



Thornley Primary School

Guidance and Procedures for dealing with School Complaints

January 2022

Date Procedure Adopted by Governing Body	
Procedure Review Period	Biennial
Procedure Review Date	January 2024

Who can make a complaint?

This complaints procedure is not limited to parents or carers of children that are registered at the school. Any person, including members of the public, may make a complaint to Thornley Primary School about any provision or services that we provide. Unless complaints are dealt with under separate statutory procedures (such as appeals relating to exclusions or admissions), we will use this complaints procedure.

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 generally recognised as *'an expression or statement of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or lack of action taken'*.

It is in everyone's interest that complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. Many issues can be resolved informally, without the need to follow the formal stages of the complaints procedure. Thornley Primary 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 concerns formally. In this case, Thornley Primary 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 of a complainant, as long as they have appropriate consent to do so.

Concerns should be raised with either the Class Teacher or Head Teacher. If the issue remains unresolved, the next step is to make a formal complaint.

Complainants should not approach individual Governors to raise concerns or complaints. They do not have the power to act on an individual basis and it may prevent the complaint being considered at Stage 2 of the procedure.

Complaints against school staff (except the Head Teacher) should be made in the first instance, to the Head Teacher via the School Office. Please mark them as 'Private and Confidential'.

Complaints that involve, or are about the Head Teacher, should be addressed to the Chair of Governors, either via the School Office or the School and Governor Support Service, Children and Young People's Services, County Hall, Durham, DH1 5UJ, telephone 03000262921. Please mark them as 'Private and Confidential'.

Complaints involving the Chair of Governors, any individual Governor or the whole Governing Body should be addressed to Advice and Clerking Lead, School and Governor Support Service, Children and Young People's Services, County Hall, Durham, DH1 5UJ, telephone 03000 262921. Please mark them as 'Private and Confidential'.

A template complaint form is included at the end of this procedure for your ease of use. If you require help in completing the form, please contact the School Office. You can also ask third party organisations such as the Citizens Advice to help you.

In accordance with equality law, we will make reasonable adjustments if required, to enable complainants to access and complete this Complaints Procedure. For instance, providing information in alternative formats, assisting complainants in raising a formal complaint or holding meetings in accessible locations.

Anonymous complaints

Anonymous complaints will not normally be investigated. However, the Head Teacher or Chair of Governors, if appropriate, will determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation.

Timescales

The complaint must be raised within three months of the incident or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within three months of the last of these incidents.

Complaints received outside of term time

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

Scope of this Complaints Procedure

This procedure covers all complaints about any provision of community facilities or services by Thornley Primary School, other than complaints that are dealt with under statutory procedures, including those listed below.

Exceptions	Who to Contact
Admissions to Schools	Concerns about admissions should be raised with the School Places and Admissions Team, Children and Young People's Services, Durham County Council, County Hall, Durham, DH1 5UJ. Telephone 03000 265896 E-Mail schooladmissions@durham.gov.uk
Education, Health and Care (EHC) assessments and plans	Concerns about Education, Health and Care assessments and plans should be raised with the SEND Casework Team, Children and Young People's Services, Durham County Council, County Hall, Durham, DH1 5UJ Telephone 03000 265878 E-Mail SENcaswork@durham.gov.uk
Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation	<p>Complaints about child protection matters are handled under our Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy and in accordance with relevant statutory guidance. If you have concerns that there is a potential risk of harm to a child or children, such as a risk presented by a family member or a person not in a formal position of trust, you may wish to contact 'First Contact' on telephone 03000 267979 or e-mail scd@durham.gov.uk.</p> <p>If you have concerns regarding allegations of harm or possible harm caused by a person in a position of trust, you may wish to contact the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) who has local responsibility for safeguarding. Contact Sharon Lewis, LADO, Children and Young People's Services, Durham County Council, County Hall, Durham, DH1 5UJ Telephone 03000 268835 or 07557081908 E-Mail sharon.lewis@durham.gov.uk</p> <p>If you have concerns that a child or children may be suffering or at risk of harm, but your concerns do not fit into either of the above categories, you should contact the Pupil Placement and Education Safeguarding Manager, Children and Young People's Services, Durham County Council, County Hall, Durham, DH1 5UJ Telephone 03000 265908 or 0755708908 E-Mail ian.shanks@durham.gov.uk</p>
Exclusion of children from school	Advice regarding your child's exclusion from school should be sought from the Inclusion and Alternative Provision Co-ordinator,

