

# St Joseph's Catholic Primary School



## Complaints Policy

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### 1. Introduction

- 1.1 We believe that our school provides a good education for all our children, and that the head teacher and staff/all staff work very hard to build positive relationships with all parents and carers. No one likes criticism but an open organisation will always be willing to listen to concerns and anxieties and be ready to learn from them if appropriate. In a school most concerns are likely to be expressed by parents of its pupils, though some may come from pupils themselves, parishioners, or from other interested parties such as neighbours or users of the premises.
- 1.2 In a Catholic school, parental concerns are of particular importance. As the first educators of their children, parents have a duty to take an active interest in their school. In a Catholic school, dealing with parental concerns will be an intrinsic part of the school's ethos and mission.
- 1.3 This policy is based on the principle that where at all possible, complaints will be dealt with informally. Where this proves unsuccessful the formal procedures will give the complainant a route to ensuring the issue is appropriately considered.
- 1.4 It is intended that this policy will clarify how complaints can be made and how the school will respond.
- 1.5 Nearly all concerns or questions can be resolved very quickly and informally if parents feel able to voice them as soon as they arise. Obviously, the more information the school gives to parents the less scope there is for misunderstanding. Feedback from parents is always welcome. Parents are encouraged to voice any concerns straightaway, preferably to the person concerned/the class teacher in the first instance. In most cases, discussion, explanation, further information - or an apology if appropriate - will resolve the issue. **Every effort should be made to allay concerns at this level and with the least possible formality. The ideal is that no concerns should ever become a formal complaint.**
- 1.6 Occasionally, however, a concern will be too serious to be handled in this way, perhaps needing greater investigation; or the person concerned may not feel that the answers given so far have been acceptable or adequate. In such circumstances, the concern will become a **complaint** and the formal procedure should be followed. Even in these cases, every effort should be made to resolve the issue at the lowest level of the procedure. It should be very rare indeed that a complaint needs to be decided at the Appeal Stage by a Governors' Committee.

## 2. Aims and objectives

Our school aims to be fair, open and honest when dealing with any complaint. We give careful consideration to all complaints and deal with them as quickly as possible. We aim to resolve any complaint through dialogue and mutual understanding and, in all cases, we put the interests of the child above all other issues. We provide sufficient opportunity for any complaint to be fully discussed and then resolved.

2.1 At every stage of the procedure, the handling of the complaint will be:

- non-adversarial
- swift (using agreed time limits)
- fair (using independent investigation where necessary) → confidential.

*In using this procedure:*

- *staff are asked to be aware that complainants may feel intimidated by the school as an institution and unsure whether they will be treated fairly*
- *complainants are asked to be aware that those complained about, especially individual members of staff may feel vulnerable during this process.*

2.2 Throughout the procedure the aim of all parties should not only be to resolve the complaint but also to develop and sustain good relationships between all members of the school community. However formal or serious the complaint, or however dissatisfied the complainant, the aim will always be reconciliation between all parties and a renewed commitment to work together amicably. The gospel values of justice and forgiveness always underpin the entire process.

2.3 This complaints procedure does not apply to:

- members of staff (who should use their own Grievance Procedure)
- procedures with their own appeal structure e.g. admissions and exclusions
- concerns about delivery of the National Curriculum.

It is also totally separate from any Disciplinary or Capability Procedures. If the investigation of any complaint were to lead to concerns on the part of the head teacher or governors about the capability or conduct of a member of staff, these would not be discussed or dealt with within this procedure.

## 3. The complaints procedure

Stage 1 - Complaint heard by staff member

**NB. The aim is to resolve the complaint at this level.**

3.1 If a parent is concerned about anything to do with the education that we are providing at our school, they should, in the first

instance, discuss the matter with the class teacher. Most matters of concern can be dealt with in this way. All teachers work very hard to ensure that each child is happy at school and is making good progress; they always want to know if there is a problem so that they can take action before the problem seriously affects the child's progress.

3.2 Whoever investigates the complaint will:

- establish what has happened so far, and who has been involved;
- clarify the nature of the complaint and what remains unresolved;
- meet with the complainant or contact them (if unsure/further information is necessary);
- clarify what the complainant feels would put things right, clearing up any areas of misunderstanding, identifying areas of agreement and discussing what might be possible;
- interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish (this should include adults and pupils as appropriate, whether main players or witnesses);
- conduct each interview with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning;
- keep notes of each interview.

