



Mintlaw Academy

Compliments, Comments and Complaints Policy

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1. BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

Mintlaw Academy staff are committed to providing the best possible service for pupils, parents/carers, other professionals, agencies and members of the public. Our users often have valuable insights into how we might improve our service; therefore we encourage all associated with our community to communicate with the school. We aim to promote our commitment to a high quality service for all young people in our local community by dealing with any communications, whether it is a compliment, comment or complaint, quickly to the satisfaction of all. Our focus is always to promote effective communication as this builds trust and partnership working.

We believe that the most effective way of ensuring effective communication is for teachers, support staff, pupils, parents and members of the public to work in partnership. We believe that identifying particular key staff in this process facilitates effective communication.

This Mintlaw Academy Compliments, Comments and Complaints Policy is based on Aberdeenshire Council's Policy, *'Have your Say, Compliments, Comments, Complaints'* leaflet and many of the procedures outlined by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman.

This Policy and associated parent/carer leaflet explain how a school compliment, comment or complaint will be progressed and, if appropriate, recorded.

2. SCHOOL AIMS

1. Achievement and Attainment

We have the highest expectations for every single young person who enters Mintlaw Academy. All our young people are given every encouragement to aim for the highest possible levels of achievement in educational attainment and life skills.

2. Framework for Learning

We aim to provide quality learning and teaching experiences for all our pupils, based on their unique aptitudes, needs and abilities, delivered by a professional and highly dedicated staff. By constantly reviewing and evaluating our curriculum, we aim to ensure that the needs of all learners are addressed. We see each individual as unique and make every effort to make them aware of the school's responsibilities to them and also their responsibilities to the school, fellow pupils and the local community. Also, we have very high expectations for the learning that takes place in every classroom, and for each pupil's contribution to this. Good classroom relationships are crucial to developing a positive school ethos, firmly built on positive relationships between all partners.

3. Inclusion and Equality

Mintlaw Academy has a tradition of being a fully inclusive school. We aim to help every individual pupil to benefit from education, and take pride in the support we continue to provide for pupils of all abilities and needs, within a framework of equal opportunities. We aim to be a caring community, providing the highest possible levels of support for all pupils. All members of the Mintlaw Academy community are valued and respected.

4. Values and Citizenship

Promoting Education at Mintlaw Academy is firmly founded on a partnership that aims to teach pupils respect for themselves and one another. It also aims to make pupils aware of their rights and responsibilities both within the school community and as part of society generally, thus developing effective skills of citizenship and an awareness of the need to care for and value our environment.

5. Learning for Life

Mintlaw Academy aims to create a learning environment that enables pupils to develop creativity, ambition, enterprise, and the skills and attitudes required for success in life in the 21st Century.

3. POLICY AIM(S)

This policy specifically relates to the following School Aims:

2. Framework for Learning
3. Inclusion and Equality
4. Values and Citizenship

In this Compliments, Comments and Complaints Policy we aim to:

1. Establish a procedure for recording and celebrating compliments
2. Outline procedures for dealing with comments or complaints
3. Establish a procedure for recording complaints
4. Ensure comments or complaints are dealt with promptly and in a courteous way
5. Ensure all comments or complaints are taken seriously and dealt with appropriately
6. Underline our commitment to learn from complaints and if appropriate, take action to ensure improvement

4. IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

Compliments

Informal and personal compliments to staff members are to be welcomed. Positive feedback is essential for personal wellbeing, acknowledgement of a 'job well done', professional reputation and school ethos. Compliments to staff acknowledge personal and/or professional contributions to school life and positively influence the public view of Mintlaw Academy. All staff (teaching and non-teaching) are to be encouraged to share compliments with their line manager.

Formal compliments are usually by e-mail or letter. Staff should forward formal compliments to his/her line manager and copy to the Rector for celebratory purposes. The Rector will use these compliments as appropriate, for example by placing letters on notice boards or for inclusion in school publications such as; the termly newsletter or our public 'Celebrations of Achievement' folders. Written compliments may be celebrated anonymously to protect personal identities and details.

Comments

It is essential that comments raised by parents/carers and members of the community are resolved within a structured framework. In so doing, the person(s) raising the comment gain confidence in the school system for dealing with such matters. Parents/carers and members of the public who do not receive a response from the school often make a complaint to the Rector or Local Authority.

