes that these may usually be fully resolved in consultation with the child's class teacher, but should this not be the case, the following complaints policy explains the procedures we should follow under such circumstances. The policy and procedures are in place to ensure that parents/guardians and others are able to express their concerns in an open and honest way in accordance with a published procedure.

### AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction or disquiet which may be about an event that has happened, failed to happen or the way in which something was handled.

The complaints procedure is designed to:

- encourage resolution of problems by informal means wherever possible
- be easily accessible and well-publicized
- be simple to understand and use
- be impartial
- be non-adversarial
- allow swift handling, with established time limits for action, and keep people informed of progress
- ensure a full and fair investigation by an independent person where necessary
- respect people's desire for confidentiality
- address all the points at issue, and provide an effective response and appropriate redress, where necessary
- provide information to the school's leadership team so that services can be improved with regard to investigating complaints.

The vast majority of concerns can be resolved informally. It is in everyone's best interests that complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. This can usually be achieved through discussion and good communication. However, if you are not satisfied with the outcome, a formal procedure (as outlined in this policy) would then need to be followed.

The procedure described does not include complaints covered by a separate statutory procedure, for example: complaints about the IB-PYP Curriculum; school admission decisions; assessments policies; Special Educational Needs (SEN) documentation; school re-organisation procedures; matters likely to require a Child Protection investigation; pupil exclusions decisions; whistleblowing; staff grievances and procedures; complaints about services provided by other providers who may use school premises or facilities.

Grassroots School has several policies that have been agreed and implemented by their Management Team. You should check which policy is relevant to your concern before proceeding with a complaint.

### DEFINITION

A complaint is an expression of discontent about the school with a real or perceived problem. It may be made about the school as a whole, about a specific person or about an individual student or member of staff. A complaint is likely to arise if a parent believes that the school has done something wrong or failed to do something that should have done or acted unfairly. Two different types of complaint are recognized by the school:

(a) A justified complaint - where the School is at fault because we have failed to do something we should have, or we have done something we should not have.

(b) A grievance - where the complainant is dissatisfied but the school is not at fault because we are following an agreed policy or procedure. Whilst these may be understandable causes for complaint, the concerns reflect policies and budgets already agreed by the school and its Management Team. As such the School has not failed to do something it said it would, or has agreed to do.

## INVESTIGATING COMPLAINTS

The complaints procedure follows three stages:

- INFORMAL - an opportunity to resolve the complaint with the school on an informal basis, for example through discussion with a senior member of staff/management;
- FORMAL - a formal complaint stage when the complaint is made in writing using the Complaint Form (See Annexure I) and usually responded to by the management team; and
- APPEAL - a hearing with a panel set up by the school, comprising of at least three people not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint, one of whom will be independent of the management and running of the school.

At each stage the person investigating the complaint will ensure that they:

- Listen sympathetically without comment.
- Explain the procedures; that is, what will happen next and who will deal with the issue.
- Offer to help complete a complaints form if the school has one and if the help is appropriate.
- Establish what has happened so far, and who has been involved
- Clarify the nature of the complaint and what remains unresolved
- Meet with the complainant or contact them (if unsure or further information is necessary)
- Clarify what the complainant feels would put things right
- Interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained about, allowing them to be accompanied if we wish
- Conduct the interview with an open mind and be prepared to persist with questioning
- Keep notes of any interview or meeting
- Communicate with the complainant at each stage over discussions and agreements reached

## RESOLVING COMPLAINTS

At each stage in the procedure, successful resolution of the complaint will take priority. If appropriate one or more of the following may be offered:

1. An apology
2. An explanation
3. An admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better
4. An assurance that the event complained of will not recur
5. An explanation of the steps that have been taken to ensure that it will not happen again
6. An undertaking to review school policies in light of the complaint

Complainants will be encouraged to state what actions they feel might resolve the problem at any stage.

## COMPLAINTS FAQs

### WHO SHOULD I TALK TO?

Most concerns can be dealt with quickly and effectively through informal discussion with members of management and/or staff at school. Parents are always welcome to come into school to discuss any concerns or problems that have arisen, and are encouraged to talk to the Head of the School/child's teacher in the first instance, as the teacher, having knowledge of both the child and events in school, is often the person best

placed to help. Sometimes, parents may not be able to travel to school so may prefer to phone the school or may send across a message using the home-school planner.

