

Stage 1: Talk over your concern with the class teacher

All primary schools have a formal complaints procedure and this is often displayed and/or is available in the prospectus.

Stage 1: Talk over your concern with the class teacher

If you have a concern about an aspect of the school's provision talk it over with the teacher first of all. Most complaints should be resolved amicably and informally at this stage. If you still have concerns after a few weeks then ask for a copy of the policy that particularly applies to your concern, e.g. the policy on teasing and bullying, or special educational needs.

Request another meeting with the teacher and either the special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) if your complaint is related to your child's stammer, or the Head or Deputy if it is related to organisational or other issues.

At this stage you are talking informally but it is still helpful to make sure that you have written down concerns in a log to remind you of dates of incidents and, if applicable, names of children and staff involved. Refer to the policy that you believe particularly refers to your concern.

- Remember to stress that in giving names you are only **alleging** that these individuals were involved, as you must appreciate that you are probably relying on information from your child and he may be mistaken. Other parents will be annoyed if their child is wrongly accused, and staff will not be pleased if they are brought into disrepute without cause. If it is the teacher herself who seems to have upset your child, it is still important to talk with her in a calm manner and hopefully the matter will be put right at this early stage.
- Be tactful and make it clear that you are simply anxious to find out what is upsetting your child and that you understand that your information is based on allegations. Show that you understand you may not have the full picture yet and are willing to hear both sides of the story.
- Try to keep as calm as possible, and work out with the staff a strategy that makes sense to you with a sensible time limit for its completion.
- Agree with the staff that you will be given information about the actions taken and the final resolution of your complaint.

Most complaints will be satisfactorily dealt with at this informal stage. If you are still concerned and wish to continue to the next stage there is advice available.

Organisations that can offer support and advice

The BSA can provide information about stammering and its effects on children and provide you with information and support during the complaints procedure.

Parent Partnership

Parent partnership services provide accurate and unbiased information on the options available to you. They may provide you with training to guide you through complaints procedures and processes or link you to organisations and groups that can help. You can find your local parent partnership service through your local authority or the National Parent Partnership Network.

Your local parent partnership service should be able to give you access to an independent parental supporter. These can help you through the complaint procedures. They work under the guidance and supervision of your local parent partnership service and are usually trained volunteers. You can also choose any other adult you wish to support you: for example, a friend, a relative or someone from a voluntary organisation. You may request that this person accompanies you to significant meetings.

An independent parental supporter may help you by:

- explaining your rights and responsibilities
- finding further sources of information, support and advice for you
- helping you to understand what is happening during SEN procedures and processes such as School Action , assessment and statementing
- helping you to prepare for and attend visits and meetings
- helping you to make phone calls, fill in forms and write letters and reports
- helping you to express your views and communicate with schools and local authorities
- listening to your worries and concerns
- providing you with ongoing and general support

[Advisory Centre for Education \(ACE\)](#) an independent advice centre for parents, offering information about state education in England and Wales for five to 16 year olds. They offer free telephone advice on many subjects like complaints, exclusion from school, bullying and special educational needs.

Stage 2: Putting concerns or complaints in writing

If your complaint does not result in a satisfactory outcome, or if the problem recurs, you may move to the next stage by putting the concerns or complaint in writing to the Headteacher.

Model letter: head this with your name, address, date as is usual, with a contact telephone number.

To save an example letter to your computer that you can alter to suit yourself, right click on the following link and choose 'Save as'.

[Example complaint letter](#)

As some parents are not comfortable with making written complaints, there is usually a template form available in the school that you can complete instead of writing your own letter.

The Headteacher should contact you after the letter has been received to arrange to meet with you. If you need help contact the [organisations that offer support and advice](#). After you have met with the Headteacher to discuss your complaint, a plan of action and a time limit that you agree with should be decided upon. It may be helpful for you to request a written copy of this signed by you and the Headteacher, so that there is no confusion about what now should happen.

You should then be contacted again with the results of the action that was agreed and be given the opportunity to talk this over at a convenient time with the Headteacher from the point of view of your child. You should be clear that in the event of any more difficulties that staff observe you will be contacted immediately.

Generally the school stores written complaints from parents in the child's personal file. If the complaint involves a detailed investigation all information may be stored in a separate file designated for this complaint. When the complaint is resolved at this stage, its main points are logged in the Complaints Summary Record.

Hopefully you are now satisfied with the outcome and will not need to continue to the next stage.

Stage 3: What to do next

If you are still dissatisfied after 6 to 8 weeks you should consider the options for your child as his happiness may be undermined at that school if you are distracted by a lengthy and stressful complaints procedure. You need to consider seriously whether it is in the best interests of your child and family to do this, when there may be other options for your child's education. If you do decide to remove your child from his school consider your [options in primary education](#) and take

advice from your child's therapist.

If you want to go to stage 3 then you obviously have very serious unresolved concerns. You can pursue these even if you have chosen to withdraw your child from that school. If you feel you need further support contact your local [Parents Partnership](#) service. You can get contact details from your local authority or the web site. This service is available in every area to provide independent advice to parents of children with special educational needs and may be able to provide a volunteer worker who can support you and accompany you to any meetings. Most of these volunteers are parents themselves with experience of the issues that concern parents.