Complaints

Complaints often occur when a person is dissatisfied with the service they have received and notify the school or the Local Authority of the reason(s) for their concerns. Complaints are a useful source of information about the standard of service we provide. Regardless of whether

the complaint is justified or not, dealing with it courteously and effectively potentially restores the complainant's future confidence in the school. It is important that we learn from complaints raised and, in the best interest of all concerned, that we attempt to resolve difficulties as quickly as possible.

- **What constitutes a complaint?**

A complaint may arise if the complainant thinks the school or an individual has:

- done something wrong
- not dealt with or ignored the issue
- failed to do something that should have been done
- acted unfairly or impolitely

Examples include instances where the complainant feels that the school or individual has:

- failed to provide a service at the right time or to the expected standard
- neglected or delayed in answering a query or responding to a request
- failed to follow Aberdeenshire Council's Complaint Policy
- failed to take account of relevant matters in coming to a decision
- been discourteous
- been discriminatory
- acted unlawfully

- **Who makes complaints?**

Most complaints will be from parents/carers or their representatives such as a solicitor, an MSP, Local Councillor or Parent Council member. Other complaint sources might be; a local resident, member of the public, shop owner or bus driver.

Occasionally pupils may also raise complaints. Pupil complaints are usually dealt with by Principal Teachers (PTs) (Subject / Faculty, Guidance, Support for Learning) or the Senior Management Team (SMT). In addition, pupil concerns or complaints can be resolved through class or year group representative discussion.

- **Informal and Formal Complaints**

All complaints require to be dealt with effectively by staff. Often parents/carers or members of the public verbally (telephone or in person) contact the school to raise issues about; their child, a group of children or a service we deliver. Often these 'complaints' can be effectively dealt with directly by the member of staff. It is for the member of staff dealing with the 'complaint' to use his/her judgement in deciding whether or not the complaint is formal or informal.

Where a member of staff considers a verbal complaint to be formal, he/she must follow the school's complaints procedure (Appendix 4). All written complaints should be considered formal and staff must follow the school's complaints procedure (Appendix 5).

- **Anonymous Complaints**

Occasionally the school receives anonymous written or verbal complaints. Where appropriate, the member of staff receiving the anonymous complaint should pass the information on to a relevant member of the Senior Management Team.

- **Verbal Complaints**

It is always best to resolve complaints through discussions with complainants at the earliest stage.

Telephone Complaints

When a verbal complaint is made by a parent/carer about their child's experience in school, the first point of contact is usually the appropriate PT Guidance who will follow our Verbal Complaints Procedure. Complaints by telephone will not, in the first instance, be directed to Principal Teachers (Subject/Faculty), class teachers or support staff.

Where the complainant is not a parent/carer, the matter should be passed to a member of the SMT who will consider the issue and decide how to progress the matter.

Verbal Complaints Made Directly to a Member of Staff

When a verbal complaint is made directly to a member of staff (e.g. by a pupil or parent/carer at Parents' Evenings), he/she should, in the first instance, attempt to resolve the complaint and, if appropriate, inform his/her line manager and/or the appropriate PT Guidance of the outcome.

Where the complainant is a member of the general public or a parent/carer complaining about a general school issue or procedure, the matter should be referred to a member of the SMT for consideration and action.

• **Written Complaints**

Most complaints are resolved verbally to everyone's satisfaction. However, complaints may also be made in writing by letter or e-mail. All written complaints should be considered formal. Staff must follow the school's formal complaints procedure.

When a written complaint is made by a parent/carer about their child's experience in school, this should be dealt with, in the first instance, by the appropriate PT Guidance who will follow the Written Complaints Procedure.

Where the complainant is not a parent/carer, the matter should be passed to a member of the SMT who will consider the issue and follow the Written Complaints Procedure.

Where a written complaint is made directly to a member of staff by a parent/carer, member of the public etc, he/she should inform their line manager and forward the letter of complaint to a member of the SMT for consideration and action. The member of the SMT will follow the Written Complaints Procedure.

