



STEPNEY GREEN

MATHS, COMPUTING & SCIENCE COLLEGE

COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

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Introduction

This policy sets out the way in which Stepney Green Maths & Computing College will deal with complaints in accordance with section 29 of the Education Act 2002 and part 7 of the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

It is in the interest of everyone that all parties involved in any complaint conduct themselves in a professional, courteous and respectful manner at all times. Complaints should be dealt with promptly, at all stages.

Who can make a complaint?

This complaints procedure is not limited to parents or carers of children that are registered at Stepney Green Maths & Computing College. Any person, including members of the public, may make a complaint to Stepney Green Maths & Computing College 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), we will use this complaints procedure.

The difference between a concern and a complaint

A concern may be defined as *'an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought'*.

A complaint may be defined as *'an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action'*.

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. Stepney Green Maths & Computing College takes concerns seriously and will make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.

How to raise a concern or make a complaint – informal

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.

Your first step should be to make an appointment to speak to the class teacher about your concern. Third party complainants should speak to the appropriate member of business support staff (eg: office manager, business manager, finance officer). It is best to resolve issues at this point.

A class teacher should offer an appointment to discuss the issue as quickly as possible, as this will give both parties time to talk about it calmly and politely without being interrupted. The parties involved should be encouraged to offer their view of what would be a realistic resolution to the problem.

If you have difficulty discussing a concern with a particular member of staff, we will respect your views. In these cases, the Headteacher will refer you to another staff member. Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels unable to deal with a concern, the Headteacher will refer you to another staff member. The member of staff may be more senior but does not have to be. The ability to consider the concern objectively and impartially is more important.

If you are dissatisfied with the result of the discussions with the class teacher/business support staff, you should ask for an appointment to meet with the Headteacher or a senior member of staff. The aim should be that discussions end on a positive note with no bad feeling. The Headteacher/senior member of staff should write a letter to parents summarising what has been agreed regarding the issue within 10 school days of the meeting.

If the issue remains unresolved, the next step is to make a formal complaint.

How to raise a concern or make a complaint – formal

We understand that there are occasions when people would like to raise their concerns formally. In this case, Stepney Green Maths & Computing College will attempt to resolve the issue internally, through the stages outlined within this complaints procedure.

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.

Complaints against school staff (except the Headteacher) should be made in the first instance, to the Headteacher via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Complaints that involve or are about the Headteacher should be addressed to the Chair of Governors, via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

You must write a letter of complaint which sets out clearly the issues which have previously been discussed and why you consider the issue to be unresolved. The letter should also outline the resolution which you are seeking.

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.

Anonymous complaints

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

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.

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.

Scope of this Complaints Procedure

This procedure covers all complaints about any provision of community facilities or services by Stepney Green Maths & Computing College, other than complaints that are dealt with under other statutory procedures, including those listed below:

| Exceptions | Who to contact |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Admissions to schools • Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs | <p>Concerns about admissions, statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs, should be raised with: www.towerhamlets.gov.uk</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation | <p>Complaints about child protection matters are handled under our child protection and safeguarding policy and in accordance with relevant statutory guidance.</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exclusion of children from school* | <p>Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at: www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions.</p> <p><i>*complaints about the application of the behaviour policy can be made through the school's complaints procedure.</i></p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whistleblowing | <p>We have an internal whistleblowing procedure for all our employees, including temporary staff and contractors.</p> <p>The Secretary of State for Education is the prescribed person for matters relating to education for whistleblowers in education who do not want to raise matters direct with their employer. Referrals can be made at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus.</p> <p>Volunteer staff who have concerns about our school should complain through the school's complaints procedure. You may also be able to complain direct to the LA or the Department for Education (see link above), depending on the substance of your complaint.</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff grievances | <p>Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the school's internal grievance procedures.</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff conduct | <p>Complaints about staff will be dealt with under the school's internal disciplinary procedures, if appropriate.</p> <p>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.</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complaints about services provided by other providers who may use school premises or facilities | <p>Providers should have their own complaints procedure to deal with complaints about service. Please contact them direct.</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Curriculum - content | <p>Please contact the Department for Education at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus</p> |

If other bodies are investigating aspects of the complaint, for example the police, local authority (LA) safeguarding teams or Tribunals, 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.

If a complainant commences legal action against Stepney Green Maths & Computing College in relation to their complaint, we will consider whether to suspend the complaints procedure in relation to their complaint until those legal proceedings have concluded.

Resolving complaints

At each stage in the procedure, Stepney Green Maths & Computing College wants to resolve the complaint. If appropriate, we will acknowledge that the complaint is upheld in whole or in part. In addition, we may offer one or more of the following:

- an explanation
- an admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better
- an assurance that we will try to ensure the event complained of will not recur
- an explanation of the steps that have been or will be taken to help ensure that it will not happen again and an indication of the timescales within which any changes will be made
- an undertaking to review school policies in light of the complaint
- an apology.