	<p>Children and Young People's Services, Durham County Council, County Hall, Durham, DH1 5UJ Telephone 03000 265903</p> <p>Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions</p> <p>Complaints about the application of the Behaviour Policy can be made through the school's complaints procedure.</p>
Whistleblowing	<p>We have an internal whistleblowing procedure for all of our employees, including temporary staff. The Secretary of State for Education is the prescribed person for matters relating to education for whistleblowers who do not want to raise matters direct with their employer. Referrals can be made at www.education.gov.uk/contactus.</p> <p>Volunteer staff who have concerns about our school should complain through the school's complaints procedure. You may also be able to complain direct to the Local Authority or the Department for Education, depending on the substance of your complaint.</p>
Staff Grievances	Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the school's internal grievance procedures.
Staff Conduct	Complaints about staff will be dealt with under the school's internal disciplinary procedures, if appropriate. Contact the Head Teacher or Chair of Governors (if the complaint involves the Head Teacher). Complainants will not be informed of any disciplinary action taken against a member of staff as a result of a complaint. However, the complainant will be notified that the matter is being addressed.
Complaints about Services provided by other providers who may use school premises or facilities	Providers should have their own complaints procedure to deal with complaints about the service. Please contact them directly.
Matters which are the responsibility of the local Authority	Concerns should be raised with the Feedback Team, Durham County Council, County Hall, Durham, DH1 5UJ Telephone 03000 269007.
Matters in relation to the Children and Young People's Service	Concerns should be raised with the Complaints Officer, Children and Young People's Services, Durham County Council, County Hall, Durham, DH1 5UJ Telephone 03000 265762 E-Mail CYPSComplaints@durham.gov.uk
National Curriculum – content	Please contact the Department for Education at www.education.gov.uk/contactus

If other bodies are investigating aspects of the complaint, for example the Police, Local Authority Safeguarding Teams or Tribunals, this may impact on or ability to adhere to the timescales within this procedure or result in the procedure being suspended until those public bodies have completed their investigations.

If a complainant commences legal action against Thornley Primary School in relation to their complaint, we will consider whether to suspend the complaints procedure in relation to their complaint until those legal proceedings have concluded.

Resolving Complaints

At each stage in the procedure, Thornley Primary 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
- an admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better
- an assurance that we will try to ensure the event complained of will not recur
- an 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 any changes will be made
- an undertaking to review school policies in light of the complaint
- an apology.

Withdrawal of a Complaint

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

Stage 1

Formal complaints must be made to the Head Teacher (unless they are about the Head Teacher), via the School Office. This may be done in person, in writing (preferably on the complaint form), or by telephone. The Head Teacher will record the date the complaint is received and will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or e-mail) within 2 school days.

Within this response, the Head Teacher will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, ask what remains unresolved and what outcome the complainant would like to see. The Head Teacher can consider whether a face to face meeting is the most appropriate way of doing this. Please note the Head Teacher may delegate the investigation to another member of the School's Senior Leadership Team, but not the decision to be taken.

During the investigation of the complaint, the Head Teacher (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 Head Teacher will provide a formal written response within 15 school days of the date of receipt of the complaint. If the Head Teacher is unable to meet the 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 Thornley primary School will take to resolve the complaint.

The Head Teacher will advise the complainant of how to escalate the complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 1.

If the complaint is regarding the Head Teacher, or a member of the Governing Body (including the Chair or Vice-Chair), a suitably skilled Governor will be appointed to complete all the actions at Stage 1.

Complaints about the Head Teacher must be made to the Chair of Governors either via school, or Education Durham Governance Services, Children and Young People's Services, County Hall, Durham, DH1 5UJ Telephone 03000 262921.

Complaints about a member of the Governing Body must be made to the School and Governor Support Service, Children and Young People's Services, County Hall, Durham, DH1 5UJ Telephone 03000 262921.

If the complaint is:

- jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair or
- the entire Governing Body
- the majority of the Governing Body

Stage 1 will be considered by an independent Investigator appointed by the Governing Body. At the conclusion of their investigation, the independent Investigator will provide a formal written response.

Stage 2

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 – a meeting with members of the Governing Body's Complaints Committee. This is the final stage of the complaints procedure.

A request to escalate to Stage 2 must be made to the Clerk to the Governing Body via Education Durham – Governance Services, Children and Young People's Services, Durham County Council, County Hall, Durham, DH1 5UJ, within 10 days of receipt of the Stage 1 response. The Clerk will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or e-mail) within 2 school days. Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.

The Clerk will write to the complainant to inform them of the date of the meeting. They will aim to convene a meeting within 20 school days of receipt of the Stage 2 request. If this is not possible, the Clerk will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed.