#### **WILL WHAT I SAY BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?**

Parents can expect that any matter raised will be treated in confidence, but parents also need to understand that to resolve problems, and find the best way forward, it will be necessary to make further enquires. When this is the case, parents can expect that this will be done with care, and that teachers will be sensitive to how such circumstances may affect their child. This is true for any investigation undertaken by the school, at any time. There may however, be times when we have to speak to other agencies in order for us not to compromise the responsibilities of our duty of care.

#### **WHAT IF IT IS DIFFICULT TO TALK TO MY CHILD'S TEACHER ABOUT MY CONCERN?**

Sometimes parents may feel that approaching their child's teacher could be awkward, especially if the matter they wish to discuss could affect a member of staff. If this is the case, or if talking to the teacher on a previous occasion did not resolve a particular problem, they should seek help from the Head of School. The Head of School has responsibility for the day to day running of the school and will recognize that situations like this can be difficult and sensitive. Parents can expect the Head of School to take the appropriate steps to follow up their concerns, and to discuss the outcome with them. Obviously, some time needs to be allowed for this to take place, but in most cases the Head of School will contact the parents again within a relatively short space of time (normally within 2-3 working days).

#### **CAN I TALK TO SOMEBODY WHO IS INDEPENDENT OF THE SCHOOL STAFF?**

It is always possible to approach a school management with a concern. However, management will always encourage parents to approach the Head of School first, if they have not already done so. This is because the Head of School is responsible for the day to day running of the school, and is therefore best placed to follow up and deal with concerns. The management will support parents in doing this, if they feel that this may be helpful, or alternatively may wish to ask a friend to help them with this.

#### **WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN AN INFORMAL AND A FORMAL COMPLAINT?**

Each of the situations above is an example of how concerns may be addressed informally. Good communication and discussion of problems allow issues to be dealt with quickly. The process is a verbal one, and usually only directly involves the parent and a member of staff or the Head of School. Dealing with matters informally does not mean that the concerns are not taken seriously, nor that agreed actions will not be followed through. A complaint becomes formal when parents feel that their concern is too serious to be dealt with informally, or when they feel that informal approaches to the school have not been adequately dealt with. A formal complaint should be made in writing to the Head of School and all investigations resulting from this and any responses made by the school will also be documented.

#### **WHAT HAPPENS IF I NEED TO MAKE A FORMAL COMPLAINT?**

Formal complaints need to be made to the Head of School in writing using the Complaints Form (See Annexure I). If the complaint itself relates to the Head of School, then the complaint needs to be made in writing to the Management Team. Certain types of complaint are already covered by Statutory Procedures and Policies laid down by School's Management Team, these cover complaints about the attendance, curriculum, admissions and behaviour management.

Parents can expect to receive written acknowledgment of their complaint from the school within 3 working days of them receiving their letter, and if the complaint is covered by one of these Statutory Procedures, the school will provide parents with details of how these Procedures work. Parents will also be offered an opportunity to discuss the process, and to provide the school with any further information they think should be considered.

### WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

When parents receive the formal acknowledgement of their complaint from the Head of School, they will also be given an estimated date by which they can expect a full response. The Head of School will also take the appropriate steps to investigate the matter, and will keep written records of the investigation. As soon as the relevant facts have been established, they will receive a written response from the Head of School, which includes an explanation of the decision that has been reached, the reasons for the decision, and the actions that need to be taken to resolve their complaint. The Head of School may also wish to discuss this with parents directly beforehand. Parents can expect to receive their formal response within 10 working days of the original acknowledgement of their complaint. If a delay is anticipated, the school will keep parents informed in writing of progress, and when parents are likely to receive details of the outcome of the investigation.

### I STILL FEEL THAT MATTERS HAVE NOT BEEN RESOLVED. WHAT SHOULD I DO?

It is very rare that a complaint will reach this stage, but if it does, the next step in the process will involve an independent and impartial review by a 3-member panel. Parents should write to the management team, requesting that their complaint proceeds to this stage. The Panel will consist of three members who have had no prior involvement in the matter in question. All relevant documents relating to the complaint will be provided to the Panel beforehand.

Parents will receive notification of the date that the Panel will meet 5 days in advance of the meeting. Parents will also be informed that they have the right to go to the meeting. The Head of School will also be invited to attend the meeting. Whilst discussions at the meeting will be documented, the meeting will be as informal as possible, with the main aim being to resolve the problem raised, and to achieve reconciliation between parents and the school. It provides an opportunity for parents to explain their complaint and concerns, for the Head of School to explain the school's response, and for all people present to seek clarification through questions and discussion.

