

Effective Communication Series

Writing a letter of concern or complaint

There may be times when conversation about a subject hasn't worked or there is so much involved that you need to put it all down in writing. Where there are concerns or you are not happy, this can be done in the form of a letter of concern or as a complaint. This can be done as an email or as a paper copy letter.

A letter of concern will not be treated in the same way as a formal complaint, but does allow opportunity to write down your concerns and what outcomes you would like to explore.

A formal complaint is usually the last stage in trying to find resolution to a concern and a formal process must be followed by the school or service to which you are complaining.

The content of your letter is generally the same regardless of which option you choose (or you may choose to do a letter of concern first and then a complaint if you feel that hasn't addressed your concerns sufficiently).

What should I include in my letter?

- Mark your letter as 'letter of concern' or 'letter of complaint'.
- Include your child's name, date of birth and your contact details.
- As an introduction be clear about the issues you want resolved right from the start
- Include (as concisely as possible and use bullet points if long lists):
 - a brief history (using relevant points only) leading up to the situation you are writing about.
 - what your specific concerns are now (especially your concerns if things are not dealt with appropriately).
 - dates, facts and specific examples where possible (include documentation if appropriate);
 - praise and examples where things are or have been, positive.
- Request an explanation if you felt actions or decisions had been agreed but didn't happen (again, refer to dates of meetings, emails etc with evidence of agreed actions).
- State what you want to happen as a result of sending your letter (known as outcomes). If you have specific ideas, then you can state these (but be prepared to negotiate if necessary)
- Give a reasonable timescale by which you would like a response, bearing in mind that your concerns will need to be investigated. If it is a complaint, then this is usually written into the school's complaints policy.

Complaints Procedure

Firstly, you will need to look up the school or service's complaints procedure. This will explain the process of how your complaint will be dealt with, along with the time frames for receiving a response. It will also explain your options should you not be satisfied with the outcome.

An effective complaints procedure will:

- Encourage resolution of problems by informal means wherever possible
- Be easily accessible and publicised.
- Be simple to understand and use.
- Be impartial.
- Be non-Adversarial (encourage co-operation)
- Allow swift handling with established time-limits for action and keeping people informed of the progress.
- Ensure a full and fair investigation by an independent person where necessary.
- Respect people's desire for confidentiality.
- Address all the points at issue and provide an effective response and appropriate redress, where necessary.
- Provide information to the school's senior management team so that services can be improved.



(taken from Best Practice Advice for school complaints procedures 2016- best practice tips)

Your complaint will usually be dealt with in 'Stages', but not all complaints will start at Stage 1. This will generally depend on who is involved and the nature of the complaint.

Although we would encourage a complaint only as a last resort, you should be aware that complaints should not be left too long after the initial situation or incident so it will be important to not leave things indefinitely and then try and make a complaint. It is unlikely that this will be accepted and there is less chance of the situation being resolved in a timely way to be effective.

What happens after you submit your letter?

It is likely that your concern(s) or complaint will be investigated first with relevant people questioned and paperwork checked through. However, you may be asked to attend a meeting first so that your concerns can be discussed more fully, and more details provided if felt necessary.

Should this happen (or at any stage) please refer to our 'preparing for a meeting' factsheet. Do make sure that you know what the meeting is for and what your options are after the meeting. (For example, is it to gather information for an investigation to be done or is it to explain the findings of their investigation).



If your letter was a complaint, you will need to know whether the meeting will be followed up in writing and what your next options are.

Should you not be happy with the initial outcome of your letter, it will be important to consider continuing through to the next stage(s). If it was a letter of concern, then you may need to consider making it a formal complaint.

If it was already a letter of complaint, then it should be able to be escalated further through the various stages. You generally cannot miss stages out and need to have followed the service's complaint process fully before taking it elsewhere (such as to the Local Government Ombudsman, depending on the nature of the initial complaint).



More information about this subject area can be found on our [complaints webpage guide](#) page that can be found on our website.

If you have any queries and concerns then do not hesitate to contact us. Our contact details are below.

Service Statement

The role of the SENDIAS service is to ensure that all parents, children and young people have access to impartial information, advice and support so they can make informed decisions related to their situation. Any information that is shared with the service is in confidence unless permission has been obtained to share this with other individuals, services and agencies that may be able to help the family with their circumstances. All our policies and privacy notice, are on our website.

How To Contact Us

Contact-line: 0330 222 8555
Email address: send.ias@westsussex.gov.uk (parent carers and professionals)
cyp.sendias@westsussex.gov.uk (children and young people up to 25 years)
Website: www.westsussexsendias.org

SEND: Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities

To view all SENDIAS factsheets online: <https://bit.ly/3apJBmu>

or scan QR code:

