



School Complaints Policy

Policy Owner: Helen Daniels, Headteacher

Written By: Jo Faulkner, School Business Manager

Approved By: Full Governing Body

Date updated: October 2025

This policy will be reviewed at least every two years.

Our Aim

At Cookham Rise Primary School we take concerns and complaints very seriously and it is our intention that any complaints will be dealt with as efficiently, fairly and quickly as possible and without prejudice. Our aim is to deal with most complaints within ten working days of receipt; however more complex cases may take longer, in which case, new target dates for resolution will be set and notified to the complainant. The complainant will be kept informed of progress throughout. Any complaints will be monitored by the Senior Leadership Team and the Governing Body to ensure the school's processes and practises are improved.

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 generally defined as *'an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action'*.

We respect that there are occasions when complainants will escalate their concerns to be considered as complaints formally through the following complaints procedure.

Who can make a complaint?

Any person, including members of the public, may make a complaint about any provision of facilities or services that the school provides, unless the concern falls outside the scope of the procedure because a separate statutory procedure applies.

The table below outlines concerns and complaints not in scope of the procedure

Table of concerns and complaints not in scope of the school complaints procedure:

Subject of concern/complaint	Procedure to be followed
School Admissions	The admissions appeal process – please see our https://www.rbwm.gov.uk/schools-and-education/school-admission-appeals
Exclusion of Pupils	The exclusion review process – please see https://www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions
Statutory assessment of Special Educational Needs	Concerns should be raised directly with RBWM
Matters likely to require a Child Protection investigation	Please see our Safeguarding Policy
Whistleblowing	The school has a Whistleblowing procedure for employees and volunteers to use. Concerns can also be raised directly with Ofsted by telephone on: 0300 123 3155, via email at: whistleblowing@ofsted.gov.uk or by writing to: WBHL, Ofsted Piccadilly Gate Store Street Manchester M1 2WD. The Department for Education is also a

	prescribed body for whistleblowing in education.
Complaints against school staff.	The complainant will not be informed of outcome(s) of any investigation under the school's internal disciplinary or capability processes.
Staff grievances	The school's internal grievance procedure.
Complaints about third party providers using the school premises or facilities	The third party's complaints procedure.

All other complaints will be handled in accordance with the school's complaints procedure.

Timeframe

The school will not consider any complaints after a three-month period unless exceptional circumstances deem this appropriate.

Serial and persistent complainants

The Governing Board recognises that there may be occasions when, despite all stages of the complaints procedure having been followed, the complainant remains dissatisfied. It acknowledges that it is important for schools to recognise when they really have done everything they can in response to a complaint. It is a poor use of any school's time and resources to reply to repeated letters, emails or telephone calls making substantially the same points.

Therefore, the governors agree that if a complainant tries to re-open the same issue, the Chair of Governors will inform them that the procedure has been completed and that the matter is now closed. If the complainant contacts the school again on the same issue, then the correspondence may be viewed as 'serial' or 'persistent' and the school may choose not to respond.

The decision to stop responding will be in-line with the Department for Education guidance on this aspect. *DfE Best Practice Advice for School Complaints Procedures 2020.*

Unreasonable complainants

Please see our separate policy regarding unreasonable complainants in Appendix 4.

The Cookham Rise school complaints policy has been created in accordance with the Best Practice Advice for School Complaints Procedures (DfE January 2020.)

Cookham Rise Primary School Complaints Procedure

Stage 1 – Informal process to discuss a concern:

In the first instance, please take the opportunity to discuss your concern with the appropriate member of staff, as most problems can be resolved at this stage. If you are a parent, this will normally be your child's teacher. An after-school appointment may need to be made, to ensure that the discussion in regards to your concern can take place in a suitable location, without interruption, and to ensure that sufficient time is available for the full details of your concern to be collected.

If you would have difficulty raising your concern with the class teacher, you may instead choose to raise it in the first instance with the Deputy Headteacher or Headteacher, by booking an appointment via the school office. They will decide whether to refer the concern to an alternative member of staff or to look into it themselves, as appropriate.

The member of staff (or Headteacher) will get back to you as soon as possible, in line with the timescale for Stage 1 (please see Appendix 1).

Stage 2 (Formal Process) – Headteacher's investigation of complaint: If you are not satisfied with the response given at Stage 1, then you may make a formal complaint to the Headteacher. To do this, please put your complaint in writing, using the complaint form in Appendix 2.

