

SCALLOWAY JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL COMPLAINTS PROCEDURES AND POLICY DOCUMENT

Introduction

Complaints occur when a person is dissatisfied with the service they have received from the school and notify the school of the reasons for their concerns.

Complaints are a useful source of information about the standard of service we provide. Whether the complaint is justified or not, dealing with complainants courteously and effectively restores the person's confidence in the school for the future.

Our complaints procedure

This procedure describes how complaints are to be dealt with in Scalloway JH School.

Scalloway JH School's staff is committed to providing the best possible service for pupils, parents, stakeholders and other users of the school. Our service users often have valuable insight into how service delivery can be improved. It is important that we learn from complaints raised and that we resolve difficulties as quickly as possible in the best interests of the pupils.

The aims of the policy

In this complaints procedure we aim to:

- outline procedures for dealing with complaints
- ensure that staff know how to deal with complaints
- deal with complaints speedily and in a courteous way
- take complaints seriously and deal with the issues appropriately
- learn from complaints and where appropriate, take action to secure improvements.

Who makes complaints?

Most complaints will be from parents/carers or their representatives such as a solicitor, an MSP, or a Local Councillor.

Pupil complaints are dealt with in the school's Pupil Support system, by the senior management team or the Pupil Councils.

Some complaints may arise from other sources, such as a local resident, shop owner or bus driver.

What is a complaint?

A complaint may arise if a person thinks the school has:

- done something wrong
- failed to do something it should have done
- acted unfairly or in an inappropriate manner.

Examples may include instances where the complainant feels that the school has:

- failed to provide a service at the right time or to the expected standard
- neglected or delayed in answering a query or responding to a request
- failed to take account of relevant matters in coming to a decision
- been discourteous to a service user
- been accused of harassment, bias or discrimination.

The policy does not cover:

- matters for which there is an existing right of appeal e.g. exclusions
- matters which may be the subject of legal proceedings
- staff complaints which are covered by Shetland Islands Council's policies.

(A) Complaints and comments made verbally

It is best to resolve concerns effectively and quickly through discussions with parents at the earliest stage. Such complaints are made verbally either by telephone or in person.

When a parent regarding their child makes a complaint, the first line of contact is the appropriate member of the Pupil Support staff or the Depute Head/Principal Teacher(Primary). Every effort should be made to deal with complaints at the earliest opportunity to provide answers and resolve problems.

More general verbal complaints are to be directed to a member of the senior management team. Complaints should not, in the first instance, be directed to subject teachers.

1. Verbal complaints on the telephone or in person, means that the school office staff will contact
 - appropriate PT Pupil Support if the complaints concerns a pupil
 - a member of SMT if the complaint is about policy or administration.
2. Ideally complaints will be resolved quickly. Where a complaint is dealt with satisfactorily, no further action is taken. It is advised however, to keep a

note of the complaint raised and the action taken and placed in the school complaints log.

3. If the matter needs to be investigated further, the person dealing with the complaint will take the complainant's details and note the reasons for concern.
4. The person initially dealing with the complaint will try to resolve the matter. If you feel that you are not the most appropriate person, the complainant is advised that you are passing the complaint to a named person who can help. Then, the named person is contacted, given the complaint details and is expected to contact the complainant seeking further details or clarification, as necessary.
5. Where a complaint requires investigation, it must be acknowledged by return of post in a standard letter. A full response will be provided within 5 working days in writing, by telephone or in person. A note should be kept of the outcome and placed in the school complaint log.
6. Complaints will normally be resolved quickly but not longer than 20 working days. In exceptional circumstances, if there is a delay beyond this, the complainant will be contacted to update them on the progress made and the reason for any delay. An estimated completion date will be given or a date when they will be contacted again.
7. If the complaint is made to a teacher, for instance at a Parents' Evening, the teacher should direct the complainant to a member of the Senior Management Team.

(B) Complaints made in writing

Most complaints are resolved verbally to everyone's satisfaction. However, concerns and complaints may also be made in writing.

1. All letters containing complaints or comments will be passed by the school office staff to the Head Teacher, who will respond, or refer the matter to SMT/Pupil Support staff to respond as soon as possible within 5 working days of receipt. An acknowledgement letter will be sent by return of post explaining who is dealing with the matter and the expected time scale for response.
2. If a complaint requires a more in-depth investigation, a standard letter will be sent acknowledging receipt of the letter and explaining who is investigating the complaint, as well as indicating that a full response will take longer than usual. Standard practice is to investigate and respond within 20 days. A telephone call to the complainant may also be appropriate to explain any delay.
3. Once the complaint has been investigated, the person dealing with the matter should contact the complainant to advise them of the outcome.

Depending on the nature of the complaint, this may be done by telephone, face to face, by letter or email. In the event of a verbal response, a brief letter summarising the outcome and any action taken and by whom will be sent.

4. In most cases, a complaint will be resolved by the designated person dealing with it. Where this is not the case, the staff member will contact the immediate line manager e.g. PT/ Depute Head Teacher/ Head Teacher to refer the matter to them.
5. All attempts should be made to resolve the complaint locally. This may be through discussions on the telephone, meetings or by correspondence.
6. Where all school line management processes have been used to try to resolve the matter, and the complainant remains dissatisfied, the Head Teacher will log the complaint with Shetland Islands Council via the Quality Improvement Officer, will then deal with the complaint. The Head Teacher will advise the complainant that the matter has been referred to the Quality Improvement Officer and that it will be dealt with in line with Shetland Islands Council's policy on complaints. Anonymous complaints will only be dealt with in exceptional circumstances.

Vexatious or abusive complainants

Most parents raise complaints in a reasonable way.

In exceptional circumstances however, a complainant may persist with a complaint in an unreasonable way. Complainants become vexatious when they repeatedly or obsessively pursue an outcome which is unreasonable or unrealistic.

If a complainant pursues a complaint in this way, the staff will take one of the following courses of action as appropriate:

- write to the complainant reiterating that the matter is concluded and no further correspondence should be expected in relation to the issue raised
- if the correspondence continues, that it will be read and noted but will receive no further acknowledgement
- provide a short response referring to previous documents that have already addressed the issues raised
- refer the matter to the Quality Improvement Officer.

Verbal aggression is rare but can be intimidating and unacceptable. Everyone can expect to be treated courteously. If a member of staff feels threatened, they should report this to the Head Teacher. The Head Teacher will then take appropriate action.

If a caller on the telephone becomes offensive, they will be advised that the call will end, if the aggression continues. If this happens, it should be recorded by the person who ended the call. It is not expected that staff will be verbally or physically threatened at work. If a caller repeatedly harasses staff, the Head Teacher will take appropriate action including alerting the police and the Quality Improvement Officer, as necessary.

Monitoring of the complaints procedure

A confidential record of complaints made is kept in the complaints log, but not in the pupil's progress record or in the individual member of staff's file.

The Head Teacher will monitor complaints once a term. This information will illustrate trends and patterns, help identify CPD needs and assist in our drive towards continuous improvement.

This information will be shared on a confidential basis with the school staff on an annual basis, with SMT, and with HMIE Inspectors as necessary.

Scalloway JH School provides all parents with the opportunity to access the policy through the school website in June 2006. A leaflet, for parents/carers, explaining the school's procedures for dealing with complaints, will be issued to parents at the start of each session and will be included in the enrolment pack for new pupils.

Review

This policy will be reviewed in June 2009