• **Vexatious or Abusive Complainants**

Almost all parents/carers and members of the public raise complaints in a reasonable way. In exceptional circumstances, a complainant may persist with a complaint in an unreasonable way. Complainants become vexatious when they repeatedly or obsessively pursue an outcome, which is unreasonable or unrealistic. Where a member of staff considers that a complainant is pursuing a complaint in this way, the Rector will take one of the following courses of action as appropriate:

- write to the complainant reiterating that the matter is concluded and no further correspondence should be expected in relation to the issue raised
- if the correspondence continues, that it will be read and noted but will receive no further acknowledgement
- provide a short response referring to previous documents that have already addressed the issues raised
- refer the matter to the Mintlaw Academy Quality Improvement Officer.

Verbal aggression is rare but can be intimidating and unacceptable. Everyone should expect to be treated courteously and with respect. If a member of staff feels threatened, they should report this to the Rector. The Rector will take the appropriate action including, if appropriate, recording the incident on Aberdeenshire's Violent Incident Reporting system.

- **'Face to Face' Abuse**

It is important that all staff carefully assess the potential risk of 'face to face' meetings. Where this means a 'sit down' meeting, staff should consider strategies such as; asking his/her line manager to attend, ensuring other staff are aware of the time/location of the meeting, meeting in a more public area (such as the library) and ensuring you are close to the door and don't have anyone between you and the exit point.

When, in the opinion of the member of staff involved in a 'face to face' meeting, the person becomes abusive, he/she should terminate the meeting and notify a member of the SMT. The matter will then be progressed by the relevant member of the SMT, as appropriate.

- **Telephone Abuse**

When, in the opinion of the member of staff receiving the call, a caller becomes abusive, he/she will be advised that the call will be terminated if the aggression continues. If this happens, the member of staff who ended the call should record it on the Verbal Complaints Form (Appendix 1) and forward it to their line manager for action. If a caller repeatedly harasses staff, the Rector will take appropriate action including alerting the police and the Mintlaw Academy Quality Improvement Officer, as necessary.

- **Written Abuse**

When, in the opinion of the member of staff receiving the letter or e-mail, he/she receives an abusive written communication, it should be passed to the relevant member of the SMT for the appropriate action and feedback.

School Formal Complaint Log

It is important that formal complaints are logged. This ensures the school has robust accountability if challenged about the numbers of types of complaints received, for example through 'Freedom of Information' or HMle requests.

It is the responsibility of PTs (Guidance) and the SMT to record formal complaints using the Verbal Complaints Form (Appendix 1) or the Written Complaints Form (Appendix 2) and pass them to the Depute Rector (Pastoral Care). The Depute Rector will maintain the School Complaints Log.

5. POLICY CONSULTATION PROCESS

This Policy has been subject to consultation with sample groups of relevant stakeholders including: parents/carers, the Parent Council and the Mintlaw Academy Quality Improvement Officer.

This Policy will be reviewed as required and formally as part of the Mintlaw Academy policy review cycle outlined in the Whole School Improvement Plan. This Policy will be updated annually and formally reviewed during session 2014-2015.

6. STAFF DEVELOPMENT AND RESOURCES

The main resource implication for this policy is:

- Staff familiarisation with this Policy
- Time to complete documentation (when required).

Mintlaw Academy will provide all parents/carers with a summary communication leaflet.

7. POLICY EVALUATION AND REVIEW

Monitoring of Compliments and Complaints

A confidential record of complaints made is kept in the Complaints Log. The Rector and Depute Rector (Pastoral Care) will monitor compliments and complaints and report as necessary. This information will illustrate trends and patterns, help identify CPD needs and assist in our continuous improvement drive towards excellence.

8. APPENDICES

1. Verbal Complaints Form (Appendix 1)
2. Written Complaints Form (Appendix 2)
3. Standard Acknowledgement of Complaint Letter (Appendix 3)
4. Verbal Complaints Procedure (Appendix 4)
5. Written Complaints Procedure (Appendix 5)

Appendix 1: Verbal Complaints Form

Date:

Pupil Name

Class

Name of person dealing with complaint:

Designation

Name of complainant

Address

.....

.....

.....

Telephone Number

Brief details of the complaint:

Action Taken/Next Steps:

Date:

Time:

Please attach copy of written or verbal complaint/further information/materials and forward to the Depute Rector (Pastoral Care) for inclusion in the School Complaints Log

Appendix 2: Written Complaints Form

Date:

Pupil Name

Class

Name of person dealing with complaint:

Designation

Name of complainant

Address

.....

