



Complaints Policy

Policy Agreed: 11th January 2023

Review date: Spring 2024

Head Teacher: Anthony David

Chair of Governors: Eric Sorenson

We believe that everyone is precious and loved by God. We aspire to let our light shine in all that we do. We nurture and empower one another to flourish. Together we shine in our world by showing compassion and by serving others. Let God's light shine through us.

Statement of intent

St Mary's aims to resolve all complaints at the earliest possible stage and is dedicated to continuing to provide the highest quality of education possible throughout the procedure.

This policy has been created to deal with any complaint against a member of staff or the school as a whole, relating to any aspects of the school or the provision of facilities or services.

Any person, including a member of the public, is able to make a complaint about the provision of facilities or services that the school provides. This policy outlines the procedure that the complainant and school must follow.

Once a complaint has been made, it can be resolved or withdrawn at any stage. The Head Teacher will be the first point of contact when following the complaints procedure.

1. We value good home/school relations and will, therefore, do everything we can to establish and maintain them. This includes seeking to resolve any concerns or complaints promptly, and to the satisfaction of all concerned.
2. We welcome feedback on what parents feel we do well (see appendix D), or not so well, as a school. We will carefully consider all feedback, whether positive or negative, and will review our policies and practises accordingly.
3. We will treat all concerns and complaints seriously and courteously and will advise parents and others of the school's procedures for dealing with their concerns. In return, we expect parents and other complainants to behave respectfully towards all members of the school community. In particular, any disagreement with the school should not be expressed inappropriately or in front of pupils.
4. All school staff and members of the governing body will receive a copy of this policy statement and will be familiar with the school's procedures for dealing with parental concerns and complaints, to which they will have access as required. The policy is available on request to parents.
5. The school's procedures will be reviewed regularly and updated as necessary.
6. Staff and governors will receive training in handling parental concerns and complaints as appropriate. This may be on an individual basis, or as a group activity for all staff, or for specific groups, such as the office staff or members of the governing body.

7. Whilst we will seek to resolve concerns and complaints to the satisfaction of all parties, it may not be possible to achieve this in every case. We will, therefore, use our option to close a complaint before all the stages of the school's procedures have been exhausted, if this appears to be appropriate.

8. The government advocate resolution of parental concerns and complaints at school level wherever possible, in the interests of maintaining good home/school relations.

Complaints procedure

St Mary's Primary School's procedures for dealing with complaints

The majority of concerns from parents, carers and others are handled under the following general procedures. The procedure is divided into three stages;

- **The Informal stage** aims to resolve the concern through informal contact at the appropriate level in school.
- **Stage 1** is the first formal stage at which written complaints are considered by the headteacher or chair of governors, who has special responsibility for dealing with complaints.
- **Stage 2** is the next stage once stage 1 has been worked through. It involves a complaints appeal panel of governors.

The DfE guides that maintained schools are free to decide how many stages their procedure will include; however, they recommend that two stages should be sufficient. The DfE advises that the second stage, an appeal stage, is heard by members of the governing board who will consider the complaint afresh.

How each of these stages operates is explained below:

Informal stage – your initial contact with the school

- Many concerns will be dealt with informally when you make them known to us. The first point of contact should be your child's form teacher or group leader.
- Once your concern is made known to us, we will see you, or contact you by telephone or in writing, as soon as possible. All members of staff know how to refer to the appropriate person with responsibility for your particular issues. He or she will make a clear note of the details and will check later to make sure that the matter has been followed up.
- Any actions or monitoring of the situation that has been agreed, will be communicated clearly and we will confirm this in writing to you.
- If necessary we will contact appropriate people who may be able to assist us with our enquiries into your concern.

- We will normally update you on the progress of our enquiries within ten working days. Once we have responded to your concern, you will have the opportunity of asking for the matter to be considered further.
- If you are still dissatisfied following this informal approach, your concern will become a formal complaint and we will deal with it at the next stage.

Stage 1 - formal consideration of your complaint

This stage in our procedures deals with written complaints. It applies where you are not happy with the informal approach to dealing with your concern, as outlined above.

