



The Castle Partnership Trust

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The Castle School
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Suggestions and Complaints Procedure

March 2020

CEO and Headteacher at The Castle School: Sarah Watson
Acting Headteacher at Court Fields School: Polly Matthews
Headteacher at Wellesley Park School: Carly Wilkins
Headteacher at Isambard Kingdom Brunel School: Richard Healey

Due for review: Spring Term 2021

Introduction

This document advises how to make a complaint or suggestion about any service provided by The Castle Partnership Trust.

We aim to provide many opportunities to keep you informed and involved in your child's progress. Co-operation between parents, staff and governors leads to a shared sense of purpose and good atmosphere in the school. However, sometimes misunderstandings arise but these can usually be sorted out by speaking to the right person. Your concern can then be looked into and a response given.

What should I do first?

Be clear what you want to talk to the school about. Remember that although you may want to change a situation, you want it to end on a positive note with no bad feelings. Because of this, you should try to follow the process and not back yourself, or anyone else, into a corner. Talking with the school can help you to understand how we see the situation and give you the chance to say what it looks like to you.

Although some schools can see parents who just "pop in", this is not generally possible. If you have a concern, please make an appointment so you have enough time to talk things through.

Raising Concerns - who should I contact?

That depends on the particular situation. Often the teacher is able to deal with the matter. More serious issues will require a senior member of staff or the Headteacher. Mutual courtesy is expected and ensures things go smoothly. There should always be discussion in the hope of solving difficulties informally. Most problems are solved in this way.

What if I am still unhappy? (Stage 1)

Ask for an appointment with the Headteacher at your child's school (or the Headteacher's nominee).

It may help to give some times when you are free, to assist us to make a mutually convenient appointment. Do try to be patient, as every effort will be made to see you as soon as possible. If your child has special educational needs you may want to contact Somerset Parent Partnership (an independent advisory service) to talk about your concerns (01823 355578).

Before attending the meeting, it would be useful for you to put your concerns down in writing. We can then focus on finding a solution. When attending the appointment you may wish to bring a friend or family member with you.

What should I expect to happen as a result of the meeting?

After the meeting, there may be a need for the Headteacher (or the Headteacher's nominee) to undertake further investigations in order to make an informed decision and help achieve resolution. The Headteacher (or the Headteacher's nominee) will write to you outlining the investigation and giving details of any action (if appropriate) to be taken within a mutually agreed timescale.

What if I feel the Head or her nominee hasn't answered my question or investigated my query?

If you are still unhappy you may, if you wish, ask to meet with the Chair of Governors (if the Chair of Governors is unavailable, the Vice-Chair will usually take their place).

What will I need to do? (Stage 2)

Contact the Clerk to the Governors, giving details of your complaint in writing and requesting a meeting with the Chair of Governors (or their representative). You will receive a written response within 20 school days of the date of your meeting.

What if I am still unhappy?

You can ask the Local Governing Body to hold a review. This is a formal process.

What will I need to do? (Stage 3)

Write to the Clerk to the Governors within 10 school days of receiving the Chair of Governors' response stating that you wish to make a formal complaint. Make it clear what it is you are complaining about and what you would like the Governors to do. If it will help you, we can give you a form that can be used for this purpose. You cannot introduce new or different complaints at this stage.

What will happen next?

A panel, comprising two Local Governing Body Governors/Directors of the Trust and one person independent from the management and operation of the Trust (all of whom have not been directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint), will undertake a review.

The Clerk to the Governors will contact you to arrange a mutually convenient date, time and place for you to meet with the panel and will send you a Governing Body Review Request Form to complete.

You will be invited to meet with the panel within 15 school days to explain your concerns. You may bring a friend if you wish; this could be anyone you think will be able to support you.

After the meeting, the panel will review and/or investigate the school's handling of/response to your complaint, decide if it was appropriate and fair and, if necessary, make recommendations. They may wish to meet with any staff or witnesses who can provide information.

The panel will write to you within 15 school days to explain their decision, giving details of their findings and any recommendations. This decision will usually be final. If the complaint is regarding an individual, the individual will also receive a copy of the panel's findings and recommendations.

What do I do if I'm still unhappy?

If you are still unhappy you may, if you wish, contact the Education & Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) via the Schools Complaints Form on the Department for Education's website:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/complain-about-an-academy>

If you are dissatisfied with the way in which the ESFA handles your complaint, you can contact the Secretary of State for Education.

Remember the whole process exists so that everyone's views can be heard. The aim is that the complaint should be properly and fairly dealt with. Communications with school are welcome and the latter stages of this complaints procedure are rarely used but remain a part of the process.

