



# Parent Complaints Handling Procedure

Updated August 2023

## Rationale

- (i) To ensure all complaints are handled in a sensitive and appropriate manner
- (ii) To establish a clear line of communication and procedure to follow in the event of a serious complaint.
- (iii) To review the pattern of complaints to improve the school.

## The difference between a concern and a complaint

A concern may be defined as *'an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought'*.

A complaint may be defined as *'an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action'*.

It is in everyone's interest that concerns and complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. Many issues can be resolved informally, without the need to use the formal stages of the complaints procedure. The school takes concerns seriously and will make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.

We understand however, that there are occasions when people would like to raise their concerns formally. In this case, the School will attempt to resolve the issue internally, through the stages outlined within this complaints procedure.

## How to raise a concern or make a complaint

A concern or complaint can be made in person, in writing or by telephone. They may also be made by a third party acting on behalf on a complainant, as long as they have appropriate consent to do so. Concerns should be raised to the school directly or to the 'management of Parent Communication' Department. This department is a central communication portal for Parents. The contact details are :

Landline : 4409-1037

Email: MPC@newtonschools.sch.qa

After School Hours : 7070-9714 and 7071-2145

The purpose of The Management of Parent Communication (MPC) Department is to create clear communication between the Parents and schools and to address and resolve concerns promptly. Once you contact the MPC Department, your communication will be shared with the Senior Management of your child's school who will address this with you directly.

## **Anonymous complaints**

We will not normally investigate anonymous complaints. However, the headteacher or Principal if appropriate, will determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation.

## **Time scales**

You must raise the complaint within three months of the incident or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within three months of the last of these incidents. We will only consider complaints made outside of this time frame if exceptional circumstances apply.

## **Complaints received outside of term time**

We will consider complaints made outside of term time to have been received on the first school day after the holiday period.

## **Resolving complaints**

At each stage in the procedure, the School wants to resolve the complaint. If appropriate, we will acknowledge that the complaint is upheld in whole or in part. In addition, we may offer one or more of the following an:

- Explanation
- Admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better
- Assurance that we will try to ensure the event complained of will not recur
- Explanation of the steps that have been or will be taken to help ensure that it will not happen again and an indication of the timescales within which any changes will be made
- Undertaking to review school policies in light of the complaint
- Apology.

## **Withdrawal of a Complaint**

If a complainant wants to withdraw their complaint, we will ask them to confirm this in writing.

## **Complaints Procedure**

### **Stage 1**

Formal complaints must be made to the headteacher, via the school office. This may be done in person, in writing (preferably on the Complaint Form below), or by telephone. The headteacher will record the date the complaint is received and will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within three school days. Within this response, the headteacher

will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, ask what remains unresolved and what outcome the complainant would like to see.

The headteacher can consider whether a face to face meeting is the most appropriate way to proceed. The headteacher may delegate the investigation to another member of the school's senior leadership team but not the decision to be taken.

During the investigation, the headteacher (or investigator) will:

- If necessary, interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish
- Keep a written record of any meetings/interviews in relation to their investigation.

At the conclusion of their investigation, the headteacher will provide a formal written response within ten school days of the date of receipt of the complaint. If the headteacher is unable to meet this deadline, they will provide the complainant with an update and revised response date. The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions the School will take to resolve the complaint. The headteacher will advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint, should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 1.

- The Parent Liaison Officer (PLO) will be the official minute taker on these occasions. An Arabic translator will also be made available and any written outcomes presented in English and Arabic as appropriate
- The school reserves the right to inform the CEO of Parents who are aggressive towards staff and recommend that their children are blocked from re-enrolling in the future. All Parents are obliged to adhere to the Parent Code of Conduct and Parent Charter in this regard
- An electronic data base is kept by each Headteacher detailing the facts of all serious parental complaints, the teacher(s) involved, the investigation outcome and recommendations.

### **Stage 2 Appeal process:**

- If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome at Stage 1 and wishes to take the matter further, they can escalate the complaint to Stage 2 – request the matter be referred to an appeal panel, for a panel hearing. This is the final stage of the complaints procedure.
- A request to escalate to Stage 2 must be made to the Principal, via the school office, within ten school days of receipt of the Stage 1 response. The Principal will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter

or email) within five school days. Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.