The Headteacher will investigate your complaint. This is likely to involve meeting with you, and with others, so the investigation may take a few days. At the end of this process, the Headteacher will respond in writing with her findings and the actions, if any, that will be taken to address any issues found. Response time will be in line with the timescale for Stage 2 (please see Appendix 1.)

If your complaint is about the Headteacher, the Governing Board or individual governor(s), please start the process at Stage 3.

Stage 3 (Formal Process) – Governor investigation of complaint: If you are not satisfied with the response given at Stage 2, or if your complaint is about the Headteacher or (a) governor(s), please write to the clerk of the Governing Body, enclosing a complaint form and any further details you can add, following the outcome of the Stage 2 investigation into your complaint.

The clerk will pass your complaint to the nominated member of the Governing Body (usually the chair or vice-chair) who will investigate the complaint and will respond in writing with his/her findings and the actions, if any, that will be taken to address any issues found. The timescale for the investigation will depend on its nature; however you will be notified if it's likely to take longer than the target 10 working days from acknowledgment of receipt of the complaint by the nominated governor.

Where the facts of the complaint have been clearly established during investigation at Stages 1 and 2, or alternatively at the nominated governor's discretion, the matter may be escalated at this point directly for consideration by the Complaints Appeal Panel (Stage 4 below). For example, this may be the most appropriate course of action in the case of a complaint against a governor or against the Governing Body. The Governing Body may co-opt governors from other schools to either investigate or to serve on a Complaint Review Panel as required.

Stage 4 (final school-based stage) – consideration by the Governing Body’s Complaint Review Panel:

If you are not satisfied by the response given by the nominated governor at Stage 3, then you may appeal by writing to the clerk of the Governing Body inside the timescale specified in Appendix 1. The Governing Body will then convene a panel to consider the complaint.

There is further information on the Complaint Review Panel meeting in Appendix 3.

Further rights of appeal:

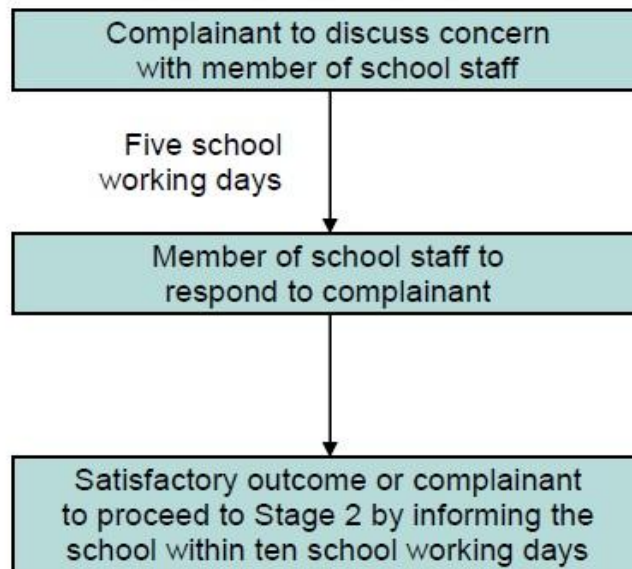
If you remain dissatisfied, you have the right to refer your complaint to the Secretary of State. The Secretary of State has a duty to consider all complaints raised but will only intervene where the governing body has acted unlawfully or unreasonably and where it is expedient or practical to do so. Please address your correspondence to

Department for Education
School Complaints Unit
2nd Floor, Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

APPENDIX 1: TARGET TIMESCALES FOR COMPLAINTS:

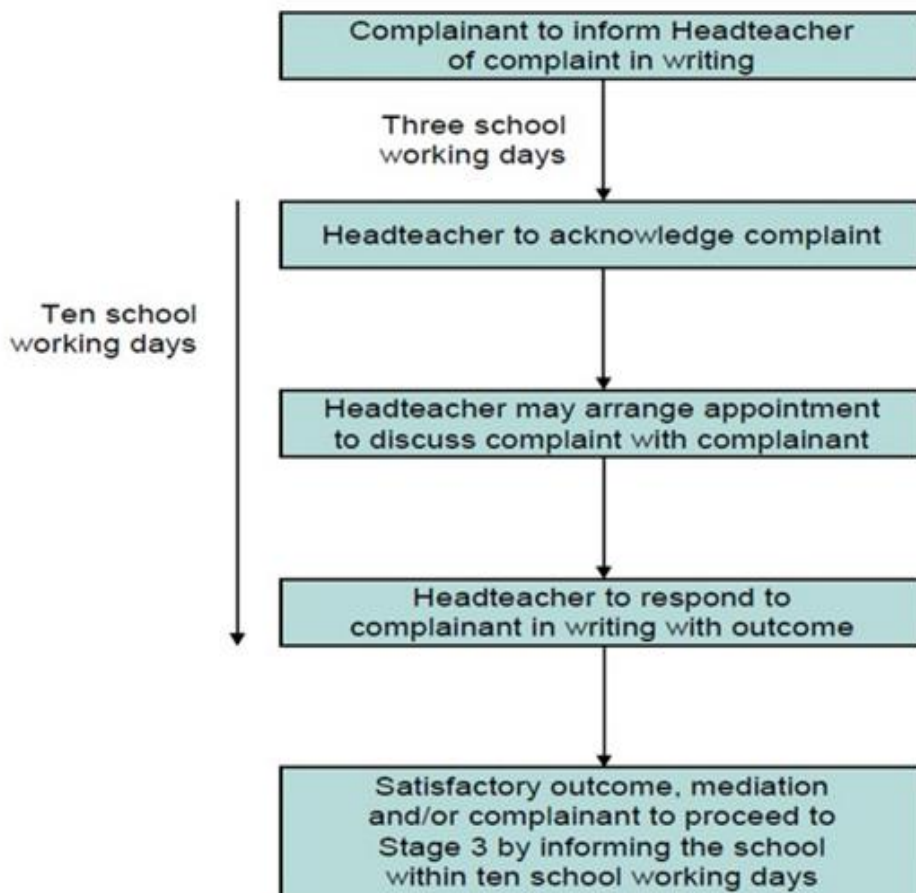
Stage 1: Informal process to discuss concern.

Discuss concern with member of school staff



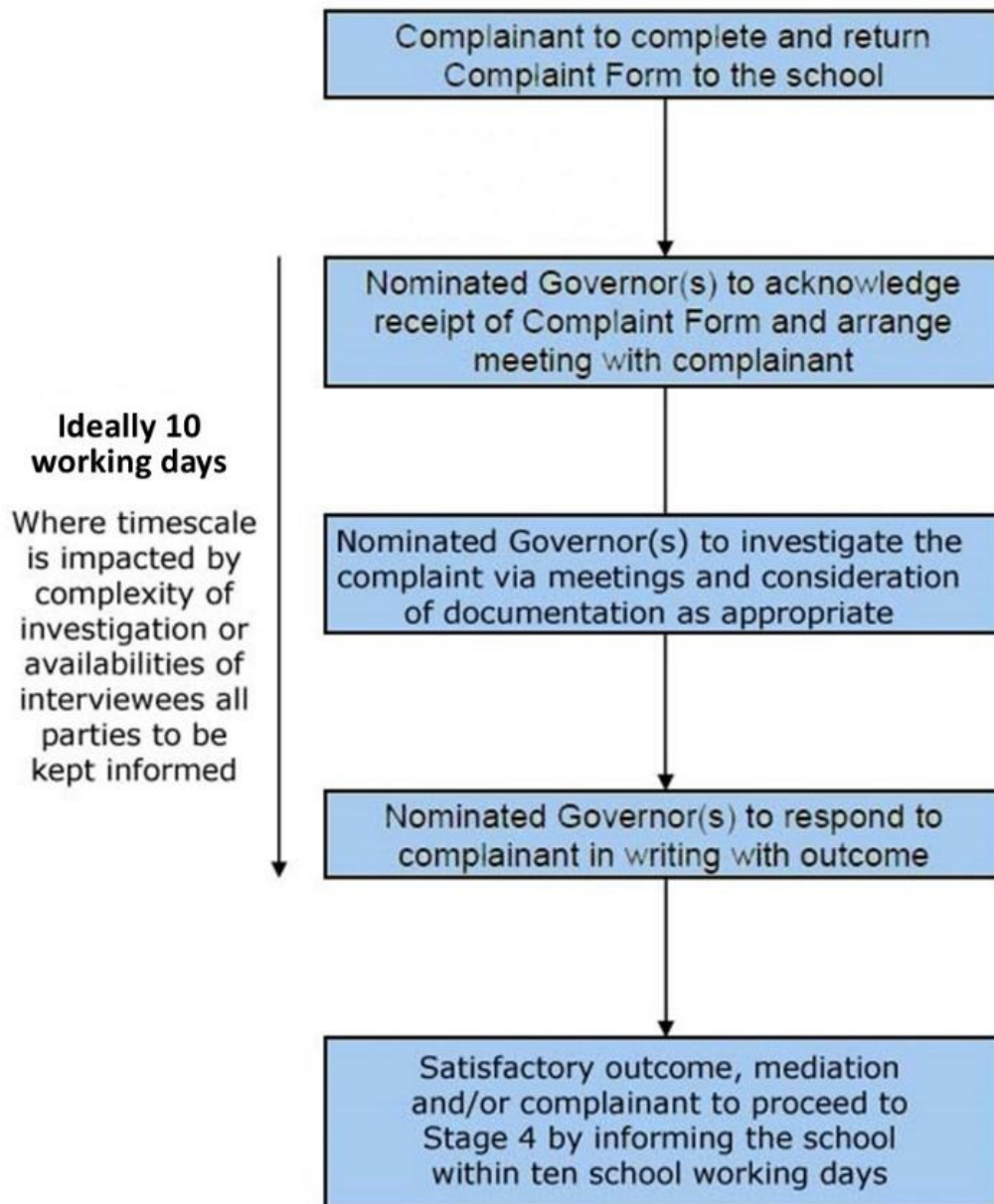
Stage 2 (Formal process) – Headteacher’s investigation of complaint

