



## Parental complaints

While most education staff enjoy a constructive relationship with parents, there are occasions when the latter may make a complaint. The questions and answers in this factsheet offer guidance about how these complaints should be addressed.

### **A parent has asked to discuss some concerns about their child's education with me. How should I approach this meeting?**

You should think about the following:

- Be proactive - agree a date and time for the meeting and ask for a brief outline of any concerns, eg bullying, low marks or lack of progression.
- Be prepared - good records and specific examples of work will help you to illustrate the strengths of the student and any areas that need developing.
- Recognise the parent's concerns, for example, if the parent feels their child is being bullied by other pupils, make reference to the school/college anti-bullying policy and give the parent a copy. Outline what the school can do to address their concerns and agree a plan of action.
- Refer on where necessary. If the complaint concerns a child protection issue or involves an allegation of abuse by a member of staff, this must be reported to the school/college child protection officer.
- Be firm - if a parent becomes aggressive then bring the meeting to a close. If possible, suggest a time and date for a future meeting. If you feel threatened then share your concerns with management and ask that a colleague attends the next meeting with you. In the unlikely event a parent becomes violent, call the police.
- Keep a record of the meeting. This will help clarify what was discussed and any actions that were agreed, together with any relevant timeframes.
- Be aware the parent may make a formal complaint.

### **A parent has made a formal complaint about me to the head/chair of governors. What should I expect?**

Your school/college should have a clear, written parental complaints policy that outlines how any complaints will be investigated and by whom. The policy should have an informal, formal and appeals stage. It should be easily accessible, simple to understand, impartial and non-adversarial.

The policy should aim to:

- encourage resolution of problems by informal means, eg discussion with the teacher/member of staff wherever possible
- allow swift handling of a complaint within established time limits for action
- keep people informed of progress
- ensure a full and fair investigation
- have due regard for the rights and responsibilities of all parties involved
- respect confidentiality
- address all the points at issue and provide an effective response.

### **Should the policy outline what is expected of a parent when raising a complaint?**

Yes - the policy should emphasise a parent raising a complaint will be expected to:

- raise concerns in a timely manner
- treat staff with respect and dignity

- provide accurate and concise information about their concern(s)
- fully engage in the policy and its procedures.

A fair and thorough complaints policy emphasising goodwill, respect and courtesy on all sides should help maintain a positive working relationship between parents and staff. If you have any concerns, contact ATL using the details below.

## **Do I have the right to be accompanied at meetings with management or management and parents during the investigation?**

No, you only have a statutory right to be accompanied by either a trade union representative or workplace colleague at formal disciplinary and grievance meetings at work. That said, do check the policy as it may allow you to be accompanied to an investigatory meeting. Certainly, ATL recommends that schools and colleges allow members to be accompanied if requested.

If, following the investigation, the employer decides to take disciplinary action you do have the right to be accompanied at those meetings and you should contact ATL for advice and support.

## **What if I have concerns about the way in which my employer has implemented the parental complaints policy?**

If you feel your employer has not acted in accordance with the terms and conditions of the policy, eg that stages have been ignored, you should seek guidance from ATL.

## **What if a parent complains about me online, eg on Facebook or Twitter?**

This could be deemed as cyberbullying and you should inform your head or principal and ask they investigate and take any appropriate action such as contacting the parents and the website to have the comments amended or removed.

If the comments are abusive and/or threatening, you or your employer may want to inform the police. Further guidance can be found in ATL's factsheet *Cyberbullying*, which can be downloaded from [www.atl.org.uk/factsheets](http://www.atl.org.uk/factsheets).



### **Need advice?**

Your first point of contact is the ATL rep in your school/college. Your local ATL branch is also available to help, or you can contact ATL's member advisers on 020 7930 6441, email [info@atl.org.uk](mailto:info@atl.org.uk). Don't forget there's lots more advice on ATL's website at [www.atl.org.uk](http://www.atl.org.uk).

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