



The Thomas Adams School

Policy Statement

School Complaints

Updated August 2017

Reviewed by Governors

School Complaints

Preamble

An occasion may arise when a parent wishes to make a complaint. Any complaint is best dealt with promptly and by direct communication with either the Pastoral team, a member of the Senior Management Team or the Headteacher. We find that in the large majority of cases any problem can be cleared up quickly and any misunderstanding resolved.

1. Aim

The aim of this policy is to ensure that a complaint (should cause arise) is handled sympathetically, efficiently and at the appropriate level, and resolved as soon as possible. Doing so is:

- a. good for relationships
- b. good education practice
- c. good business practice

We aim to encourage an environment where parents and other members of the community feel free to complain and know that they will receive a fair hearing with a friendly and positive response from the school. Justified complaints are actually useful in that they help you put right things that are wrong in or with the School.

Certainly we understand that taking informal concerns seriously at the earliest stage will reduce the numbers that develop into formal complaints. In fact the School's underlying principle is that concerns ought to be handled, if at all possible, without the need for formal procedures. Indeed the requirement to have a complaints procedure need not in any way undermine efforts to resolve the concern informally.

2. Policy Statement

We need to know as soon as possible if there is any cause for dissatisfaction. Parents and students should never feel - or be made to feel - that a complaint, made in a reasonable and appropriate way, will be taken amiss or will reflect adversely on the student or his/her opportunities. We will investigate and try to resolve every complaint in a positive manner and will treat every complaint as an opportunity.

Through this policy, we aim:

- To put right any matter which may have gone wrong.
- To review our systems and procedures in the light of the relevant circumstances.

We recognise that a complaint which is not resolved quickly and fairly can soon become a cause of resentment, damaging to relationships and also to our internal culture.

3. Framework of Principles

The School's Complaints Procedure seeks to:

- encourage resolution of problems by informal means wherever possible;
- be easily accessible and simple to understand and use;
- be impartial;
- be non-adversarial;

- allow swift handling with established time-limits for action and keeping people informed of the progress;
- ensure a full and fair investigation by an independent person where necessary;
- respect people's desire for confidentiality;
- address all the points at issue and provide an effective response and appropriate redress, where necessary;
- provide information to the school's senior management team so that services can be provided.

4. Procedures: Dealing with Complaints – Formal Complaints Procedure

These procedures will be introduced when initial attempts to resolve the issue are unsuccessful and the person raising the concern remains dissatisfied and wishes to take the matter further.

Initial complaints will normally be taken by senior staff. If the complaint is not satisfied then the complainant has the chance to talk to the Headteacher. If the issue cannot be resolved, or if the complaint is against the Headteacher himself, then the next step is to involve the Chair of Governors. If the complainant is then still not happy then the final stage is a reference of the matter to the Complaints Committee of the Governing Body.

4.1 *Complaints Form:* Every serious concern or complaint notified to senior staff must be filled in by the complainant and then completed by staff as to the action taken, on a standard form known as a Complaints Form – CF1. A sample of the form is attached to this policy.

4.2 *Minor Concerns:* In many cases, a concern can be resolved quickly and will not reach the stage of becoming a formal complaint. If a concern is not able to be resolved, parents may wish to complete 'Complaints Form – CF2'.

4.3 *Acknowledgement:* A formal complaint in writing will be acknowledged by telephone on the date of receipt if practicable or in writing within three working days. A letter of acknowledgement will state the action being taken and the likely time scale.

4.4 *Designated Officer:* The Governing Body has appointed the Headteacher ("Designated Officer") :

- a To be responsible for investigating and resolving complaints.
- b To be the first point of contact while the matter remains unresolved.
- c To co-ordinate the complaint procedures in the School.
- d To monitor the keeping, confidentiality and storage of records in relation to complaints.

4.5 Investigating Complaints

The Headteacher when investigating any formal complaint will:

- establish what has happened so far, and who has been involved;
- clarify the nature of the complaint and what remains unresolved;
- meet with the complainant or contact them (if unsure or further information is necessary);
- clarify what the complainant feels would put things right;

- interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish;
- conduct the interview with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning;
- keep notes of the interview.

All complaints are thoroughly checked out. Where we believe them to be unjustified we will defend ourselves. Where there is a fault we will 'own up' and apologise – there should be no cover ups.

Some complaints can be dealt with by telephone or even letter, but the complainant will always be offered the chance to come in and talk it out face to face.

The aim is to try and settle complaints informally and this is nearly always successful.

In all cases the School follows the statutory requirements as regards complaints laid down by Section 29 of the Education Act 2002.

5. Procedure for the Governors' Complaints Committee

The Chair of Governors will convene a meeting of the Complaints Committee if requested by the complainant, but is not to be a member of that committee.

The Complaints Committee of the Governing Body comprises 3 – 5 members and chooses its own chair.

Remit of the Committee

The Committee can:

- ❖ dismiss the complaint in whole or in part
 - ❖ uphold the complaint in whole or in part
 - ❖ decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint
 - ❖ recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not occur
- a. The Committee hearing is independent and impartial. No governor may sit on the committee if they have had a prior involvement in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it. In deciding the make-up of the committee, governors will try to ensure that it is a cross-section of the categories of governor and sensitive to the issues of race, gender and religious affiliation.
 - b. The aim of the hearing, which is held in private, will always be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the School and the complainant. However, it has to be recognised the complainant might not be satisfied with the outcome if the hearing does not find in their favour. It may only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations which will satisfy the complainant that his or her complaint has been taken seriously.
 - c. The Committee acknowledges that many complainants feel nervous and inhibited in a formal setting. Parents often feel emotional when discussing an issue that affects their child. The Committee chair will ensure that the proceedings are as welcoming as possible. The layout of the room will set the tone and the aim is to ensure that the setting is informal and not adversarial.