Withdrawal of a Complaint

If a complainant wants to withdraw their complaint, we will ask them to confirm this in writing.

Formal Complaint - Stage 1

Formal complaints must be made to the Headteacher (unless they are about the Headteacher), via the school office. This may be done in person, in writing, or by telephone.

The Headteacher will record the date the complaint is received and will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 5 school days.

Within this response, the Headteacher will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, ask what remains unresolved and what outcome the complainant would like to see. The Headteacher can consider whether a face to face meeting is the most appropriate way of doing this.

Note: The Headteacher may delegate the investigation to another member of the school's senior leadership team but not the decision to be taken.

During the investigation, the 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.

At the conclusion of their investigation, the Headteacher will provide a formal written response within 20 school days of the date of receipt of the complaint.

If the Headteacher is unable to meet this deadline, they will provide the complainant with an update and revised response date.

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 Stepney Green Maths & Computing College will take to resolve the complaint.

The Headteacher will advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 1.

Formal Complaint - Stage 2

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 – The Governing Body will arrange for the complaint to be heard by a panel consisting of three people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint. Two members of the panel will be Governors while the third panel member will be independent of the management and running of Stepney Green School. Stepney Green School will identify suitably independent individuals who can fulfil the role and responsibility of being the independent member of the panel. This panel should be set up when needed. This is the final stage of the complaints procedure.

A request to escalate to Stage 2 must be made to the Chair of Governors, within 10 school days of receipt of the Stage 1 response.

The Chair of Governors will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 5 school days.

Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.

The Chair of Governors will write to the complainant to inform them of the date of the meeting. They will aim to convene a meeting within 15 school days of receipt of the Stage 2 request. If this is not possible, the Chair of Governors will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed.

If the complainant rejects the offer of three proposed dates, without good reason, the Chair of Governors 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.

The complainant and Headteacher will be invited to attend the meeting to give a verbal statement in support of their documentation. Each of them may bring someone along to provide support but this person will not be allowed to contribute to the meeting. This can be a relative or friend. Generally, we do not encourage either party to bring legal representatives to the panel hearing. However, there may be occasions when legal representation is appropriate. For instance, if a school employee is called as a witness in a complaint meeting, they may wish to be supported by union and/or legal representation.

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.

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

At least 7 school days before the meeting, the Clerk will:

- confirm and notify the complainant of the date, time and venue 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 panel at least 5 school days before the meeting.

Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least 5 school days before the date of the meeting. The panel will not normally accept, as evidence, recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.

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.

The meeting will be held in private. Electronic recordings of meetings or conversations are not normally 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.

The panel will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented. The panel can:

- uphold the complaint in whole or in part
- dismiss the complaint in whole or in part.

If the complaint is upheld in whole or in part, the panel 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.

When the evidence has been fully considered and a decision made, the Chair of the panel will notify in writing the complainant, the Headteacher and where relevant the person complained about, of the outcome, giving an explanation of the conclusion, the reason for it, and any action taken, including details of any request made of those complained against to take particular actions in respect of the complaint. This will be done as quickly as possible but within a maximum of 10 school days. The decision of the panel hearing is final.

The findings and recommendations of the panel will be available for inspection on the school premises by the proprietor and the Headteacher. A written record will be kept of all complaints, along with details of whether they were resolved following a formal procedure, or progression to a panel hearing. Actions taken as a result of complaints, regardless of whether they are upheld or not, will be recorded.

The letter to the complainant will include details of how to contact the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled by Stepney Green Maths & Computing College.

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 panel of local governors from another academy within the Trust.

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 Stepney Green Maths & Computing College will take to resolve the complaint.

The response will also advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied.

Next Steps

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 Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) after they have completed Stage 2.

The Role of the ESFA

It is the responsibility of academies to make sure that their complaints procedure is fully compliant. ESFA's responsibility is to ensure academies comply with their funding agreements.

If a complaint comes to ESFA they will check whether the complaint has been dealt with properly by the academy. They will consider complaints about academies that fall into any of the following three areas:

1. Where there is undue delay or the academy did not comply with its own complaints procedure when considering a complaint
2. Where the academy is in breach of its funding agreement with the Secretary of State
3. Where an academy has failed to comply with any other legal obligation

ESFA will not overturn an academy's decision about a complaint. However, if they find an academy did not deal with a complaint properly, they will request the complaint is looked at again and procedures meet the requirements set out in the regulations.

If the academy's complaints procedure does not meet the regulations, ESFA will ask the academy to put this right.