If the complainant rejects the offer of three proposed dates, without good reason, the Clerk 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 Complaints Committee will consist of at least three Governors with no prior involvement or knowledge of the complaint. If there are fewer than three Governors available from Thornley Primary School available, the Clerk will source any additional, independent Governors through another local School or through the Governor Support Team, in order to make up the committee. Alternatively, an entirely independent committee may be convened to hear the complaint at Stage 2.

The committee will decide whether to deal with the complaint by inviting parties to a meeting or through written representations, but in making their 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 a friend. Generally, we do not encourage either party to bring legal representatives to the committee meeting. However, there may be times when legal representation is appropriate. For instance, if a school employee is called as a witness in a complaint meeting, they may wish to be supported by union and/or legal representation.

Note: Complaints about staff conduct will not generally be handled under this Complaints 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.

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

At least 7 school days before the meeting, the Clerk will:

- confirm and notify the complainant of the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that, if the complainant is invited, the dates are convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible
- request copies of any further written material to be submitted to the Committee in advance of the meeting.

The Committee will not normally accept, as evidence, recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded. The Committee will also 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 meeting will be held in private. Electronic recordings of meetings or conversations are not normally permitted unless a complainant's own disability or special needs require it. Prior knowledge and consent of all parties attending must be sought before meetings or conversations take place. Consent will be recorded in the minutes of the meeting.

The Committee will consider the complaint and all evidence presented. The Committee can:

- uphold the complaint in whole or in part
- dismiss the complaint in whole or part

If the complaint is upheld in whole or part, the Committee 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.

The Chair of the Committee will provide the Complainant and Thornley Primary School with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within 5 school days. The letter to the Complainant will include details of how to contact the Department for Education if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled.

Next Steps

If the Complainant believes the School did not handle their complaint in accordance with the published complaints procedure or they acted unlawfully or unreasonably in the exercise of their duties under education law, they can contact the Department for Education after they have completed Stage 2.

The Department for Education will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by Thornley Primary School. They will consider whether Thornley Primary School has adhered to education legislation and any statutory policies connected with the complaint.

The Complainant can refer their complaint to the Department for Education online at:

www.education.gov.uk/contactus, by telephone on 0370 000 22 88 or in writing to:

Department for Education
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD



Complaint Form

Please complete and return to the Head Teacher/Clerk to the Governing Body (as appropriate) who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

Your name:
Pupils name (if relevant):
Your relationship to the pupil (if relevant):
Address:
Post Code:
Daytime telephone number:
Evening telephone number:
E-Mail address:
Please give details of your complaint, including whether you have spoken to anybody at the school about it.

What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?

Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details.

Signature:

Date:

Official use:

Date acknowledgement sent:

By who:

Complaint referred to:

Date:

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 timescale to respond
- prepare a comprehensive report for the Head Teacher or complaints committee that sets out the facts, identifies solutions and recommends courses of action to resolve problems.

The Head Teacher 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.

Complaints Co-ordinator (this could be the Head Teacher)

The Complaints Co-ordinator should:

- ensure that the complainant is fully updated at each stage of the procedure
- liaise with staff members, Head Teacher, Chair of Governors, Clerk and LAs (if appropriate) to ensure the smooth running of the complaints procedure
- be aware of issues regarding:
 - sharing third party information
 - additional support. This may be needed by complainants when making a complaint including interpretation support or where the complainant is a child or young person
- keep records

Clerk to the Governing Body

The Clerk is the contact point for the complainant and the committee and should:

- ensure that all people involved in the complaint procedure are aware of the legal rights and duties, including any under legislation relating to school complaints, education law, the Equality Act 2010, the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act (DPA) 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)
- set the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that the dates are convenient to all parties (if they are invited to attend) and that the venue and proceedings are accessible
- 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 committee's decision

Committee Chair

The Committee's Chair, who is nominated in advance of the complaint meeting, should ensure that:

- both parties are asked (via the Clerk) to provide any additional information relating to the complaint by a specified date in advance of the meeting
- the meeting is conducted in an informal 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 committee 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 under the DPA 2018 or GDPR.
If a new issues 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 committee has an external interest in the outcome of proceedings or any involvement in an earlier stage of the procedure
- the meeting is minuted
- they liaise with the Clerk (and complaints co-ordinator, if the school has one)

Committee Member

Committee members should be aware that:

- the meeting must be independent and impartial, and should be seen to be so. No governor may sit on the committee if they have had prior involvement in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it
- the aim of the meeting should be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and complainant, we recognise that the complainant might not be satisfied with the outcome if the meeting 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 parents should be advised that an 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.