3.3 When the investigation is complete, the member of staff investigating will meet the complainant to try to resolve the complaint. **Every effort should be made to try to resolve the complaint at this meeting.**

*Any of the following may be appropriate at this point;*

- *an acknowledgement that the complaint is valid in whole or in part;*
- *an apology;*
- *an explanation;*
- *a clarification of misunderstandings;*
- *an admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better;*
- *an assurance that the event complained of will not recur;*
- *an explanation of the steps that have been taken to ensure that it will not happen again;*
- *an undertaking to review school policies in light of the complaint. Some of the above may require authority from the head teacher. Nothing should be offered or promised that cannot be justified or fulfilled.*

Stage 2 - Complaint heard by head teacher

3.4 Where a parent feels that a situation has not been resolved through contact with the class teacher, or that their concern is

of a sufficiently serious nature, they should make an appointment to discuss the matter with the head teacher. The head teacher considers any such complaint seriously and investigates each case thoroughly. Most complaints are normally resolved at this stage.

- 3.5 The head teacher will either investigate the complaint personally or refer it to another senior member of staff (who has not so far been involved) or arrange for an independent investigation if appropriate. At this point it is possible that the complaint will have escalated to include a complaint concerning the manner in which the original complaint has been handled. Both parts of the complaint would in this case need to be investigated.
- 3.6 In conducting the investigation, the investigator will operate in accordance with section 3.2.

**Timescales:** Within ten school days of receiving the complaint, the investigator will complete the investigation and contact the complainant to arrange a meeting. At any point in the process, a further investigation may be necessary. If this occurs, the timescale may be extended and the complainant must be informed of the extension and the reason for it.

Any of the suggestions in section 3.3 may be appropriate at this point.

If the complaint cannot be resolved informally by the head teacher, the complainant will be asked to put the complaint in writing to the Chair of Governors who should then liaise with the head teacher and the complainant to try to resolve the complaint. If no agreement can be reached the complainant can request that the Governors' Complaints Panel meets.

**Stage 3 - Complaint heard by Governing Body's Complaints Appeal Panel** 3.7 Only if an informal complaint fails to resolve the matter should a formal complaint be made to the governing body. This complaint must be made in writing, stating the nature of the complaint and how the school has handled it so far. The parent should send this written complaint to the Chair of Governors.

3.8 The chair will check what has happened so far and, if the procedure has been properly followed and it is appropriate to move to stage 3, he/she, or a nominated other governor, will - via the clerk - convene a Governing Body's Complaints Appeal Panel.

3.9 This is the final stage of the procedure. There is no further redress or appeal. It is, therefore, vital that, in the spirit of the procedure, the Appeal Panel should:

- be prepared to hear complaints without preconceptions;
- examine and discuss the matter fully so that they ensure that they have every piece of information or evidence that they require;

- be prepared to commission, organise or conduct further investigations if necessary;
- give the complainant the opportunity to express their dissatisfaction and worries and to suggest what might put things right;
- be prepared to take whatever action is required.

3.10 After hearing all the evidence, the governors consider their decision and inform the parent in writing. The governors do all they can at this stage to resolve the complaint to the parent's satisfaction.

**Timescales:** The date of the governors meeting should be agreed by all parties within five school days of the receipt of the written referral of the complaint. The meeting itself should be held within fifteen school days of the receipt of the referral. If the complainant or head teacher wishes to submit information in writing to the governors, they should send it to the clerk to the governors at least five school days before the meeting.

#### Monitoring and review

- 4.1 The governors monitor the complaints procedure, in order to ensure that all complaints are handled properly. The head teacher logs all complaints received by the school and records how they were resolved. Governors examine this log on an annual basis
- 4.2 Governors take into account any local or national decisions that affect the complaints process, and make any changes necessary to this policy. This policy is available to parents, via the school office, so that they are properly informed of the complaints process.

Complaints made other than in accordance with this procedure Sometimes a complainant may be unfamiliar with, or unaware of, the complaints procedure; sometimes they may choose to take their complaint straight to governors or to other parties, such as the diocese or LA. In every such case, the procedure must be strictly adhered to, and the complaint redirected to the proper stage in the procedure. It is, therefore, important that all members of staff and all governors are fully aware of the procedure and that it is publicly available. It is particularly important that governors know they must not attempt to deal with complaints themselves, but should tell complainants to take their complaint to the head teacher.

#### Complaints made to the DfE

In unusual cases the Secretary of State may have the power to intervene if the governing body of the school has acted as no reasonable governing body would act. This is very unlikely to be the case unless the whole of the school's own complaints procedure has been exhausted.

