



COMPLAINTS POLICY

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The Skylark Plus complaints policy is in place to ensure that parents/carers and others are able to express their concerns in an open and honest way in accordance with a published procedure.

The complaints procedure is designed to:

1. encourage resolution of problems by informal means wherever possible
2. be easily accessible and well-publicised
3. be simple to understand and use
4. be impartial
5. be non-adversarial
6. allow swift handling, with established time limits for action, and keep people informed of progress
7. ensure a full and fair investigation by an independent person where necessary
8. respect people's desire for confidentiality
9. address all points raised, and provide an effective response and appropriate redress, where necessary

10. provide information to centre's Leadership team so that services can be improved

Investigating complaints:

At each stage, the person investigating the complaint will make sure that they:

1. establish what has happened so far, and who has been involved
2. clarify the nature of the complaint and what remains unresolved
3. meet with the complainant or contact them (if unsure of further information is necessary)
4. clarify what the complainant feels would put things right
5. interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish
6. conduct the interview with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning
7. keep notes of the interview

Procedure:

Stage 1 Informal Stage

(Concern raised with class teacher or member of staff responsible for the area of concern)

Any problem or concern should be raised promptly with the member of staff responsible for the area or action you are concerned about. All staff will make every effort to resolve your problem promptly at this informal stage.

Most concerns and potential complaints can best be resolved through informal discussion with the relevant member of staff.

If your concern is more serious you may prefer to make an appointment to discuss it with the relevant local authority.

Stage 2 Formal Complaint

If you are dissatisfied with the response of the member of staff then you may wish to put your concerns in writing to the directors as a complaint. You should make it clear if you wish the matter to be dealt with as a complaint. You should lodge the complaint formally within 2 months of initiating Stage 1 as detailed above.

An acknowledgement will be sent to the complainant within 48 hours of receipt of the written complaint.

The director responsible will investigate the complaint and provide a written response. This will normally be within 10 centre days of your letter, but you will be kept informed if, for example, more time is needed to complete the investigation.

If your original concern was about an action by the director personally, and you have already discussed it at the informal stage, then you should put your complaint in writing to the relevant local authority.

Stage 3 Skylark Plus Investigation

If you are not satisfied with the director's response, you need to write to our DSL, giving details of the complaint. These details and how to contact him/her/them is available from the Centre office.

The DSL will convene a Board of Directors Complaints Panel to investigate your complaint. This will normally be arranged within fifteen days of your complaint being received, depending on the availability of all concerned. You may be invited to speak to the panel at a meeting and be accompanied by a friend or representative.

After the meeting you will be advised of the outcome in writing, this will normally be within 10 days of the meeting. The letter will also indicate whether there are any further rights of appeal and, if so, to whom they need to be addressed.

The DSL appeal hearing is the last Centre-based stage of the complaints process. For most complaints the decision of the DSL is the last step in the procedure. Individual complaints would not be heard by the whole Board of Directors at any stage, as this could compromise the impartiality of any panel set up for a disciplinary hearing against a member of staff following a serious complaint.

Other Complaints

There is a specific procedure for complaints about the centre curriculum under Section 23 of the Education Reform Act 1988 and matters relating to it. You may complain either to the Local Authority or the Board of Directors in the first instance and the complaint will be investigated by whichever of these is responsible for the matter complained about.

The Board of Directors will inform both the complainant and the LA of the outcome of its investigation.

There is a right of appeal to the LA, and then to the Secretary of State. If you are in doubt whether your complaint comes into this category please contact the centre.

Complaints against centre staff

If your complaint amounts to or includes an allegation against a member of staff, this may need to be considered under the centre's grievance procedure for employees, rather than the complaint procedure. You will be advised if these procedures are to be used in dealing with your complaint.

A complaint about the Local Authority

Procedures for complaining about the Local Authority are set out in a separate Leaflet about the Council's complaints procedure. A copy of this Leaflet is available from the centre, libraries and Council offices.

Conclusion

By the centre having a clear, published procedure, the management hope that this will help resolve problems and confirm good working relationships between all people involved with the centre.