If a complainant wants ESFA to consider whether their complaint has been dealt with properly by an academy, they must use the online enquiry form and tick the box that says complaint:

https://form.education.gov.uk/en/AchieveForms/?form_uri=sandbox-publish://AF-Process-f1453496-7d8a-463f-9f33-1da2ac47ed76/AF-Stage-1e64d4cc-25fb-499a-a8d7-74e98203ac00/definition.json&redirectlink=%2Fen&cancelRedirectLink=%2Fen

Extracurricular activities

The governing body should ensure that any third party provider offering activities and services through the extended schools programme has their own complaints procedure in place. Governors would need to have a discussion around, and make a decision about, what happens when the third party provider's complaints process is exhausted and the matter is not resolved and whether it should then be referred to a Complaints Panel. This would ensure that the Governors are kept aware of complaints about provision.

Managing Serial and Unreasonable Complaints

It is important to distinguish between people who make a number of complaints because they really think things have gone wrong, and people who are being difficult. Complainants can be frustrated and aggrieved and it is therefore important to consider the merits of the case rather than their attitude.

Stepney Green Maths & Computing College 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.

Stepney Green Maths & Computing College 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 co-operate 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 ESFA
- 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.

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.

Whenever possible, the Headteacher or Chair of Governors will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying an 'unreasonable' marking.

If the behaviour continues, the Headteacher will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and ask them to change it. For complainants who excessively contact Stepney Green Maths & Computing College causing a significant level of disruption, we may specify methods of communication and limit the number of contacts in a communication plan. This will be reviewed after six months.

In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, we will immediately inform the police and communicate our actions in writing. This may include barring an individual from Stepney Green Maths & Computing College.

Correspondence

All correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential, except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the 2008 Act requests access to them.

Review

This policy will be reviewed annually by the Full Governing Body.

Appendix 1: 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
- co-operate with the academy 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:
 - o sensitive and thorough interviewing of the complainant to establish what has happened and who has been involved
 - o interviewing staff and children/young people and other people relevant to the complaint
 - o consideration of records and other relevant information
 - o 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 Headteacher or complaints committee that sets out the facts, identifies solutions and recommends courses of action to resolve problems. The 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 Headteacher / Chair of Governors / 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, Headteacher and Chair of Governors 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.

Chair of Governors

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
- arrange for the proceedings to be clerked
- circulate the minutes of the meeting
- notify all parties of the committee's decision.

Panel Chair

The Panel's chair, who is nominated in advance of the panel hearing, should ensure that:

- both parties are asked (via the Chair of Governors) 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/young person
- 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/Chair of governors.

Panel Member

Panel 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 panel 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/young person and present during all or part of the meeting
- the welfare of the child/young person is paramount.

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

The panel should respect the views of the child/young person and give them equal consideration to those of adults.

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

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

Appendix 2: Panel Hearing Meeting Procedure

During the meeting:

- The complainant and Headteacher (or his/her representative) should provide all the relevant information they wish and the panel members should clarify any points. After the complainant and Headteacher (or his/her representative) have provided all the information they wish, the chair will ask all parties to leave except the panel members and the clerk.
- Although this is a formal meeting, every effort should be made to make it as informal as possible for all concerned.
- Everyone attending should be in the room at the same time.
- Consideration may need to be given to the seating arrangements to make everyone feel equal and comfortable.
- The clerk should take notes of the meeting, listing who is present: Members of the panel, stating who is the chair of the panel, the Headteacher (or his/her representative) and any other members of Academy staff, the Parents/third party members and anyone accompanying them eg friend, the Clerk.
- The chair of the panel should open the meeting stating the purpose and the format of the meeting to clarify this to all in attendance.
- People present should introduce themselves stating their reason for being at the meeting.
- The chair of the panel should request a verbal statement from the complainant in support of his or her written letter of complaint and why s/he feels the issue has not been resolved. The panel members can ask questions to make sure they understand the issue from the complainant's point of view.
- The chair of the panel should request a verbal statement from the Headteacher (or her representative) in support of his/her written account of the complaint and the steps taken to resolve the issue. The panel members can ask questions to make sure they understand the issue from the Headteacher's point of view.
- The members of the panel should make sure they fully understand the issues and ask any further questions to clarify any points that are still not clear to them.
- The chair of the panel must ask the complainant and the Headteacher (or his/her representative) if they are satisfied that they have provided all the information they wanted or if there is something they wish to add and if they feel they have had a fair hearing.
- When the panel members understand all the issues, the chair will ask all parties to leave except the panel members and the clerk.

After the meeting:

- The panel members then discuss the issues in private and the clerk remains to record the decision.
- The panel members will need to consider the information then come to a decision and suggest a way to resolve the issue, taking into account the best interests of the child or children.
- When the panel has reached a decision the Clerk will inform everyone concerned in writing, as soon as possible, but in any event, within 10 working days of the panel meeting.
- The decision of the panel hearing is final.