- Normally, your written complaint should be addressed to the headteacher. If, however, your complaint concerns the headteacher personally, it should be sent to the school marked "For the attention of the chair of governors"
- We will acknowledge your complaint in writing as soon as possible after receiving it. This will be within three working days.
- We will enclose a copy of these procedures with the acknowledgement.
- Normally we would expect to respond in full within 15 working days but if this is not possible we will write to explain the reason for the delay and let you know when we hope to be able to provide a full response.
- As part of our consideration of your complaint, we may invite you to a meeting to discuss the complaint and fill in any details required. If you wish, you can ask someone to accompany you to help you explain the reasons for your complaint.
- The headteacher, or chair of governors may also be accompanied by a suitable person if they wish.
- Following the meeting, the headteacher, investigating officer or chair of governors [*designated governor*] will, where necessary, talk to witnesses and take statements from others involved. If the complaint centres on a pupil, we will talk to the pupil concerned and, where appropriate, others present at the time of the incident in question.
- We will normally talk to pupils with a parent or carer present, unless this would delay the investigation of a serious or urgent complaint, or where a pupil has specifically said that he or she would prefer the parent or carer not to be involved. In such circumstances, we will ensure that another member of staff, with whom the pupil feels comfortable, is present.
- If the complaint is against a member of staff, it will be dealt with under the school's internal confidential procedures, as required by law.
- The headteacher or chair of governors will keep written/typed, signed and dated records of all meetings and telephone conversations, and other related documentation.

- Once we have established all the relevant facts, we will send you a written response to your complaint. This will give an explanation of the headteacher's or chair of governors' decision and the reasons for it. If follow-up action is needed, we will indicate what we are proposing to do. We may invite you to a meeting to discuss the outcome as part of our commitment to building and maintaining good relations with you.
- The person investigating your complaint may decide that we have done all we can to resolve the complaint, in which case we may use our discretion to close the complaint at this point. Please see the next page for further information about this process.
- If you are unhappy with the way in which we reached our conclusions, you may wish to proceed to stage 2, as described below.

Stage 2 - consideration by a governors appeal panel

- If the complaint has already been through stage 1 and you are not happy with the outcome as a result of the way in which the complaint has been handled, you can take it further to a governors appeal panel. This is a formal process, and the ultimate recourse at school level.
- The purpose of this arrangement is to give you the chance to present your arguments in front of a panel of governors who have no prior knowledge of the details of the case and who can, therefore, consider it without prejudice.
- However, the aim of a panel is not to rehear the complaint. It is there to review how the complaint has been investigated and to determine whether this has been conducted fairly. It is there to establish facts and make recommendations which will reassure you that we have taken the complaint seriously.

The governors appeal panel operates according to the following formal procedures:

- The governing body will convene a panel of three governors and will aim to arrange for the panel meeting to take place within **20 working days**.
- You will be asked whether you wish to provide any further written documentation in support of your appeal.
- The headteacher or complaint investigator will be asked to prepare a written report for the panel. The panel can request additional information from other sources if necessary.
- You will be informed, at least **five working days** in advance, of the date, time and place of the meeting. We hope you will feel comfortable with the meeting taking place in the school but we will do what we can to make alternative arrangements if you prefer.

- With the letter, you will receive any relevant correspondence or reports regarding stage 1 and you will be asked whether you wish to submit further written evidence to the panel.
- The letter will explain what will happen at the panel meeting and that you are entitled to be accompanied to the meeting. The choice of person to accompany you is your own, but it is usually best to involve someone in whom you have confidence but who is not directly connected with the school. They are there to give you support but also to witness the proceedings and to speak on your behalf if you wish.
- If it is necessary in the interests of ratifying the investigative process, the complaint investigator may, with the agreement of the chair of the panel, invite relevant witnesses directly involved in matters raised by you to attend the meeting.
- The chair of the panel will bear in mind that the formal nature of the meeting can be intimidating for you and will do his or her best to put you at your ease.
- As a general rule, no evidence or witnesses previously undisclosed should be introduced into the meeting by any of the participants. If either party wishes to do so, the meeting will be adjourned so that the other party has a fair opportunity to consider and respond to the new evidence.
- The chair of the panel will ensure that the meeting is properly minuted. Please understand that any decision to share the minutes with you, the complainant, is a matter for the panel's discretion and you do not have an automatic right to see or receive a copy as the minutes are the property of the governing body. Since such minutes usually name individuals, they are understandably of a sensitive and, therefore, confidential nature.
- Normally, the written outcome of the panel meeting, which will be sent to you, should give you all the information you require. If, however, you feel that you would like to have a copy of the minutes it would be helpful if you could indicate this in advance. If the panel is happy for the minutes to be copied to you, the clerk can then be asked maintain confidentiality in the minutes.

