



St John's Catholic Primary School

Complaints Policy



April 2016

Introduction:

St. John's Catholic Primary School values your views and opinions and if you think we could do something better we would like to hear from you. When making contact with us, you may be unsure whether you have a concern or 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 generally defined as *'an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action'*.

Generally, a concern relates to a pupil who is currently on roll at our school and we like to think that most concerns can be settled quickly and effectively by someone who knows your child well. Quite often it may be about the following:

- Your child's learning
- Friendship groups
- Relationships with staff
- School procedures
- Bullying
- Theft

In these cases we ask that parents follow stage 1 of the Complaints Procedure and allow the concern to be dealt with in an informal manner. However, we also realise that a parent may wish to make a complaint if they feel that the school has not dealt with the concern satisfactorily.

Any person, including members of the public, may make a complaint about any provision of facilities or services that the school provides, unless separate statutory procedures apply (such as exclusions or admissions). At St. John's, we do not limit complaints to parents or carers of children that are registered at our school and complaints may be made in person, by telephone or in writing, (with the exception of stage 4 of the procedure).

Complaints about the curriculum, collective worship, racist incidents, exclusions, admissions or provision for children with special educational needs are dealt with under separate procedures, likewise, staff grievances, whistleblowing, disciplinary matters and those likely to require a Child Protection Investigation are outside the scope of this complaints procedure and all third party providers offering services through the school premises have their own complaints procedure in place to deal with complaints connected to their individual services.

Our principle aim is to deal with complaints:

- Openly
- Fairly
- Promptly
- Without prejudice

Our procedures for dealing with complaints will:

- Be publicised on the School Website
- Be simple to understand and follow
- Be focused on outcomes
- Have established time limits for action
- Keep people informed at all stages
- Respect people's desire for confidentiality
- Be carefully monitored and evaluated
- Provide information to the school's senior management team so that the school's procedures can be improved

In order to prevent any later challenges or disagreements over what was said in connection to the complaint, brief notes of meetings and telephone calls will be kept and a copy of any written response added to the record. A record of the progress of the complaint and the final outcome will be recorded and the complaints co-ordinator will be responsible for holding all such records centrally. Under the Freedom of Information and Data Protection Acts, the complainant will have access rights to copies of these records.

Dealing with complaints through a staged approach

Our staged approach is designed to ensure that every effort is made to deal with complaints informally at school level in partnership with the complainant. The formal stages would only be triggered in exceptional circumstances:

- Stage 1 is the informal stage. In the case of either a concern being raised or a complaint being made by a parent, the class teacher will receive the first approach and the majority of issues should be resolved at this stage. In the case of a complaint by a member of the public, the school office should be the first point of contact. A decision will then be made as to which member of staff is best placed to deal with the complaint.
- Stages 2 and 3 are formal stages involving the headteacher and the chair of governors.
- Stage 4 is the appeal stage within the school which is heard by a panel of governors. (Further guidance on each stage of the procedure is shown in Appendix A)

The policy is designed to manage all complaints, but as complaints vary in their nature and complexity the school will recommend at which stage a complaint should be

considered when it is initially raised and which member of staff is best placed to deal with it. That said however, a complainant will always be given the opportunity to complete the complaints procedure in full should this be their wish. Equally, once a complaint has been made, it can be withdrawn at any time during the complaints process if resolved satisfactorily.

Managing our Complaints Procedure:

The complaints co-ordinator at St. John's Catholic Primary School is our headteacher and they are also responsible for the operation and management of the procedure. When managing this procedure, staff and governors will also consider the DfE publication, 'Best Practice Advice for School Complaints Procedures 2016'.

This complaints policy links to the following school policies:

- Safeguarding
- Child Protection
- Health & safety

The review period for our complaints policy is every three years.

Further guidance on each stage of the complaints procedure.

Stage 1 (informal): complaint heard by staff member

It is in everyone's interest that complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. The experience of the first contact between the complainant and the school can be crucial in determining whether the complaint will escalate. To that end, staff are fully aware of the procedures and will know what to do when they receive a complaint.

Our school will respect the views of a complainant who indicates that he/she would have difficulty discussing a complaint with a particular member of staff. In these cases, the complaints co-ordinator can refer the complainant to another staff member. Where the complaint concerns the headteacher, the complaints co-ordinator can refer the complainant to the Chair of Governors.

Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels too compromised to deal with a complaint, the complaints co-ordinator may consider referring the complainant to another staff member. The member of staff may be more senior but does not have to be and that member of staff will have the ability to consider the complaint objectively and impartially.

If the complainant approaches a governor in the first instance regarding a complaint, the matter will be referred to the appropriate person and the complainant will be advised about the procedure. Governors will not act unilaterally on an individual complaint outside the formal procedure or be involved at the early stages in case they are needed to sit on a panel at a later stage of the procedure.

Stage 2 (formal): complaint heard by headteacher

The headteacher's influence will shape the way complaints are handled in the school. At stage 2, the complainant may be dissatisfied with the way the complaint was handled at Stage 1 and want to address this as well as pursuing their initial complaint. The head may therefore delegate the task of collating the information to another staff member but not the decision on the action to be taken. In most circumstances it is expected that a formal complaint will be lodge within three months of the incident arising.

Stage 3 (formal): complaint heard by Chair of Governors

If the complainant is not satisfied with the response of the headteacher or the complaint is about the headteacher, the complainant should write to the Chair of Governors to request that their complaint is considered further. It is expected that the complaint will be lodge with the Chair of Governors within one month of receiving the headteacher's response to the stage 2 formal complaint.

Stage 4 (formal): complaint heard by the Governors' Complaints Appeal Panel

Should the complainant not be satisfied by the outcome of findings for stage 3 or should they wish to make a complaint about the Chair of Governors, the complainant will be asked to write to the Clerk to the Governors giving details of the complaint and asking that it is put before the appeal panel. The Chair, or if the Chair has been involved at any previous stage in the process or is the subject of the complaint, then a nominated governor, will convene the Governing Body's Complaints Appeal Panel.

The panel will be drawn from the nominated members of the Governing body and may consist of three or five people. The panel may choose their own Chair. The governors' appeal hearing is the last school-based stage of the complaints process.

Notification of the panel's decision

The Chair of the Panel will ensure that the complainant is notified of the panel's decision, in writing, with the panel's response (including the reasons for the decision); this is usually within six-weeks. The letter will also explain any further rights of appeal and, if so, to whom they need to be addressed. This may be the LA or Diocesan Board.

The final stage of appeal is to the Secretary of State for Education.

**Complainants should be advised to write to The School Complaints Unit (SCU) at:
Department for Education
2nd Floor, Piccadilly Gate
Manchester
M1 2WD**

What will the Department for Education do?

If a complaint has exhausted the local procedures, SCU will examine if the complaints policy and any other relevant policies were followed in accordance with the provisions set out. SCU will also examine policies to determine if they adhere to education legislation. However, the department will not re-investigate the substance of the complaint. This remains the responsibility of schools.

If legislative or policy breaches are found, SCU will report them to the school and the complainant and, where necessary, require remedial action to be taken. Failure to carry out remedial actions could ultimately result in a formal Direction being issued by the Secretary of State.

Complaints Procedure approved by the Full Governing Body on: 27th June 2016

Next Review Date: Summer-term 2018