- The school's Office will write to the complainant to inform them of the date of the panel hearing. They will aim to convene a meeting within 5 school days of receipt of the Stage 2 request. If this is not possible, the school will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed. If the complainant rejects the offer of the proposed date, without good reason, the school will decide when to hold the meeting. It will then proceed in the complainant's absence on the basis of written submissions from both parties.
- The appeals panel will consist of at least two senior staff members with no prior involvement or knowledge of the complaint. The Principal will decide whether to deal with the complaint by inviting parties to a meeting or through written representations, but in making the decision they will be sensitive to the complainant's needs.
- If the complainant is invited to attend the meeting, they may bring someone along to provide support. This can be a relative or friend.
- Complaints about staff conduct will not generally be handled under this complaint's procedure. Complainants will be advised that any staff conduct complaints will be considered under staff disciplinary procedures, if appropriate, but outcomes will not be shared with them.
- The appeals panel will not review any new complaints at this stage or consider evidence unrelated to the initial complaint to be included. New complaints must be dealt with from Stage 1 of the procedure

The appeal panel will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented. They can:

- Uphold the complaint in whole or in part
- Dismiss the complaint in whole or in part.

**If the complaint is upheld in whole or in part, the Principal will:**

- Decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint
- Where appropriate, recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future.

## **Roles and Responsibilities**

### **Complainant**

The complainant will receive a more effective response to the complaint if they:

- Explain the complaint in full as early as possible
- Co-operate with the school in seeking a solution to the complaint
- Respond promptly to requests for information or meetings or in agreeing the details of the complaint
  
- Ask for assistance as needed
- Treat all those involved in the complaint with respect
- Refrain from publicising the details of their complaint on social media and respect confidentiality.

### **Investigator**

The investigator's role is to establish the facts relevant to the complaint by providing a comprehensive, open, transparent and fair consideration of the complaint through:

- Sensitive and thorough interviewing of the complainant to establish what has happened and who has been involved
- Interviewing staff and children/young people and other people relevant to the complaint
- Consideration of records and other relevant information
- Analysing information
- Liaising with the complainant and the complaints co-ordinator as appropriate to clarify what the complainant feels would put things right.

### **The investigator should:**

- Conduct interviews with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning
- Keep notes of interviews or arrange for an independent note taker to record minutes of the meeting
- Ensure that any papers produced during the investigation are kept securely pending any appeal
- Be mindful of the timescales to respond
- Prepare a comprehensive report for the headteacher or complaints appeal panel that sets out the facts, identifies solutions and recommends courses of action to resolve problems.
- The headteacher or complaints committee will then determine whether to uphold or dismiss the complaint and communicate that decision to the complainant, providing the appropriate escalation details.

## **Parent Liaison Officer should:**

- Collate any written material relevant to the complaint (for example; stage 1 paperwork, school and complainant submissions) and send it to the parties in advance of the meeting within an agreed timescale
- Record the proceedings
- Circulate the minutes of the meeting
- Notify all parties of the panel's decision.

## **Panel Chair**

The panel chair, who is nominated in advance of the complaint meeting, should ensure that:

- Both parties are asked to provide any additional information relating to the complaint by a specified date in advance of the meeting
- The meeting is conducted in a formal manner, is not adversarial, and that, if all parties are invited to attend, everyone is treated with respect and courtesy
- Complainants who may not be used to speaking at such a meeting are put at ease. This is particularly important if the complainant is a child/young person
- The remit of the appeal panel is explained to the complainant
- Written material is seen by everyone in attendance, provided it does not breach confidentiality or any individual's rights to privacy. If a new issue arises it would be useful to give everyone the opportunity to consider and comment upon it; this may require a short adjournment of the meeting
- Both the complainant and the school are given the opportunity to make their case and seek clarity, either through written submissions ahead of the meeting or verbally in the meeting itself
- The issues are addressed
- Key findings of fact are made
- The committee is open-minded and acts independently
- No member of the panel has an external interest in the outcome of the proceedings or any involvement in an earlier stage of the procedure
- The meeting is minuted.

## **Panel Members should be aware that:**

- The meeting must be independent and impartial, and should be seen to be so
- No member may sit on the committee if they have had a prior involvement in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it
- The aim of the hearing should be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant

- We recognise that the complainant might not be satisfied with the outcome if the hearing does not find in their favour. It may only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations
- Many complainants will feel nervous and inhibited in a formal setting. Parents/carers often feel emotional when discussing an issue that affects their child
- Extra care needs to be taken when the complainant is a child/young person and present during all or part of the meeting. Careful consideration of the atmosphere and proceedings should ensure that the child/young person does not feel intimidated. The committee should respect the views of the child/young person and give them equal consideration to those of adults
- If the child/young person is the complainant, the committee should ask in advance if any support is needed to help them present their complaint. Where the child/young person's parent is the complainant, the committee should give the parent the opportunity to say which parts of the meeting, if any, the child/young person needs to attend. However, the parent should be advised that agreement might not always be possible if the parent wishes the child/young person to attend a part of the meeting that the committee considers is not in the child/young person's best interests
- The welfare of the child/young person is paramount.