

GUIDANCE FOR PARENTS : WHAT TO DO WHEN PROBLEMS ARISE?

West Tytherley is committed to encouraging the involvement of parents in the community of the school and in their children's education. One aspect of this commitment is reflected by recognising that, from time to time, things may occur which cause parents concern, and that it is important that parents or children know what steps to take, to make sure that any problems are resolved. These notes are intended to provide guidance to help parents with this process.

WHO SHOULD I TALK TO?

Most concerns can be dealt with most quickly and effectively through informal discussion with members of staff at school. You are always welcome to come into school to discuss any concerns or problems that arise and are encouraged to talk to your child's teacher in the first instance, as the teacher, having knowledge of both the child and events in school, is often the best placed person to help.

WILL WHAT I SAY BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?

You can expect that matters you raise will be treated in confidence, but parents also need to understand that to resolve problems, and find the best way forward, the teacher may have to make further enquiries. When this is the case, you can expect that this will be done with care, and that teachers will be sensitive to how such circumstances may affect your child. This is true for any investigation undertaken by the school, at any time.

WHAT IF IT IS DIFFICULT TO TALK TO MY CHILD'S TEACHER ABOUT MY CONCERN?

Sometimes you may feel that approaching your child's teacher could be awkward, especially if the matter you wish to discuss may affect a member of staff. If this is the case, or if talking to the teacher on a previous occasion does not seem to have resolved a particular problem, you should seek help from the Headteacher. The Headteacher has responsibility for the day-to-day running of the school and will recognise that situations like this can be difficult and sensitive. You can expect the Headteacher to take the appropriate steps to follow up your concerns, and to discuss the outcome with you. Obviously some time needs to be allowed for this to take place, but in most cases the Headteacher will contact you again within a relatively short space of time (ideally within two to three working days).

CAN I TALK TO SOMEBODY WHO IS INDEPENDENT OF THE SCHOOL STAFF?

It is always possible to approach a School Governor with a concern. However, governors will always encourage you to approach the Headteacher first, if you have not already done so. This is because the Headteacher is responsible for the day-to-day running of the school and is therefore best placed to follow up and deal with concerns. The governor will support you in doing this, if you feel that this may be helpful. Or, alternatively, you may wish to ask a friend to help you with this.

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN AN INFORMAL AND A FORMAL COMPLAINT?

Each of the situations above is an example of how concerns may be addressed informally. Good communication and discussion of problems allow issues to be dealt with quickly. The process is verbal and usually only directly involves you, as the parent, and a member of staff or the Headteacher. Dealing with matters informally does not mean that the concerns are not taken seriously, nor that agreed actions will not be followed through.

A complaint becomes formal when you feel that your concern is too serious to be dealt with informally, or when you feel that informal approaches to the school have not been adequately dealt with.

WHAT HAPPENS IF I NEED TO MAKE A FORMAL COMPLAINT?

A formal complaint should be made in writing to the Headteacher and all investigations resulting from this and any responses made by the school will also be documented. If the complaint itself relates to the Headteacher, then the complaint needs to be made in writing to the Chair of the Governing Body (c/o West Tytherley CE Primary School).

Certain types of complaint are already covered by statutory procedures laid down by Hampshire County Council and the Government. These cover complaints about the curriculum, admissions and exclusions of pupils from school. You can expect to receive written acknowledgement of your complaint from the school within three working days of them receiving your letter. If the complaint is covered by a statutory procedure the school will provide you with details of how the procedures work. You will also be offered an opportunity to discuss the process and to provide the school with any further information you think should be considered. This will happen even if your concern falls outside the areas covered by the statutory arrangement, because the school follows similar principles to deal with complaints about other aspects of school life.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

When you receive the formal acknowledgement of your complaint from the Headteacher, you will also be given an estimated date by which you can expect a full response. The Headteacher will provide you with an opportunity to discuss the process and to add any additional information you feel is important. The Headteacher will also take the appropriate steps to investigate the matter, and will keep written records of the investigation.

As soon as the relevant facts have been established, you will receive a written response from the Headteacher, which includes an explanation of the decision that has been reached, the reasons for the decision and the actions that need to be taken to resolve your complaint. The Headteacher may also wish to discuss this with you directly beforehand. You can expect to receive your formal response within ten working days of the original acknowledgement of your complaint. If a delay is anticipated, the school should keep you informed, in writing, of progress and when you are likely to receive details of the outcome of the investigation.

If complaints were made about the actions of the Headteacher, it would be normal for the Chair of the Governing Body to carry out the investigation at this stage.

I STILL FEEL THAT MATTERS HAVE NOT BEEN RESOLVED. WHAT SHOULD I DO?

It is very rare that a complaint will reach this stage, but if it does, the next step in the process will involve an independent and impartial review by a panel from the Governing Body. You should write to the Governing Body, requesting that your complaint proceeds to this stage. Your letter can be sent via the school. However, if you prefer, you may write directly to the Chair or Vice-Chair, whose details are below. They will acknowledge receipt of your complaint and will explain that a panel will meet to review your complaint within ten working days. The panel will consist of three governors who have had no prior involvement in the matter in question. All relevant documents relating to the complaint will be provided to the panel beforehand.

You will receive notification of the date and location that the panel will meet five days in advance of the meeting. You will also be informed that you have the right to go to the meeting and to be accompanied by a friend, legal representative or interpreter. The Headteacher will also be invited to attend the meeting.

Whilst discussions at the meeting will be documented, the meeting will be as informal as possible, with the main aim being to resolve the problem raised and to achieve reconciliation between you and the school. It provides an opportunity for you to explain your complaint and concerns, to the independent panel. There will then be an opportunity for the Headteacher to explain the school's response and for all people present to seek clarification through questions and discussion. Once the discussion has ended, everyone, apart from the panel, will leave the meeting and the panel will review matters and reach its decision.

A written decision on the complaint will be provided to you, and to the school, by the panel, within fifteen working days. You will also be advised of what options are open to you to appeal against the decision, following county guidelines. It is very rare though, that a complaint will need to progress to these stages.

Any communication should be marked 'Private and Confidential' and sent to either :

Mrs Nicola French
Chair of Governors

or

Mr Robert Stratford
Vice Chair of Governors
c/o West Tytherley CE Primary School, The Village, West Tytherley, Salisbury, Wiltshire, SP5 1JX