During the meeting, you can expect there to be opportunities for:

- The panel to hear you explain your case and your argument for why it should be heard at stage 2;
- The panel to hear the complaint investigator's case in response;
- you to raise questions via the chair;
- you to be questioned by the complaint investigator through the chair;
- the panel members to be able to question you and the complaint investigator;
- you and the headteacher to make a final statement.

1. In closing the meeting, the chair will explain that the panel will now consider its decision and that written notice of the decision will be sent to you and the headteacher **within three school days**. All participants other than the panel and the clerk will then leave.
2. The panel will then consider the complaint and all the evidence presented in order to:
 - reach a unanimous, or at least a majority, decision on the case;
 - decide on the appropriate action to be taken, if necessary;
 - recommend, where appropriate, to the governing body changes to the school's systems or procedures to ensure that similar problems do not happen again.
3. The clerk will send you and the headteacher a letter outlining the decision of the panel. The letter will also explain that you are entitled to have the handling of the complaint reviewed by Barnet Education Authority. That process is not strictly an appeal, as the local authority cannot direct the governing body in most general complaints cases. It is, however, an opportunity to seek the view of an official third party and the outcome, including any recommendations, may be helpful to you in seeking resolution of the complaint, through the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if necessary.
4. We will keep a copy of all correspondence and notes on file in the school's records but separate from pupils' personal records.

Closure of complaints

- Very occasionally, a school will feel that it needs, regretfully, to close a complaint where the complainant is still dissatisfied.
- We will do all we can to help to resolve a complaint against the school but sometimes it is simply not possible to meet all of the complainant's wishes. Sometimes it is simply a case of "agreeing to disagree".
- If a complainant persists in making representations to the school – to the headteacher, designated governor, chair of governors or anyone else – or to the local authority, this can be extremely time-consuming and can detract from our responsibility to look after the interests of all the children in our care.
- For this reason, we are entitled to close correspondence (including personal approaches, as well as letters and telephone calls) on a complaint where we feel that we have taken all reasonable action to resolve the complaint and that the complaint has exhausted our official process. The local authority will support us in this position, and especially where the complainant's action is causing distress to staff and/or pupils.
- In exceptional circumstances, closure may occur before a complaint has reached stage 2 of the procedures described in this document. This is because

a complaints panel takes considerable time and effort to set up and we must be sure that it is likely to assist the process of investigating the complaint.

The chair of governors [*the designated governor*] may decide, therefore, that every reasonable action has been undertaken to resolve the complaint and that a complaints review panel would not help to move things forward.

This does not, of course, prevent you from referring your complaint to the Secretary of State for a review of the way it has been handled, as described below.

If you wish to pursue your complaint beyond the Governor's review, you can write to the Secretary of State for Education and Skills at the address shown below:

Secretary of State
Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF)
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
LONDON
SW1P 3BT

Please enclose with your letter to the DCSF a copy of the LA review outcome. This will save time in that the DCSF will not need to ask for our view of what has happened.

We would advise parents that, unless the school is shown to have behaved unreasonably or not to have followed their own procedures, there is likely to be little further action that can be taken, as governing bodies are empowered to deal with many issues without reference to either the local authority or the Secretary of State.

St Mary's Primary School
Complaints Feedback form

Personal Details

Name

Address

.....

