

Comments and Complaints Policy

Policy Data Sheet

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Comments and Complaints Policy

1. Aim of the Policy

This policy aims to ensure that all comments and complaints are received positively and where necessary acted upon in accordance with the procedures set out in this policy.

2. Legislation and Guidance

This document meets the requirements set out in part 7 of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, which states that we must have and make available a written procedure to deal with complaints from parents of pupils at the school.

It is also based on guidance published by the Department of Education (DfE) on creating a complaints procedure that complies with the above regulations, and refers to good practice guidance on setting up complaints procedures.

This policy complies with our funding agreement and articles of association.

3. Scope of the policy

The scope of this policy affects all staff, pupils, families, carers, visitors and the general public. It outlines procedures on making comments and complaints giving timescales in order to resolve any issues whether informal or formally.

Each service also has a comments and complaints leaflet which includes service specific information. The leaflet should be read in conjunction with this policy.

Big Life Schools is committed to improving the lives of people by providing quality services and facilities. We are constantly looking for ways to improve. We believe that the people we work with deserve the best possible service. We encourage feedback as part of the process of improving what we do. We welcome positive comments as well as complaints.

We want to positively respond to complaints and be open when things go wrong and about the improvements we have made as a result of feedback. The SLT will monitor the implementation of this policy and collate information about required improvements. We will offer all staff and volunteers training so that they are able to encourage, receive and manage the complaints process with sensitivity.

4. General Principles

- We wish to encourage comments and complaints. All schools will clearly advertise the comments and complaints procedure.
- Many complaints arise from misunderstandings. It is very important that every effort is made to ensure that users and carers understand the reasons for decisions made about care and treatment. The need for complaints can often be avoided if there is good ongoing communication between staff, pupils, carers, families and the public.
- The BLS Comments and Complaints form (enclosed in this policy) can be used by the complainant to record their complaint. This form should also be used when staff are recording a verbal complaint.

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- Assistance will be offered to both parties in a complaint procedure to ensure equality of representation. Complainants should be made aware of advocates and other organisations able to offer them assistance.
- We will ensure that complainants are not discriminated against as a result of making a complaint.
- We are committed to providing complainants with ongoing communication throughout the complaints process
- All complaints will be kept confidential to the parties concerned; where appropriate the complainant will be made known to the CEO or Headteacher.
- Complaints regarding individuals need to be from an identified complainant and details of the complaint must be in writing.
- Complaints regarding external service providers will be referred to their complaint's procedure. We will make sure that complainants know how to access their complaints process.
- Where appropriate, complainants will be informed of the complaint's procedures of other professional bodies
- Big Life Schools reserves the right to refuse to accept a complaint where the complaint is clearly vexatious, malicious or motivated by racist, sexist, homophobic or other discriminatory attitudes or where the complainant threatens or abuses BLS staff. The decision as to whether a complaint is vexatious will be taken by the Appeals Manager in consultation with the CEO.

5. Appreciating and Understanding Complaints

A complaint is an expression of discontent or dissatisfaction, requiring a response. If a person complains they are basically saying that they are unhappy and explaining why this is the case. A good way of determining whether an expression of dissatisfaction amounts to a complaint or not is to determine what is being sought by the complainant and what is needed to resolve the matter.

The word 'complaint' in its everyday use is often perceived in a negative manner. This is perhaps best exemplified by its associated words. For example, if you look up the verb 'to complain', it is defined by reference to others: to grumble, to whine, to nitpick and to nag. Accordingly, complaining is not generally seen as a positive thing to do, but this is neither the best nor the correct way to view complaints. It would be better to look at why complaints should be considered important from the perspective of the various parties involved.

5.1 Why people complain

In modern culture, consumers are better informed about their rights and have high expectations of service providers. As a service user, complainants feel entitled to have a say regarding how that service is provided.

There can of course be a variety of reasons for complaining but the underlying purpose will nearly always be to rectify the situation. For some people all they seek from the service provider is an acknowledgement that whatever happened to give rise to their complaint should not have done so, and to receive an apology that it did in their case.

Consumer complainants are often seeking restitution, i.e. recompense or reimbursement. If a consumer bought a faulty product, they would quite rightly seek a refund to put them back in the position they were in before the fault occurred.

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Other complaints are motivated by seeking an understanding or answers. People can often feel that they have cause to complain because they do not know why or how something has happened. An explanation or information can resolve matters in these circumstances. This is often the case when there has been an unexpected death of a loved one.

Perhaps the most important reason for bringing a complaint though is to avoid a repetition or recurrence. Complainants want to know that whatever happened to them to give them cause to complain, would not happen again, either to them or to anyone else. This ties in closely with the reason why we consider complaints to be important.

5.2. Valuing complaints

Receiving a complaint can feel like an attack on the service provider. It is possible to feel offended but complaints should not be viewed in this way. It is often human nature to take criticism badly and as a service provider, it is possible to take personal offence. However, developing an understanding of the purpose of complaints is key to changing this perception.

Complaints are a form of feedback and we need to know how they are doing. Performance and delivery can only really be assessed by obtaining feedback from service users. Those people who have used the service are naturally best placed to provide comment on how that service is received.

Complaints should be used to inform and improve. We should aim for continuous change and improvement in their performance and complaints are a rich and vital source of information that can be used to assist in this.