Complaints about the Headteacher, Directors, Governors or CEO

Where a complaint regards the Headteacher, Directors, Governors or CEO, you should first approach the Headteacher, Director, Governor or CEO in an attempt to resolve the issue informally. If you are not satisfied with this outcome, you should notify the Clerk to the Governors in writing.

The Clerk to the Governors will then contact:

- The Chair of Governors (or Vice-Chair) and CEO for complaints regarding the Headteacher.
- The Chair of Governors (or Vice-Chair) for complaints regarding Governors.
- The Chair of the Trust (or Vice-Chair) for complaints regarding Directors, the Chair of Governors or CEO.

Timeline

Raising Concerns	The relevant member of staff will address your concerns/issues.	The staff member will respond to you within 5 school days.
Stage 1	Investigation by the Head (or nominee).	The Head (or her nominee) will respond to you within 5 school days of having received your complaint. You will receive confirmation of the outcome of their investigation within the timescale you agreed at the meeting.
Stage 2	Investigation by the Chair of Governors (or representative).	The Chair of Governors (or their representative) will endeavour to meet with you within 10 school days of the date of receipt of your complaint. You will receive a written response from the Chair of Governors (or their representative) within 20 school days of the date of your meeting.
Stage 3	Formal review of the complaint by the Local Governing Body.	You should write to the Clerk to Governors within 10 school days of receiving the Chair of Governors' response, stating that you wish to make a formal complaint. You will be invited to meet with the panel within 15 school days of receiving your complaint. The panel will write to you within 15 school days of the meeting to explain their decision.

We will endeavour to abide by the timeframes stated under each stage but, in some circumstances, this may not always be possible. If it becomes apparent that it is not possible to complete any stage of the complaints procedure within the given timeframe, you will be contacted as soon as possible to agree a timeframe that works for all parties involved.

We reserve the right not to investigate complaints that have been made six months after the subject of the complaint took place, except in exceptional circumstances. What is meant by exceptional circumstances is where new evidence has come to light, where the complaint is of an exceptionally serious nature, or where there is reasonable justification for why you have been unable to raise the complaint before this time. The Headteacher will review the situation and decide whether or not to enact the complaints procedure, informing the Chair of Governors of her decision.

Serial or Persistent Complaints and Unreasonable Complainant Behaviour

We are 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 the school, however, we do not expect our staff or governors to tolerate unacceptable behaviour. We will take action to protect staff and Governors from unacceptable behaviour, including that which is abusive, offensive or threatening.

A complaint may be regarded as unreasonable when the person making the complaint:

- 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 while still wishing their complaint to be resolved;
- 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 Trust's complaints procedure or with good practice;
- Introduces trivial or irrelevant information which the complainant expects to be taken into account and commented on, or 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 or similar 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 Trust's complaints 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, complicated and stressful contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with.

A complaint may also be considered unreasonable if the person making the complaint does so either face-to-face, by telephone, in writing or electronically:

- Maliciously;
- Aggressively;
- Using threats, intimidation or violence;
- Using abusive, offensive or discriminatory language;
- Knowing it to be false;
- Using falsified information;
- Publishing unacceptable information in a variety of media such as in social media, websites and newspapers.

In these circumstances, the Chair of Governors will write to the complainant explaining that the behaviour is unreasonable and asking them to change it, or confirming that the complaints procedure has been completed and the matter is closed. For complainants who excessively contact the school or Trust, we may restrict the complainant's access to the school or Trust, e.g. by requesting contact in a particular form, requiring contact to take place with a named person only, or restricting contact to specified days and times.

Incidents of aggression or violence may result in the complainant being banned from the Trust's premises and the school or Trust informing the police.

Record keeping

The Board of Directors and the Headteacher have the authority to inspect a copy of the complaints panel's findings and recommendations, which will be kept on school premises in a secure filing system.

A written record of all formal complaints will be kept, along with details of whether they were resolved following a formal procedure, or progression to a panel hearing. We will record the action taken as a result of a complaint, regardless of whether it was upheld.

Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints are confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under Section 109 of the 2008 Education and Skills Act requests access to them.

Suggestions

If you have a suggestion, please write to the Headteacher at the school, giving details of your name, address, telephone number and the details of your suggestion.

Contact Details

Clerk to the Governors:

Miss J Gregory
Clerk to the Governors
The Castle Partnership Trust
Wellington Road
Taunton
Somerset
TA1 5AU
Tel: 01823 274073 Email: office@castle.somerset.sch.uk

Headteachers:

Mrs P Matthews (Acting Headteacher) Mrs L Chard (PA)
Court Fields School
Mantle Street
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Mrs C Wilkins (Headteacher)
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Tel: 01823 664876 Email: SCH.393@educ.somerset.gov.uk

Mr R Healey (Headteacher)
Isambard Kingdom Brunel School
Thomas Place
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CEO:

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