Consideration by the Headteacher

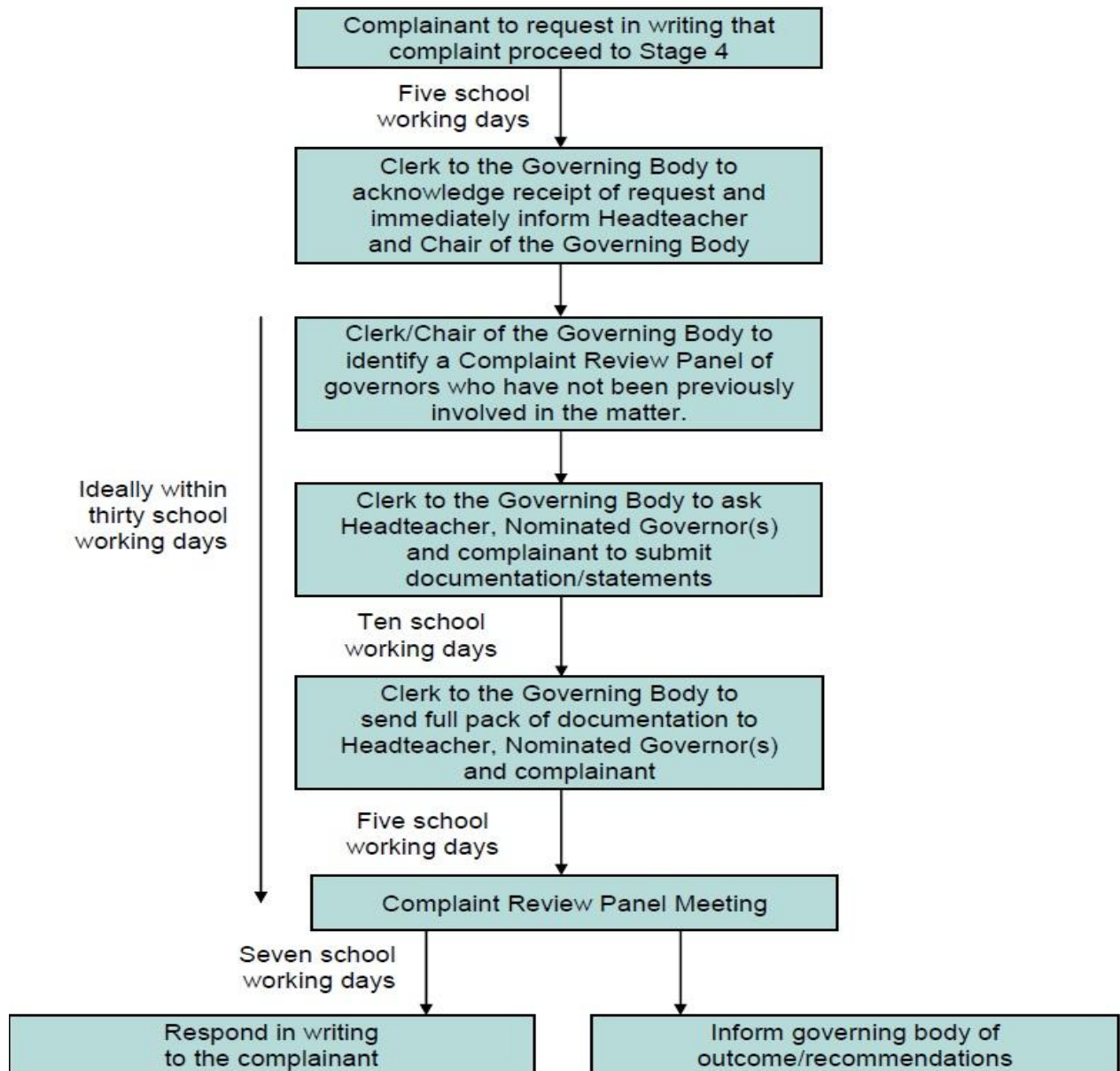


Stage 3 (Formal process) – Nominated Governor’s investigation of complaint

(Note: if the matter is escalated directly to Stage 4, the complainant will be notified of this within 10 working days of the nominated governor acknowledging receipt of the complaint.)



Stage 4 (Final school-based stage) – Governing Board Complaint Review Panel



APPENDIX 2: COOKHAM RISE PRIMARY SCHOOL COMPLAINTS' FORM

Please complete and return to the Headteacher, who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

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 actions 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 whom:

Complaint referred to:

Date:

APPENDIX 3: THE COMPLAINT REVIEW PANEL MEETING

This is the last school-based stage of the complaints process. The aim of the meeting will always be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant. 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.

Procedures and principles relating to Complaint Review Panel meetings

- The governing body will convene a panel of three governors who have not previously been involved in the complaint. The panel will choose its own Chair.
- The Headteacher and the complainant will be notified by the clerk to the panel as to whether they will be invited to attend the panel meeting. Alternatively, the panel may decide to consider written material only. Both parties must be treated equally. For example, if the Headteacher is invited to the meeting, so must be the complainant.
- In this event, the date and time of the meeting will be selected to be convenient for both complainant and Headteacher, within reason. The complainant will be advised that they may be accompanied to the meeting by a friend/representative if they wish.
- All relevant paperwork relating to the complaint and its investigation(s) will be circulated to the panel, the complainant and the Headteacher no less than 5 school working days in advance of the meeting.
- The complainant and Headteacher must notify the clerk to the panel in advance of the meeting if they wish to call witnesses. Witnesses will only be invited to attend the part of the meeting in which they give their evidence.
- It is the responsibility of the Chair of the panel to ensure the meeting is properly conducted. However, proceedings will be kept as informal as possible to ensure that parents and others not used to attending and speaking at such meetings are put at ease.
- The Chair of the panel will notify the complainant in writing of the panel's decision(s) and any recommendations to be made within seven school working days of the meeting taking place.

APPENDIX 4: Policy for dealing with Unreasonable Complainants

Cookham Rise Primary School is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially. We will not normally limit the contact complainants have with the 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.

