

Complaints Policy

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Who can make a complaint?

This complaints procedure is for parents or carers of children that attend Darlington Learning Zone. It may also be used by schools who use this provision.

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

It is in everyone's interest that concerns and complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. Many issues can be resolved informally, without the need to use the formal stages of the complaints procedure. Darlington Learning Zone takes concerns seriously and will make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.

If you have difficulty discussing a concern with a particular member of staff, we will respect your views. In these cases you may speak to the other member of staff. Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels unable to deal with a concern, they will speak to the other member of staff.

We understand however, that there are occasions when people would like to raise their concerns formally. In this case, Darlington Learning Zone will attempt to resolve the issue internally, through the stages outlined within this complaints procedure.

How to raise a concern or make a complaint

A concern or complaint can be made in person, in writing or by telephone. They may also be made by a third party acting on behalf on a complainant, as long as they have appropriate consent to do so.

Concerns should be raised with either member of staff. If the issue remains unresolved, the next step is to make a formal complaint.

Complaints against staff should be made to either Fay or Glen Blythman. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

For ease of use, a template complaint form is included at the end of this procedure. If you require help in completing the form, please contact us. You can also ask third party organisations like the Citizens Advice to help you.

In accordance with equality law, we will consider making reasonable adjustments if required, to enable complainants to access and complete this complaints procedure. For instance, providing information in alternative formats, assisting complainants in raising a formal complaint or holding meetings in accessible locations.

Anonymous complaints

We will not normally investigate anonymous complaints. However, if appropriate, we will determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation.

Time scales

You must raise the complaint within three months of the incident or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within three months of the last of these incidents. We will consider complaints made outside of this time frame if exceptional circumstances apply.

Complaints received outside of term time

We will consider complaints made outside of term time to have been received on the first day after the holiday period.

Scope of this Complaints Procedure

This procedure covers all complaints about any provision or services by Darlington Learning Zone, other than complaints that are dealt with under other statutory procedures, including those listed below.

Exceptions	Who to contact
Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation	Complaints about child protection matters are handled under our child protection policy and in accordance with relevant statutory guidance. If you have serious concerns, you may wish to contact the local authority designated officer (LADO) who has local responsibility for safeguarding or the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH). 01325 405292 desingatedofficer@darlington.gov.uk
Staff conduct	Complaints about staff will be dealt with internally. Complainants will not be informed of any disciplinary action taken against a staff member as a result of a complaint. However, the complainant will be notified that the matter is being addressed.
National Curriculum - content	Please contact the Department for Education at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus

If other bodies are investigating aspects of the complaint, for example the police, local authority (LA) safeguarding teams or Tribunals, this may impact on our ability to adhere to the timescales within this procedure or result in the procedure being suspended until those public bodies have completed their investigations.

If a complainant commences legal action against Darlington Learning Zone in relation to their complaint, we will consider whether to suspend the complaints procedure in relation to their complaint until those legal proceedings have concluded.

Resolving complaints

At each stage in the procedure, Darlington Learning Zone wants to resolve the complaint. If appropriate, we will acknowledge that the complaint is upheld in whole or in part. In addition, we may offer one or more of the following:

- an explanation
- an admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better
- an assurance that we will try to ensure the event complained of will not recur
- an explanation of the steps that have been or will be taken to help ensure that it will not happen again and an indication of the timescales within which any changes will be made
- an apology.

Withdrawal of a Complaint

If a complainant wants to withdraw their complaint, we will ask them to confirm this in writing.

Complaint process

Formal complaints must be made to either Fay or Glen Blythamn. This may be done in person, in writing (preferably on the Complaint Form), or by telephone.

We will record the date the complaint is received and will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 10 school days.

Within this response, we will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint if needed, ask what remains unresolved and what outcome the complainant would like to see. Consideration will be given as to whether a face to face meeting is the most appropriate way of doing this.

During the investigation, the investigator will:

- if necessary, interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish
- keep a written record of any meetings/interviews in relation to their investigation.

At the conclusion of their investigation, they will provide a formal written response within 20 school days of the date of receipt of the complaint. If this needs to take longer, the complainant will be provided with an update and revised response date.

The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it

will include details of actions Darlington Learning Zone will take to resolve the complaint.

Advice will be given to the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 1.

Complaint Form

Please complete and return to either Fay or Glen Blythman at Darlington Learning Zone who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

Your name:
Pupil's name (if relevant):
Your relationship to the pupil (if relevant):
Address: Postcode: Daytime telephone number: Evening telephone number:
Please give details of your complaint, including whether you have spoken to anybody at Darlington Learning Zone about it.

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 who:

Complaint referred to:

Date:

Roles and Responsibilities

Complainant

The complainant will receive a more effective response to the complaint if they:

- explain the complaint in full as early as possible
- co-operate with Darlington Learning Zone in seeking a solution to the complaint
- respond promptly to requests for information or meetings or in agreeing the details of the complaint
- ask for assistance as needed
- treat all those involved in the complaint with respect
- refrain from publicising the details of their complaint on social media and respect confidentiality.

Investigator

The investigator's role is to establish the facts relevant to the complaint by:

- providing a comprehensive, open, transparent and fair consideration of the complaint through:
 - sensitive and thorough interviewing of the complainant to establish what has happened and who has been involved
 - interviewing staff and children/young people and other people relevant to the complaint
 - consideration of records and other relevant information
 - analysing information
- liaising with the complainant and the complaints co-ordinator as appropriate to clarify what the complainant feels would put things right.

The investigator should:

- conduct interviews with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning
- keep notes of interviews
- ensure that any papers produced during the investigation are kept securely pending any appeal
- be mindful of the timescales to respond

A decision will then determine whether to uphold or dismiss the complaint and communicate that decision to the complainant, providing the appropriate escalation details.