If you are still not satisfied with the outcome of the investigation so far, you should write to request another meeting with the Headteacher, this time with the responsible member of the Governing Body.

Model letter: head this with your name, address, date as is usual, with a contact telephone number.

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[Example meeting letter](#)

The meeting with the Headteacher and the representative of the Governing Body

At this meeting the parent and the Headteacher may be accompanied by another person, and the parent should ask a friend/partner, or advocate from the local parents partnership or similar. It is important at this stage that a parent does have the support of another person who is familiar with the case.

- The main points of the meeting should be noted down and an agreed written record of the discussion and any decision or action to take as a result given to the school and the parent. All of the parties present at the meeting sign the record and receive the same copy of it.
- Parents should be aware that it is advisable to keep confidential details of any children or staff named in the complaint. At this formal stage staff or parents of children named could consider they have been brought into disrepute if there is gossip about them, particularly if the complaint is not upheld.
- This signed record signifies that the procedure has concluded. When the complaint is resolved at this stage, the significant points are logged in the Complaints Summary Record.

Stage 4: External mediation

When the parent is still concerned after stage 3 the Governing Body may require a panel of governors, who have not met with the parent, to review all aspects of the complaint. If the panel decides that it is not possible to do any more to deal with the complaint, external mediation may be considered.

An external mediator should be acceptable to both parties, listen to both sides and offer advice. A mediator has no legal powers but can help to define the problem, review the action so far and suggest further ways in which it might be resolved. Usually the local authority would be contacted to provide a mediator.

The mediator keeps all discussion confidential. S/he can hold separate meetings with the Headteacher/governor(s) and the parent, if this is decided to be helpful. The mediator keeps an agreed written record of any meetings that are held and of any advice s/he gives.

Stage 5: Conclusion

When the mediator has concluded her/his investigations, a final meeting between the parent and the Headteacher is held. The purpose of this meeting is to reach a decision on the action to be taken to deal with the complaint. The mediator's advice is used to reach this conclusion. The mediator is present at

the meeting if all parties think this will help a decision to be reached.

A record of this meeting, including the decision on the action to be taken, is made. Everyone present at the meeting signs the record and receives a copy of it. This signed record signifies that the procedure has concluded.

When the complaint has not been resolved at stage 5

The role of the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED)

Schools must advise parents that they may approach OFSTED directly at any stage of this complaints procedure but should certainly do so if a complaint is not resolved at stage 5. In addition, a parent has the right to contact the Secretary of State for Education, and the school must provide information about this process. Obviously only the most serious of complaints will proceed to this stage.

The address and telephone number of OFSTED is:

2nd Floor,
Royal Exchange Buildings,
St. Ann's Square,
Manchester,
M2 7LA.
Tel 08456 404040

The Secretary of State for Education may be contacted by name at:

House of Commons,
London,
SW1A 0AA.

Records

Usually a record of complaints against the school and/or the children and/or the adults working in the school is kept, including the date, the circumstances of the complaint and how the complaint was managed. The outcome of all complaints is recorded in the Complaints Summary Record that is available for parents on request and OFSTED inspectors.

Complaints relating to Child Protection

In the event of any disclosure of a concern about child protection by a child or adult to the school or the parent then the Area Safeguarding Children Committee at the local authority should be contacted immediately. Complaints under this heading are only made available in confidence to designated professionals and the parents, as long as the parents are not themselves involved in the child's disclosure of such a concern.

Summary

All state schools have a formal complaints procedure and independent schools usually follow good practice too. This complaints procedure is often displayed and/or is available in the prospectus. There are five stages in this procedure and most complaints are sorted out informally at Stage 1.

Most complaints will be satisfactorily dealt with at this informal stage. If you are still concerned and wish to continue to the next stage there is advice available.

Organisations that can offer support and advice

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information and support.

Parent Partnership

Parent partnership services provide accurate and unbiased information on the options available to you. They may provide you with advice to guide you through the complaints procedures and processes or link you to organisations and groups that can help.

You can find your local parent partnership service through your local authority or the National [Parent Partnership Network](#).

Independent parental supporters

Your local parent partnership service should be able to give you access to an independent parental supporter who can help you through the procedures involved in making a formal complaint. **They work under the guidance and supervision of your local parent partnership service and are usually trained volunteers.**

While an independent parental supporter helps you understand what is happening, they will not make decisions about your child. You can also choose any other adult you wish to support you: for example, a friend, a relative or someone from a voluntary organisation. You may request that this person accompanies you to significant meetings.

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Mediation

If the parent and the school have not reached agreement by Stage 4 an external mediator is invited to help to settle the complaint. This person should be acceptable to both parties, listen to both sides and offer advice. A mediator has no legal powers but can help to define the problem, review the action so far and suggest further ways in which it might be resolved. Usually the local authority would be contacted to provide a mediator. Usually the local authority would be contacted to provide a mediator.

The mediator keeps all discussion confidential. S/he can hold separate meetings with the Headteacher/governor and the parent, if this is decided to be helpful. The mediator keeps an agreed written record of any meetings that are held and of any advice s/he gives.

At Stage 5 the mediator's conclusions and advice are discussed with the parent and the school and hopefully the complaint is resolved.

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