Once the discussion has ended, everyone apart from the Panel will leave the meeting, and the Panel will review matters and reach its decision. The school will inform parents in writing of the panel's decision within two working days of the meeting. The letter will include:-

- a summary of events
- an outline of the main points of discussion
- the reason for the decision
- proposed action or outcomes.

### **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

#### DIFFICULT AND ABUSIVE COMPLAINANTS

In the case of any complaints which are:-

- abusive, vexatious
- repeatedly and obsessively pursued
- unreasonable or seeking unrealistic outcomes
- reasonable but pursued in an unreasonable manner

Management will decide whether all future contacts should be:

- directed to, and only be dealt with by, a named individual
- restricted, for example to letter only

If a conclusion has been reached about a complaint and parents wish to continue to pursue it, the school will write:-

- to reiterate that the matter is concluded and there will be no further correspondence
- to give a short response referring to previous documents that have already dealt with the matter
- to say that, if correspondence continues, it will be read and filed but will receive no acknowledgement.

### PHYSICAL AND VERBAL AGGRESSION

No Physical or verbal abuse will be tolerated by any school staff member. Verbal aggression can be as intimidating as physical aggression. All parties have a right to be treated courteously and with respect. If school staff feel threatened, the Head of School will either:-

- Write to the complainant requesting that the behavior cease, and/or
- Set restrictions for further contact with staff, and/or
- Report the incident to the Police.

### TELEPHONE CALLS

If the school receives an aggressive telephone call, the person taking the call will explain that they will end the call if the aggressive behaviour persists. If they need to end the call, a record of this action will be recorded. All repeated abusive and aggressive contacts will be considered as harassment and the Head of School will report all incidents to the Police.

In the case of physical abuse from complainants, the police will be called immediately. The staff concerned may decide to take legal action against the complainant. All schools can seek advice from legal services within the city/state.

### ANONYMOUS COMPLAINTS

Generally, we will not respond to anonymous complaints. Nevertheless, we will respond if the Head of School and the Management Team feel that:

- the issue and the fear of identification is genuine
- the issue is one of child abuse.

### **TIME LIMITS**

Complaints will be considered and resolved as quickly and efficiently as possible.

Realistic time limits will be set for each action within each stage. However, where further investigations are necessary, new time limits may need to be set and the complainant sent details of the new deadline and an explanation for the delay. On occasion, the school may need to extend the time to respond to a Stage 1 or Stage 2 complaint. This may be because of resource or capacity issues, or because additional information needs to be obtained to investigate the complaint. In such cases, the school will provide a holding letter, explaining the reason for the delay, and providing a date by which a response will be supplied. Response times given refer to Monday to Friday inclusive, term time only.

### **RECORD KEEPING**

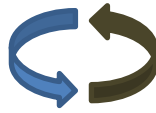
All formal complaints will be responded to in writing.

All correspondence, statements and records of complaints must be kept confidential but must be shown to Management Team when they inspect.

## QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE



Talk to the Head of School/member of staff regarding the problem



Head of School/member of staff follows up



(or)



Outcome is unsatisfactory outcomes (or) Agreed actions and outcomes



**PROBLEM RESOLVED**



Make a written complaint to the Head of School/Management Team



Head of School/Management Team conducts documented investigations



(or)



Outcome is unsatisfactory (or) Written report and outcome agreed



**PROBLEM RESOLVED**



Formal written complaint to the Management Team



3-member panel meeting with complainant and Head of School



Panel reach decision and inform complainant and Head of School



(or)



Outcome is unsatisfactory outcomes (or) Agreed actions and outcomes



**PROBLEM RESOLVED**





## ANNEXURE I - COMPLAINT FORM

Please complete and return to the Office Manager who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

<b>Your name:</b>	
<b>Student's name</b>	
<b>Your relationship to the Student</b>	
<b>Address:</b>	
<b>Postcode:</b>	
<b>Day time telephone number:</b>	
<b>Evening telephone number:</b>	
<b>Please give details of your complaint:</b>	
<b>What action, if any, have you already taken to try and resolve your complaint. (Who did you speak to and what was the response)?</b>	
<b>What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?</b>	
<b>Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details.</b>	
<b>Signature:</b>	<b>Date:</b>
<b><u>OFFICIAL USE</u></b>	
<b>Date acknowledgement sent:</b>	<b>By whom:</b>
<b>Complaint referred to:</b>	