



Hampshire
County Council

Improvement and
Advisory Service

Hot Topics – Session 1

Parental complaints

What are the main reasons for complaints?

- Behaviour of pupils
- Safeguarding
- Communication
- Staff conduct
- SEND
- Headteacher decisions

Engaging with a complainant

- When under threat it can be tempting to batten down the hatches.



Communication is key

- Engage with the complainant, invite them in and consider who is the best person to meet with them – it may not be the headteacher.
- Try to establish what the complainant wants as an outcome.
- Manage parental expectations of the outcome, be clear about what you can and cannot do.
- Ensure all staff in the school understand the communication strategy and stick to it.
- Agree follow up checks with the complainant to ensure things are better and addressed in the longer term.

Do what you say you will do

- Ensure your complaints policy is accurate and up to date.
- Follow this policy, do not short cut or leap to a different stage.
- If you say you will get back to a parent or check in with them ensure you follow through or your staff do.
- Keep a record of when you have met with parents and agreed actions.
- Establish if it is a formal complaint where the parent is expecting a formal response or if a 'chat' is sufficient.
- E-learning is available from governor services on managing complaints.

Tackle the issue

- Tackle the issue with staff if necessary, do not protect staff at the expense of addressing the issue.
- Ensure the complainant does not feel fobbed off, it is important that they feel their concerns are taken seriously.
- Get someone else to sense check any emails or letters to the complainant before you send.
- Ensure as a matter of course you are developing parental engagement and confidence. If this is strong there is more likely to be trust when something goes wrong.

Track action and responses

- Keep a chronology of what has happened and who responded, when and how.
- Gather actions the school has taken to address the issue.
- If the complaint goes to Ofsted and the LA needs to contact you this will be very helpful in responding.
- Pull in external agencies if helpful, ISS, PBS, EMTAS etc
- Its ok to say sorry/apologise.

Recognise if something needs to improve or change

- Complaints are rarely black and white and perception is key.
- Be open to learning for you / the school from the complaint.
- Do not hesitate to talk about changes you will put in place or action you will take to address concerns.
- Do not become entrenched.
- Follow up meetings with an email stating what has been agreed and see through on what has been agreed.
- Consider what the parent is trying to communicate with the complaint.

Support

- If you are worried about a complaint please contact your SIM or LLP, they will be happy to discuss and support.
- Ensure your CoG is kept informed but ensure other governors remain untainted.
- Governor services can support when governors are involved.
- A colleague headteacher or coaching from HeadsUp4HTs can also be helpful.
- Remember support is also available from personnel, legal, inclusion and communications.
- If the LA needs to contact you they will need details of the complaint and actions you have taken. There is often a tight turnaround.
- Ofsted complaints are often anonymous.

22. Inspectors will, during their preparation for graded and ungraded inspections, normally review and consider any qualifying complaints made to Ofsted about the school. **Inspectors will not:**

- investigate the circumstances of a complaint on a graded or ungraded inspection, or come to any conclusions about the complaint itself
- follow up on complaints received before the inspection
- use complaints (qualifying complaints or other) or information about complaints as evidence to support judgements or come to any judgements based on complaints (qualifying complaints or other). However, evidence we find on an inspection following a complaint can be used to support judgements

Next Sessions

Date	Link	Focus
03/12/24	<u>W&E Hot Topic session - Tuesday 3 December 09.30-10.30</u>	Parental Engagement
21/01/25	<u>W&E Hot Topic session - Tuesday 21 January 13.30-14.30</u>	HR Issues
04/03/25	<u>W&E Hot Topic session - Tuesday 4 March 09.30-10.30</u>	EBSA
17/06/25	<u>W&E Hot Topic session - Tuesday 17 June 13.30-14.30</u>	TBA