Areas of deficiency can be highlighted by complaints. When a complaint identifies that something has gone wrong or has fallen below standards, this should be seen as an opportunity to improve and avoid a recurrence. Learning is a key aspect of processing complaints. By identifying deficiencies and faults, we have the chance to learn from the experience. The opportunity to reflect and review the matter can allow for systems, policies, practices or procedures to be amended or put in place as appropriate, to ensure that lessons are learned and followed up.

By making sure that lessons from complaints are taken on board and followed up appropriately, service and performance can be greatly improved for the future.

6. Complaints Procedure

Big Life Schools Comments and complaints procedure

1. Stage 1: informal

The school will take informal concerns seriously and make every effort to resolve the matter quickly. It may be the case that the provision or clarification of information will resolve the issue.

The complainant should raise the complaint as soon as possible with the relevant member of teaching or support staff, either in person or by letter, telephone or email. If the complainant is unclear who to contact or how to contact them, they should contact the school office.

The school will acknowledge informal complaints within 5 working days and investigate and provide a response within 7 school days. If the school cannot complete the investigation within this timeframe, they must contact the complainant and make them aware of the amended timescales. If the complaint is not resolved informally, it will be escalated to a formal complaint.

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2. Stage 2: formal

The formal stage involves the complainant putting the complaint into writing, usually to the headteacher and/or the subject of the complaint. This letter should provide details such as relevant dates, times and the names of witnesses of events, alongside copies of any relevant documents. The complainant should also state what they feel would resolve the complaint.

The headteacher (or other person appointed by the headteacher for this purpose) will then conduct their own investigation. The written conclusion of this investigation will be sent to the complainant within 7 school days.

If the complainant is not satisfied with the response and wishes to proceed to the next stage of this procedure, they should inform the CEO in writing within 2 weeks of receiving the outcome of stage 2.

3. Stage 3: CEO

Complaints will be escalated to the CEO if the complainant is not satisfied with the response to the complaint at the second, formal, stage. The CEO is contactable through the school office. The CEO will have access to the existing record of the complaint's progress.

The complainant will be invited to meet with the CEO. At the meeting, each individual will have the opportunity to give statements and present their evidence, and witnesses will be called, as appropriate, to present their evidence.

The CEO will be given the chance to ask and reply to questions. Once the complainant has presented their case, they will be asked to leave and evidence will then be considered.

The CEO must then put together their findings and recommendations from the case. A copy of the findings and recommendations will be made available to the complainant and, where relevant, the individual who is the subject of the complaint, and make a copy available for inspection.

The school will inform those involved of the decision in writing within 14 days.

4. Complaints against the headteacher or a governor

Complaints made against the headteacher or any member of the governing body should be made in writing to the Chair of the Multi Academy Trust. The Chair of the MAT will contact the complainant within 7 days, acknowledging the complaint and detailing the timescales to complete the investigation.

Chair of Big Life Schools Multi Academy Trust
339 Stretford Road
Manchester, M154ZY

Or via emailing: governance@thebiglifegroup.com

5. Referring complaints on completion of the school's procedure

If the complainant is unsatisfied with the outcome of the school's complaints procedure, they can refer their complaint to the DfE. The DfE will check whether the complaint has been dealt with properly by the school. The DfE will not overturn a school's decision about a complaint. However, it will look into:

- Whether there was undue delay, or the school did not comply with its own complaint's procedure
- Whether the school was in breach of its funding agreement with the secretary of state

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- Whether the school has failed to comply with any other legal obligation
- If the school did not deal with the complaint properly, it will be asked to re-investigate the complaint. If the school's complaints procedure is found to not meet regulations, the school will be asked to correct its procedure accordingly.

For more information or to refer a complaint, see the following webpage:

<https://www.gov.uk/complain-about-school>

7. Time limits on making a complaint

Normally complaints should be made within twelve months of the event or within twelve months of the complainant becoming aware of a cause to complain. Exceptions to this rule may be made by the headteacher/CEO considering reasons for the delay and the practicability of investigating the matter.

8. Monitoring systems

All complaints are tracked through our complaints management system (IMS), enabling us to identify unresolved issues and prioritise their resolution accordingly.

A report of all comments and complaints will be compiled and sent to the Quality Committee on a quarterly basis. The Quality Committee will regularly review the reports with a view to sharing lessons learned across the group.

9. Review

This procedure will be the subject of periodic review in the light of local practice and/or the receipt of changes to national procedures or guidelines.

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Private & Confidential – Comments/Complaint Form

Big Life Schools is committed to providing quality services and welcomes feedback from people using the range of available services.

Any comments or complaints you make will be given serious attention and appropriate action will be taken. Please note, that this complaint will be kept on our secure IT systems.

NAME:	
ADDRESS:	
CONTACT PHONE NUMBER:	
DATE:	

NATURE OF COMMENT / COMPLAINT:
<i>(Please explain in detail – use a separate sheet if necessary)</i>

DESIRED OUTCOME:
<i>(Please explain in detail what the complainants desired outcome in response to the complaint – use a separate sheet if necessary)</i>

ACTION TAKEN:
Copy retained? ☐
SIGNED:
COUNTER SIGNED: (by staff receiving complaint)

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