



NURTURE **ASPIRATION** **EQUALITY**
INCLUSION **CREATIVITY**

Meridian Primary School Complaints Procedure

Reviewed and ratified by Governors March 2023. To be reviewed March 2024.

1. Introduction

At Meridian our values underpin all our work - we work hard to maintain our friendly and inclusive learning community which values individuality and celebrates differences. We strive to ensure that children are happy, safe and secure in school and we are committed to working in partnership with all members of our school community. However, in any school, parents/carers or a member of the public may occasionally feel concerned about something or have a complaint. This document explains how you can voice a concern or complaint - we are committed to listening to you.

2. Who can make a complaint?

This complaints procedure is mainly aimed at parents or carers of children who are registered at the school, but it is not limited to them. Any member of the public may make a complaint to Meridian Primary School about any provision of facilities or services that we provide. Unless complaints are dealt with under separate statutory procedures (such as appeals relating to exclusions or admissions - see point 9), we will use this complaints procedure.

3. The difference between a concern and a complaint

- a) A concern may be defined as '*an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought*'.
- b) A complaint may be defined as '*an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action*'.
- c) It is in everyone's interest that concerns and complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. Many issues can be resolved informally, without the need to use the formal stages of the complaints procedure. Meridian takes concerns seriously and will make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible. We understand however, that there are occasions when people would like to raise their concerns formally. In this case, Meridian will attempt to resolve the issue internally, through the stages outlined within this complaints procedure.

4. How to raise a concern or make a complaint

- a) A concern or complaint can be made in person, in writing or by telephone. They may also be made by a third party acting on behalf of a complainant, as long as they have appropriate

consent to do so.

- b) In most cases, concerns can be dealt with informally by raising the issue with a child's class teacher. The member of staff may feel it appropriate to refer the complainant to a more senior member of staff who will try to resolve the concern informally. The matter may also be referred directly to the Head of School or Executive Headteacher at any time.
- c) If the issue remains unresolved, the complainant may raise their complaint formally - this is called Stage 1 of the procedure. The procedure for making a formal complaint is outlined below beginning on page 4 of this document.
- d) Complainants should not approach individual governors to raise concerns or complaints. They have no power to act on an individual basis and it may also prevent them from considering complaints at Stage 2 of the procedure.
- e) Complaints against school staff (except the Executive Headteacher) should be made in the first instance, to Jo Graham, the Executive Headteacher via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.
- f) Complaints that involve or are about the Executive Headteacher should be addressed to Maggie Shields, the Chair of Governors, via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.
- g) Complaints about the Chair of Governors, any individual governor or the whole governing body should be addressed to Karen Hennessey (the Clerk to the Governing Body) via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.
- h) In accordance with equality law, we will consider making reasonable adjustments if required, to enable complainants to access and complete this complaints procedure. For instance, providing information in alternative formats, assisting complainants in raising a formal complaint or holding meetings in accessible locations.

5. Anonymous complaints

We will not normally investigate anonymous complaints. However, the Executive Headteacher or Chair of Governors, if appropriate, will determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation.

6. Duplicate complaints

If, after closing a complaint at the end of the complaints procedure, we receive a duplicate complaint from a spouse, a partner, a grandparent or a child not attending this school, we will remind them that we have already considered the complaint and the local process is complete. Complainants will be advised to contact the DfE if they are dissatisfied with our handling of the complaint.

7. Complaint campaigns

If we receive what we consider to be a large volume of complaints, all based on the same subject

and possibly from complainants not connected to the school, then we will treat these complaints as being part of a campaign and respond in one of the following two ways, depending upon the nature and scale of the complaint:

- send the same response to all complainants; or
- publish a single response on the school's website.

8. Time scales

You must raise the complaint within three months of the incident or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within three months of the last of these incidents. We will consider complaints made outside of this time frame if exceptional circumstances apply.

9. Complaints received outside of term time

We will consider complaints made outside of term time to have been received on the first school day after the holiday period.