- d. Extra care will be taken when the complainant is a child. Careful consideration of the atmosphere and proceedings will ensure that the child does not feel intimidated. The Committee will be aware of the views of the child and give them equal consideration to those of adults. Where the child's parent is the complainant, the parent will have the opportunity to say which parts of the hearing, if any, the child needs to attend.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The Role of the Clerk

The Clerk would be the contact point for the complainant and be required to:

- ❖ set the date, time and venue of the hearing, ensuring that the dates are convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible
- ❖ collate any written material and send it to the parties in advance of the hearing
- ❖ meet and welcome the parties as they arrive at the hearing
- ❖ record the proceedings
- ❖ notify all parties of the Committee's decision

The Role of the Chair of the Governing Body

- ❖ check that the correct procedure has been followed
- ❖ if a hearing is appropriate, notify the clerk to arrange the Committee meeting

The Role of the Chair of the Committee

To ensure that:

- ❖ the remit of the Committee is explained to the parties and each party has the opportunity of putting their case without undue interruption
- ❖ the issues are addressed
- ❖ key findings of fact are made
- ❖ parents and others who may not be used to speaking at such a hearing are put at ease
- ❖ the hearing is conducted in an informal manner with each party treating the other with respect and courtesy
- ❖ the Committee is open minded and acting independently
- ❖ no member of the Committee has a vested interest in the outcome of the proceedings or any involvement in an earlier stage of the procedure
- ❖ each side is given the opportunity to state their case and ask questions
- ❖ written material is seen by all parties. If a new issue arises it would be useful to give all parties the opportunity to consider and comment on it

Notification of the Committee's Decision

The chair of the Committee needs to ensure that the complainant is notified of the Committee's decision, in writing, with the Committee's response; this is usually within an agreed deadline. The letter will explain if there are any further rights of appeal and, if so, to whom they need to be addressed.

Procedure for a Committee

- ❖ The hearing is as informal as possible.

- ❖ Witnesses are only required to attend for the part of the hearing in which they give their evidence.

- ❖ After introductions, the complainant is invited to explain their complaint, and be followed by their witness.
- ❖ The headteacher may question both the complainant and the witness after each has spoken.
- ❖ The headteacher is then invited to explain the School's actions and be followed by the School's witness.
- ❖ The complainant may question both the headteacher and the witness after each has spoken.
- ❖ The Committee may ask questions at any point.
- ❖ The complainant is then invited to sum up their complaint.
- ❖ The headteacher is then invited to sum up the School's actions and response to the complaint.
- ❖ Both parties leave together while the Committee decides on the issues.
- ❖ The chair explains that both parties will hear from the Committee within a set time scale.

6. HOW TO COMPLAIN

- 6.1 Education Matters:** If the concern relates to the classroom, the curriculum or special educational needs, please speak or write to the Deputy Headteacher (Curriculum).
- 6.2 Pastoral Care:** If the concern relates to matters outside the classroom, please speak or write to the Deputy Headteacher (Pastoral).
- 6.3 Financial Matters:** A concern or complaint about a matter relating to financial matters should be stated in writing to the Business Manager.
- 6.4 Permanent Exclusion:** Parents who are aggrieved by a decision of the Headteacher to permanently exclude a student have the rights of representation and appeal as outlined in the Exclusion Policy (this will be sent to parents of any child permanently excluded).
- 6.5 Other Complaints:** A parent who is dissatisfied with an aspect of the School's policies, procedures, management or administration should write to the Headteacher with details of the complaint. The Headteacher will investigate and will do his best to resolve the dispute. If the parent is dissatisfied with the outcome, he should renew his complaint in writing to the Chair of Governors. The Chair may:
- a delegate the investigation to the Delegated Officer;
 - b convene a panel of Governors to hear the complaint.

The outcome of any complaint will be notified to the parent in writing giving reasons for any decisions.

Thomas Adams School – CF1

COMPLAINTS FORM

This form should be made available on request to any person who wishes to make a complaint. It should be passed to a member of SMT.

- 1. What is the nature of the complaint? (Please tick)**
- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Staff Conduct: | <input type="checkbox"/> Parental Conduct: |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Teaching Standards : | <input type="checkbox"/> Pastoral Care: |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Condition of Premises: | <input type="checkbox"/> Time Tabling: |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Matters of Regime and Routine: | <input type="checkbox"/> Access to or Regulation of Extra Curricular Activities: |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please give details): | |

2. Please give details of your complaint:

Date/s of Incident:

Time/s:

3. If you are complaining about someone's behaviour please give the names of any witnesses to the incident/s:

4. Action Taken:

Name:

Contact Details:

Signed:

Date:

Thomas Adams School

Complaint Form - CF2 (parent to complete)

Please complete and return to the Chair of Governors, who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken. For all sections, please attach additional sheets as necessary.

Your name:	
Pupil's name:	
Your relationship to the pupil:	
Address:	
Postcode:	
Daytime telephone number:	
Evening telephone number:	
Please give details of your complaint.	
What action, if any, have you already taken to try and resolve your complaint? (Who did you speak to and what was the response?)	

What action 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: