

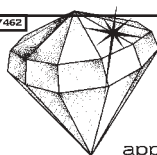
Nottinghamshire
County Council

Listening to you...

...school complaints



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**Crystal
Mark**

Clarity
approved by
Plain English Campaign

County
Contact

Listening to you ...

What to do when you have a complaint about a Nottinghamshire school

Most parents have a positive relationship with schools but sometimes things may go wrong.

All complaints should be taken seriously and schools are expected to have procedures in place for dealing with them. You can ask the school for a copy of their complaints procedure so that you know exactly how they will handle matters. School governors have a responsibility under the Schools Standards and Framework Act 1998 to deal with all complaints about the school.

If you need any help in understanding this leaflet, contact your child's school or your Local Education Officer. (There are more details at the end of this leaflet.)



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Where do I begin?

Whether you are a parent or a member of the public the place to start is the school. It is much better if matters can be sorted out within school, even if this might feel rather awkward in the beginning. There is usually more than one side to any dispute or misunderstanding and it is important that all the facts are known so that the best solution can be found.

Contact the school, speak to the secretary and ask who is the best person to deal with your complaint. Then write to that person or make an appointment to meet them. In a primary or special school this may be your child's class teacher or the head teacher. In a secondary school you may be advised to contact the form tutor or head of year.

What do I need to do?

Think about the nature of your complaint. If there has been a specific incident, gather the facts and try to separate what may have happened from what actually happened. You might want to write down the details. In particular, be clear about:

- what it is you are complaining about;
- when and where the incident happened;
- who else was involved;
- whether anyone saw it happen;
- who you have spoken to already; and
- what you want to happen as a result of your complaint.

Or you may want to raise concerns of a more general nature.

The school will look into the issues you have raised and respond once they have established what happened.

It is important that you raise your concerns as soon as you can. By taking positive steps early on, the school is more likely to be able to sort out your complaint.



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What if my complaint is about the head teacher?

If the complaint is about the head teacher you should contact the chair of governors of the school. The school will give you the name of the chair of governors and tell you how you can contact him or her. The chair or a nominated complaints governor will investigate your concerns and respond directly to you.

What if my complaint is about the governing body or an individual governor?

If the complaint is about a governor, contact the chair of governors first. The chair will investigate your concerns. If the complaint is about the chair of governors, a nominated complaints governor will investigate. You can get details of the nominated complaints governors from the Governor Services Officer at the Local Education Office (see the end of this leaflet).

If you have a complaint about the governing body as a whole, contact the Local Education Office.

What can I expect to happen?

You should be listened to so that your complaint is understood. Complaints need to be investigated and the head teacher or chair of governors will need some time to do this. A reasonable amount of time for investigating most complaints is 20 school days. You should be told if it will take longer than this.

If the school agrees that your complaint is justified, they should tell you what action will be taken.

In some cases, disciplinary action may be taken against a member of staff. This is a decision for the governing body, not the Local Education Authority (LEA). There is an entirely separate procedure for schools to follow in dealing with staff disciplinary matters.

If the school does not support your complaint, they should tell you the reasons for this decision, and you can ask for these in writing.



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What if I am not satisfied with the way in which the school has dealt with my complaint?

You should be told of your right to appeal. If the head teacher and the nominated complaints governor have not been able to resolve your complaint to your satisfaction, a committee of the governing body which has not been involved with your complaint should deal with your appeal. If you are still not satisfied, you can contact the LEA's Local Education Officer. (You will find the address at the end of this leaflet.)

What if my complaint is about a voluntary-aided school?

In voluntary-aided schools, religious education is directed by the school governors in line with each school's trust deed and instrument of government. These schools are linked to a particular church, for example Church of England or Catholic.

Your complaint will be handled in the same way. However, if the governing body is not able to resolve your complaint to your satisfaction, it will refer it to the diocesan (church) board for education. You can get the address of the diocesan board from the school. If you are not satisfied with the way the diocesan board handles your complaint, you should then contact the LEA.

How can the LEA help?

If you are not satisfied with the school's response, the LEA will investigate how the school handled the complaint and will let you know its opinion on how the governing body carried out the investigation and the appeal. For most complaints the LEA will not investigate the actual complaint but will only become involved after the governing body has tried to resolve the complaint.

If the complaint is about the National Curriculum or religious education and worship and the school cannot resolve it, separate procedures apply. You can get more details about this from the LEA on 0115 977 3589.

Who can help?

If you feel worried about making a complaint about a school you may want to involve a friend, representative or interpreter to support you. You could contact your local county councillor or there are agencies that might be able to support you, for example:

- Advisory Council for Education (ACE)
on 0207 354 8321; or
- Race Equality Council (REC)
on 0115 958 6515.



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If your child has special educational needs, you may want to contact the Parent Partnership Service on the following numbers.

- Nottingham Office, 0115 948 2888
- Mansfield Office, 01623 651170

If you are still not satisfied after the LEA's investigation you have a final right of appeal to the Secretary of State for Education and Skills. If they agree that your complaint was justified, they may direct the governing body to act in a particular way. The LEA will give you the address of the Secretary of State when it tells you the outcome of its investigation.

Local Government Ombudsman

If you are still not satisfied when the complaints process is complete, you can complain to the Local Government Ombudsman at:

- Beverley House, 17 Shipton Road, York
YO30 5FZ, phone 01904 663200.

The Ombudsman is not able to investigate some internal school matters such as religious instruction, the curriculum and discipline.

How long will it take?

Complaints should be handled quickly and most issues should be resolved in a few days. The school should complete most investigations within 20 school days but if a complaint moves through all the above stages, it may take several months to resolve.

Your Local Education Officer

If you need help in understanding this leaflet, you can contact your **Local Education Officer** at:

- North Base, covering Bassetlaw, Newark, Ashfield and Mansfield areas, phone 01623 433433; or
- South Base, covering Broxtowe, Gedling and Rushcliffe areas, phone 0115 854 6000.

Governor Services Officer

The Governor Services Officer can be contacted at South Base, phone 0115 854 6055.



Notes



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