10. Scope of this Complaints Procedure

- a) The Meridian complaints procedure covers all complaints about any provision of community facilities or services by Meridian, other than complaints that are dealt with under other statutory procedures, including those listed below:

Concerns about...	Are dealt with...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Admissions to schools • Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs • School re-organisation proposals 	By the Royal Borough of Greenwich
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child Protection 	Under our child protection and safeguarding policy and in accordance with relevant statutory guidance.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exclusion of children from school 	Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at: www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions .
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complaints about services provided by other providers who may use school premises or facilities 	Providers should have their own complaints procedure to deal with complaints about service. Please contact them directly.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Curriculum - content 	Please contact the Department for Education at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Religious Education and Collective Worship 	Local Authority, Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Whistleblowing 	Our internal whistleblowing procedure for all our employees, including temporary staff and contractors.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff grievances 	Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the school's internal grievance procedures.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff conduct 	Complaints about staff will be dealt with under the school's internal disciplinary procedures, if appropriate. Complainants will not be informed of any disciplinary action taken against a staff member as a result of a complaint. However, the complainant will be notified that the matter is being addressed.

- b) If other bodies are investigating aspects of the complaint, for example the police, Local Authority (LA) safeguarding teams Tribunal, or OfSTED, this may impact on our ability to adhere to the timescales within this procedure, or result in the procedure being suspended until those public bodies have completed their investigations.
- c) If a complainant commences legal action against Meridian Primary School in the relation to their complaint, we will consider whether to suspend the complaints procedure in relation to their complaint, until those legal proceedings have concluded.

11. Formal Complaints Procedure - Stage 1

- a) In most cases, concerns or complaints can be dealt with informally but if the issue remains unresolved, the complainant may raise their complaint formally.
- b) A formal complaint will be made in writing where possible, and for ease of use, there is a form at the end of this policy that you can use if you choose to do so (page 10). If you require help in completing the form, please contact the school office.
- c) The date the complaint is received will be recorded and the Head of School or EXecutive Headteacher will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 5 school days.
- d) The Head of School or Executive Headteacher will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, ask what remains unresolved and what outcome the complainant would like to see. She can consider whether a face to face meeting is the most appropriate way of doing this.
- e) The Head of School or Executive Headteacher may delegate the investigation to another member of the school's senior leadership team but not the decision to be

taken.

- f) During the investigation, the Head of School or Executive Headteacher (or investigator) will:
- if necessary, interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish
 - keep a written record of any meetings/interviews in relation to their investigation.
- g) At the conclusion of their investigation, the Head of School or Executive Headteacher will provide a formal written response within 10 school days of the date of receipt of the complaint. If the Head of School/Executive Headteacher is unable to meet this deadline, they will provide the complainant with an update and revised response date.
- h) The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions Meridian will take to resolve the complaint.
- i) The Head of School/Executive Headteacher will advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 1.
- j) If the complaint is about the Executive Headteacher, or a member of the governing body (including the Chair or Vice-Chair), a suitably skilled governor will be appointed to complete all the actions at Stage 1.
- k) If the complaint is jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair, or the entire governing body, or the majority of the governing body, Stage 1 will be considered by an independent investigator appointed by the governing body. This will usually be a member of one of the governing bodies within the Greenwich Community Schools Partnership (GCSP) whom Meridian collaborates with. At the conclusion of their investigation, the independent investigator will provide a formal written response.

12. Formal Complaints Procedure - Stage 2

- a) If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome at Stage 1 and wishes to take the matter further, they can escalate the complaint to Stage 2 - a meeting with members of the governing body, which will be formed of three, impartial governors. This is the final stage of the complaints procedure.
- b) A request to escalate to Stage 2 must be made to the Clerk, via the school office, within 10 school days of receipt of the Stage 1 response. Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.
- c) The Clerk will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 3 school days.
- d) The Clerk will write to the complainant to inform them of the date, time and venue of the

meeting. They will aim to convene a meeting within 10 school days of receipt of the Stage 2 request. If this is not possible, the Clerk will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed.

