

How to complain to your child's school

CONTENTS

- What can parents do?
- Steps 1-6 Informal complaint
- Steps 7-10 formal complaint
- Whistleblowing/press
- Other useful resources

What can parents do?

We are often asked by parents how they can complain when their child's school is undermining safeguarding. Fortunately, there are well established procedures in place to deal with situations like this.

All schools will have a complaints policy that you can follow. This alarms a lot of people, and some parents are scared about doing so. There is no need to be scared; it is not as scary as it sounds. By following this procedure, you are fulfilling the duty of every adult to safeguard children. If we all do our bit and work together, we can keep children safe.

We have had some parents express concerns that the school will "take it out" on their child if they complain. This is not something that parents should worry about. Teachers, school leaders and governors are all expected to deal with complaints in a professional and confidential way. Failure to do so would be a serious breach of safeguarding itself.

Step 1-6: Informal complaint:

1. Locate the Complaints Policy on the school website. This should be readily available. If by any chance it isn't, request the policy from reception at school in person or email and ask for it. The email address will be on the website. Education Scotland and your Local Council also have guidance on complaining to schools.
2. Read the policy thoroughly. It may look complicated but they're really not and it is there to help you and your child. Maybe read it together with your partner or a friend if you are not already familiar with complaint procedures.
3. The likely first step of the complaint's procedure will be to deal with informally by 'raising a concern'. Hopefully most issues can be resolved informally. The vast majority of schools are committed to safeguarding and will want to work together in partnership with parents and are committed to the welfare of all children. These are requirements as set out in [Getting it Right for Every Child \(GIRFEC\)](#)

4. Send an email or letter (and ensure you keep a copy) clearly and factually setting out your concerns with any supporting evidence. The complaints policy should tell you who to address the initial email to when first raising a concern. If it doesn't, then address it to the head or the office email address. They will delegate to the most appropriate member of staff. Safeguarding Our Schools have many template letters and factsheets to help with this initial contact.
5. Face to face meetings are good and we would recommend you attend one if invited. However, if you do not wish to and would rather keep it in writing, it is fine to say so. If you attend a face-to-face meeting, take notes, you can take a partner or friend with you if you would like to, to take notes on your behalf. It is best to tell the school that you will be doing so first, so that they too can have a note taker if they wish.

Afterwards send an email confirming your understanding of the meeting and actions agreed.

6. Hopefully at this stage the concern will have been rectified and you will be happy with the outcome. If you are not though, you will need to escalate. If the concern you raised involves the safety or welfare of children, it is very important that you do so. In cases where the school have not addressed a safeguarding concern it is your duty as an adult to log a formal complaint and ensure the relevant agencies are informed. Your relationship with the school is not more important than the safeguarding of children.
The important thing about a formal complaint is that it puts the complaint on record, so that it will be one of the things that ES look at in their next inspection.

Step 7-10: Formal complaint:

The complaints policy will set out how to make a formal complaint. It will probably be in two or three stages:

7. Stage one is likely to be writing clearly to the headteacher stating that this is a FORMAL COMPLAINT (or there may be a form to fill in). If you are seriously concerned about the welfare of children in a school also contact the police and/or social work.

8. Again, you may be invited to a meeting. Again, do attend be clear though that you want this dealt with as a formal complaint. Do not agree to the school downgrading it to informal or a 'concern' as you have already tried that. The Local Authority or the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) will not review informal complaints and concerns. They will review formal ones. Be clear that you want the resolution to the formal complaint in writing.

The complaint should have now been taken seriously and resolved as headteachers should have a good understanding of safeguarding. If by any chance you are not happy with the outcome you will need to proceed to stage two.

9. Stage two is likely to be writing to the Local Authority Education Department who are responsible for ensuring any concerns about a school are dealt with appropriately. You can find details here <https://www.cosla.gov.uk/councils>, though again check the complaints policy for your particular school. If you have got to this stage, you need to be clear that you want all responses in writing. Continue to follow up any meetings/telephone calls with emails, always take somebody with you to take notes and as a witness at any meetings.

10. School complaints policies will generally have two or three stages. In the unlikely event the school has not resolved your complaint by the end of these stages you will need to pursue the complaint. This is where it will be imperative that you have a detailed paper trail of your efforts to resolve the issues. Your options for pursuing the complaint further are:

- If you are not satisfied with the responses from the local authority and you feel your concerns have not been addressed to your satisfaction, you have the right to contact the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO), who handle complaints about public services in Scotland.

The SPSO will consider complaints which have been through the formal complaint's procedure of your local authority.

Contact details for the SPSO are as follows:

- In person: SPSO, Bridgeside House, 99 McDonald Road, Edinburgh, EH7 4NS
 - By post: SPSO, Freepost
 - Freephone: 0800 377 7330
 - Online Contact: <http://www.spsso.org.uk/contact-us>
 - Website: <http://www.spsso.org.uk/>
 - Mobile Site: <http://m.spsso.org.uk>
- Contact your MP for support
 - Take legal action including applying for a judicial review
 - If you are at the stage of thinking about legal action about a serious safeguarding concern email us on SOSScotland@gmail.com we may be able to assist.

Whistleblowing / press

Safeguarding failures in schools are a matter of public interest.

If you feel that you would like to whistle blow to the press about safeguarding issues, contact us. We may be able to broker you doing this anonymously.

Other useful resources

[Report child abuse to your Local Authority](#)