.....

.....

Telephone Number

Brief details of the complaint:

Action Taken/Next Steps:

Date:

Time:

Please attach any further information/materials and forward to the Depute Rector (Pastoral Care) for inclusion in the School Complaints Log

APPENDIX 3: Standard Acknowledgement of Formal Complaint Letter

Dear

Thank you for your letter of <date> regarding <topic>.

The letter has been passed to <name and designation of member of staff> who is dealing with your concern. They will contact you during the next twenty working days to respond to your communication in more detail.

Thank you for raising this matter with Mintlaw Academy and you can be assured that your concern will be dealt with as quickly as possible.

Yours sincerely

XXXXX
XXX

APPENDIX 4: Verbal Complaints Procedure

All Complaints

1. All verbal complaints to the school will result in Reception staff:

- Contacting the appropriate PT Guidance if the complaint concerns **a pupil**
- Contacting a member of the SMT if the complaint is about **policy or procedure**.

If the appropriate member of staff is unavailable, Reception staff will e-mail the appropriate member of staff and, when the contact person is a member of the Guidance Team, copy the e-mail to the relevant member of the SMT for information.

Verbal complaints **made directly to a member of staff**. The member of staff will:

- Attempt to resolve the issue if it comes from **a pupil or parent/carer** and inform his/her relevant member of the SMT/PT Guidance as appropriate
- Contact his/her relevant member of the SMT if the complainant is **not a parent/carer**.

Informal Complaints

2. Ideally verbal complaints will be resolved quickly. Where a complaint is dealt with satisfactorily with minimal school intervention, it should be considered as an informal complaint and once feedback to the complainant is completed, no further action is required.

Formal Complaints

3. If the matter needs to be investigated further, it should be considered as a formal complaint. The person dealing with the complaint will take the complainant's details and note the reasons for concern.
4. The person initially dealing with the complaint will try to resolve the matter. If the person receiving the complaint is not the most appropriate person, the complainant is informed that you are passing their complaint to a named person who can help.

The named person is contacted, given the complaint details and, if necessary, contacts the complainant seeking further details or clarification.

5. In almost all cases, where a complaint requires investigation, it will be acknowledged to the complainant either by telephone, letter, e-mail or meeting within two working days of the original complaint. An example of when it would not be appropriate to notify the complainant, might be if the matter is related to a child protection issue. A note of the complaint raised, any investigation paperwork and the action taken is recorded using the Verbal Complaints Form (Appendix 1). This should then be forwarded to the Depute Rector (Pastoral Care) for inclusion in the School Complaint Log.

Complaints will normally be resolved quickly but in no longer than 20 working days. In exceptional circumstances, investigations may take longer. If the investigation is taking longer than 20 working days, the complainant will be contacted with an update on progress and the reason for any delay. An estimated completion date will be given.

APPENDIX 5: Written Complaints Procedure

All complaints

1. All letters of complaint, e-mail or communication in any written form sent to the school will be recorded by office staff.
2. Letters of complaint should be passed to the named person in the letter who will acknowledge the letter using the Policy template (**Appendix 3**) within two working days.
3. Once the complaint has been investigated, the person dealing with the matter should contact the complainant to advise them of the outcome. This response will normally be made within 20 working days. Depending on the nature of the complaint, this may be done by telephone, meeting, letter or e-mail. In the event of a verbal response, a brief letter summarising the outcome, actions taken and by whom **must** be sent. A note of the complaint, investigation paperwork, and the action taken (**See Appendix 2**) needs to be completed prior to forwarding to the Depute Rector (Pastoral Care) for inclusion in the School Complaint Log.
4. If a written response within 20 days is not possible because, for example, the matter requires a more in-depth investigation, a further acknowledgement letter of the complaint will be sent explaining who is dealing with the matter and the expected time scale for a reply. A telephone call to the complainant may also be appropriate to explain progress in dealing with the complaint.
5. In most cases, the designated person will resolve a complaint. Where this is not the case, the staff member will contact his/her relevant member of the SMT for further action.
6. Where all school line management processes have been exhausted and the complainant remains dissatisfied, the Rector will advise the complainant that she has referred the matter to the Mintlaw Academy Quality Improvement Officer, who will then deal with the complaint.