- e) If the complainant rejects the offer of three proposed dates, without good reason, the Clerk will decide when to hold the meeting. It will then proceed in the complainant's absence on the basis of written submissions from both parties.
- f) The complaints committee will consist of three governors with no prior involvement or knowledge of the complaint. Prior to the meeting, they will decide amongst themselves who will act as the Chair of the Complaints Committee. If there are fewer than three governors from Meridian available, the Clerk will source any additional, independent governors from one of the collaborating schools, in order to make up the committee. Alternatively, the Clerk may convene an entirely independent committee to hear the complaint at Stage 2.
- g) The committee will decide whether to deal with the complaint by inviting parties to a meeting or through written representations, but in making their decision they will be sensitive to the complainant's needs.
- h) If the complainant is invited to attend the meeting, they may bring someone along to provide support. This can be a relative or friend. If a school employee is invited to attend as a witness, they may bring someone along to provide support. This may be a friend or a union representative. Other members of the public and representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.
- i) Note: Complaints about staff conduct will not generally be handled under this complaints procedure. Complainants will be advised that any staff conduct complaints will be considered under staff disciplinary procedures, if appropriate, but outcomes will not be shared with them.
- j) The Clerk will:
 - confirm and notify the complainant of the date and time of the meeting, ensuring that, if the complainant is invited, the dates are convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible
 - request copies of any further written material to be submitted to the committee at least 5 school days before the meeting. (Additional papers will not be accepted at the meeting.)
- k) Any written material will be circulated to all parties before the date of the meeting. The committee will not accept, as evidence, recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.
- l) The committee will also not review any new complaints at this stage or consider evidence unrelated to the initial complaint to be included. New complaints must be dealt with from Stage 1 of the procedure.

- m) The meeting will be held in private. Electronic recordings of meetings or conversations are not permitted unless a complainant's own disability or special needs require it. Prior knowledge and consent of all parties attending must be sought before meetings or conversations take place. Consent will be recorded in any minutes taken.
- n) The committee will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented. The committee can:
 - uphold the complaint in whole or in part
 - dismiss the complaint in whole or in part.
- o) If the complaint is upheld in whole or in part, the committee will:
 - decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint
 - where appropriate, recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future.
- p) The Chair of the Committee will provide the complainant and Meridian's Leadership Team with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within 10 school days.
- q) The letter to the complainant will include details of how to contact the Department for Education if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled by Meridian.
- r) If the complaint is jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair, or the entire governing body, or the majority of the governing body, stage 2 will be heard by a committee of independent governors. The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions Meridian will take to resolve the complaint. The response will also advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied.

13. Next Steps

- a) If the complainant believes the school did not handle their complaint in accordance with the published complaints procedure or they acted unlawfully or unreasonably in the exercise of their duties under education law, they can contact the Department for Education after they have completed Stage 2.
- b) The Department for Education will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by Meridian. They will consider whether Meridian has adhered to education legislation and any statutory policies connected with the complaint.
- c) The complainant can refer their complaint to the Department for Education online at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus, by telephone on: 0370 000 2288 or by writing to:
Department for Education

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester M1
2WD.

14. Roles and Responsibilities

Complainant

The complainant will receive a more effective response to the complaint if they:

- explain the complaint in full as early as possible
- cooperate with the school in seeking a solution to the complaint
- respond promptly to requests for information or meetings or in agreeing the details of the complaint
- ask for assistance as needed
- treat all those involved in the complaint with respect
- refrain from publicising the details of their complaint on social media and respect confidentiality.

Investigator

The investigator's role is to establish the facts relevant to the complaint by:

- providing a comprehensive, open, transparent and fair consideration of the complaint through:
 - sensitive and thorough interviewing of the complainant to establish what has happened and who has been involved
 - interviewing staff and children and other people relevant to the complaint
 - consideration of records and other relevant information
 - analysing information
- liaising with the complainant and the complaints co-ordinator as appropriate to clarify what the complainant feels would put things right.

The investigator should:

- conduct interviews with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning
- keep notes of interviews or arrange for an independent note taker to record minutes of the meeting
- ensure that any papers produced during the investigation are kept securely pending any appeal
- be mindful of the timescales to respond

- prepare a comprehensive report for the Head of School/Executive Headteacher or complaints committee that sets out the facts, identifies solutions and recommends courses of action to resolve problems.

The Head of School/Executive Headteacher or complaints committee will then determine whether to uphold or dismiss the complaint and communicate that decision to the complainant, providing the appropriate escalation details.

Complaints Co-ordinator (this could be the Head of School/Executive Headteacher / designated complaints governor or other staff member providing administrative support)

The complaints co-ordinator should:

- ensure that the complainant is fully updated at each stage of the procedure
- liaise with staff members, Head of School/Executive Headteacher, Chair of Governors, Clerk and LA (if appropriate) to ensure the smooth running of the complaints procedure
- be aware of issues regarding:
 - o sharing third party information
 - o additional support. This may be needed by complainants when making a complaint including interpretation support or where the complainant is a child or young person
- keep records.