Cookham Rise Primary School defines unreasonable complainants as *'those who, because of the frequency or nature of their contacts with the school, hinder our consideration of their or other people's complaints'*.

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 a complaint's procedure.
- insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with our school complaints procedure or with good practice.
- introduces trivial or irrelevant information which the complainant expects to be considered 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 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, 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 or 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.

Complainants should limit the numbers of communications with a school while a 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 asking them to change it. For complainants who excessively contact Cookham Rise Primary School causing a significant level of disruption, we may specify methods of communication and limit the number of contacts in a communication plan. This will usually be reviewed after 6 months.

In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, the concerns and actions taken will be put in writing immediately and the police informed. This may include banning an individual from Cookham Rise Primary School.

The governing board notes the following extract from DfE Best Practice Advice for School Complaints Procedures 2020.

Barring from the School Premises

Although fulfilling a public function, schools are private places. The public has no automatic right of entry. Schools will therefore act to ensure they remain a safe place for pupils, staff and other members of their community.

If a parent's behaviour is a cause for concern, a school can ask him/her to leave school premises. In serious cases, the headteacher or the local authority can notify them in writing that their implied licence to be on school premises has been temporarily revoked subject to any representations that the parent may wish to make. Schools should always give the parent the opportunity to formally express their views on the decision to bar in writing.

The decision to bar should then be reviewed, considering any representations made by the parent and either confirmed or lifted. If the decision is confirmed the parent should be notified in writing, explaining how long the bar will be in place.

Anyone wishing to complain about being barred can do so, by letter or email, to the headteacher or Chair of Governors. However, complaints about barring cannot be escalated to the Department for Education. Once the school's own complaints procedure has been completed, the only remaining avenue of appeal is through the Courts; independent legal advice must therefore be sought.