Clerk to the Governing Body

The Clerk is the contact point for the complainant and the committee and should:

- ensure that all people involved in the complaint procedure are aware of their legal rights and duties, including any under legislation relating to school complaints, education law, the Equality Act 2010, the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act (DPA) 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)
- set the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that the dates are convenient to all parties (if they are invited to attend) and that the venue and proceedings are accessible
- collate any written material relevant to the complaint (for example, stage 1 paperwork, school and complainant submissions) and send it to the parties in advance of the meeting within an agreed timescale
- record the proceedings
- circulate the minutes of the meeting
- notify all parties of the committee's decision.

Committee Chair

The committee's chair, who is nominated in advance of the complaint meeting, should ensure that:

- both parties are asked (via the Clerk) to provide any additional information relating to the complaint by a specified date in advance of the meeting
- the meeting is conducted in an informal manner, is not adversarial, and that, if all parties are invited to attend, everyone is treated with respect and courtesy
- complainants who may not be used to speaking at such a meeting are put at ease. This is particularly important if the complainant is a child
- the remit of the committee is explained to the complainant
- written material is seen by everyone in attendance, provided it does not breach confidentiality or any individual's rights to privacy under the DPA 2018 or GDPR. If a new issue arises it would be useful to give everyone the opportunity to consider and comment upon it; this may require a short adjournment of the meeting
- both the complainant and the school are given the opportunity to make their case and seek clarity, either through written submissions ahead of the meeting or verbally in the meeting itself
- the issues are addressed
- key findings of fact are made
- the committee is open-minded and acts independently
- no member of the committee has an external interest in the outcome of the proceedings or any involvement in an earlier stage of the procedure
- the meeting is minuted
- they liaise with the Clerk (and complaints co-ordinator, if the school has one).

Committee Member

Committee members should be aware that:

- the meeting must be independent and impartial, and should be seen to be so
No governor may sit on the committee if they have had a prior involvement in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it.
- the aim of the meeting should be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant
We recognise that the complainant might not be satisfied with the outcome if the meeting does not find in their favour. It may only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations.
- many complainants will feel nervous and inhibited in a formal setting
Parents/carers often feel emotional when discussing an issue that affects their child.
- extra care needs to be taken when the complainant is a child and present during all or

part of the meeting

Careful consideration of the atmosphere and proceedings should ensure that the child does not feel intimidated.

The committee should respect the views of the child and give them equal consideration to those of adults.

If the child is the complainant, the committee should ask in advance if any support is needed to help them present their complaint. Where the child's parent is the complainant, the committee should give the parent the opportunity to say which parts of the meeting, if any, the child needs to attend.

However, the parent should be advised that agreement might not always be possible if the parent wishes the child to attend a part of the meeting that the committee considers is not in the child's best interests.

- the welfare of the child is paramount.

Meridian policy for managing serial and unreasonable complaints

- a) Meridian Primary School is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, and to providing a high quality service to those who complain. We will not normally limit the contact complainants have with our school. However, we do not expect our staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour and will take action to protect staff from that behaviour, including that which is abusive, offensive or threatening.
- b) Meridian Primary School defines unreasonable behaviour as that which hinders our consideration of complaints because of the frequency or nature of the complainant's contact with the school, such as, if the complainant:
 - refuses to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcomes sought by raising the complaint, despite offers of assistance
 - refuses to cooperate with the complaints investigation process
 - refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of the complaints procedure
 - insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the complaints procedure or with good practice
 - introduces trivial or irrelevant information which they expect to be taken into account and commented on
 - raises large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions, and insists they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales
 - makes unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues, and seeks to have them replaced
 - changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds
 - repeatedly makes the same complaint (despite previous investigations or responses concluding that the complaint is groundless or has been addressed)
 - refuses to accept the findings of the investigation into that complaint where the school's complaint procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed including referral to the Department for Education
 - seeks an unrealistic outcome
 - makes excessive demands on school time by frequent, lengthy and complicated contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with
 - uses threats to intimidate
 - uses abusive, offensive or discriminatory language or violence
 - knowingly provides falsified information

- publishes unacceptable information on social media or other public forums.
- c) Complainants should try to limit their communication with the school that relates to their complaint, while the complaint is being progressed. It is not helpful if repeated correspondence is sent (either by letter, phone, email or text), as it could delay the outcome being reached.