Postcode

Daytime telephone number

Evening telephone number

If applicable, name of child(ren) and year at school

.....

Your relationship to the school, e.g. parent, carer, neighbour, member of the public, student:

.....

Please give details of your complaint:

What action, if any, have you already taken to try and resolve your complaint? Who did you speak to, when and what was the response?

What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?

Signature

Date

Official Use:

Date of acknowledgment

By whom

Complaint referred to

Date

Annexe B

Model complaint closure letter – stage 1

MODEL CLOSURE LETTER FOR FORMAL STAGE 1 – HEADTEACHER

Dear Mr and Mrs X,

FORMAL STAGE 1 COMPLAINT ABOUT Y AND SCHOOL Z

Thank you for your letter dated.... From your letter(s) it is clear that you are still unhappy with the situation. As a result I have decided to have the matter investigated as part of formal stage 1 of the school's complaints procedure. You complain that :
Summary of complaint to be stated. State each point separately

I have completed my investigation and can offer the following response(s) on each of the points you have raised.

1. Concerning your complaint that
2. Concerning your complaint that

It is important that you are clear about what action the school has taken at each stage of the process so far:

Informal stage

State what action was taken in response and the outcome of this.

Formal stage 1

State what investigative action was taken in response and the outcome of this, including any remedial action to be taken if complaint is upheld.

I hope this response answers your concerns. Please let me know if you wish me to clarify any points. In the meantime, if you are still not satisfied with my reply, there is a further stage of the complaints procedure that you can follow. This formal stage 2 is a review by a panel of governors who will look at the way in which your complaint has been dealt with. The panel will not, however, rehear the whole case. To go to the next formal stage 2, you should write to the chair of governors within ten days of the receipt of this letter, giving your reasons why you wish to take your complaint further.

Yours sincerely,

Annexe C

Model complaint closure letter – stage 2

MODEL CLOSURE LETTER FOR FORMAL STAGE 2 - GOVERNORS PANEL

Dear Mrs and Mrs

FORMAL STAGE 2 COMPLAINT ABOUT Y AND SCHOOL Z

The panel met on ...date...to hear your appeal regarding your complaint which can be summarised as follows:

That so and so/the school did/said/did not,...

Legal or administrative background

State any legal or administrative background to the case, including any legislation relevant to the investigation.

The investigation

Set out the key facts about the complaint, the findings and conclusions from the Formal stage 1 investigation, and any continuing concerns.

Conclusion

Set out the findings of the panel

Panel decision

Outcome of the decision

Please let me know if you wish me to clarify any points for you. In the meantime, if you remain dissatisfied with the way in which your complaint has been dealt with, there is another stage of the complaints procedure that you can write to the Secretary of State to examine the process that we have followed.

We would advise parents that, unless the school is shown to have behaved unreasonably or not to have followed their own procedures, there is likely to be little further action that can be taken, as governing bodies are empowered to deal with many issues without reference to either the local authority or the Secretary of State.

Annexe A

Complaints which are subject to statutory procedures

Some areas of complaint are subject to statutory procedures and there is clear guidance on how such issues should be dealt with. These include;

- admissions
- child protection
- drugs
- equal opportunities
- exclusions
- health and safety
- National Curriculum
- religious education and collective worship
- sex education
- special educational needs
- staff capability
- staff discipline
- staff grievance
- racist incidents *

The headteacher will in most cases determine which if any of these statutory procedures apply. Advice can be obtained from Education Leeds on any such issues either by contacting the appropriate service manager or the customer relations service on 0113 247 5688.

If one of these statutory procedures needs to be invoked at some point during the investigation of a more general complaint the complaints procedure should be suspended until the statutory procedure has been concluded.

* although racist incidents are subject to a statutory procedure, the Race Relations Amendment Act 2000, this does not necessitate the complaints procedure being suspended. However, there is a duty for local authorities to monitor racist incidents and so schools must complete the racial harassment monitoring form (RH1), as part of the procedure for any complaint regarding a racist incident. See Part IV Further Guidance, section 13.

Annexe D

St Mary's Primary School

Compliments Feedback form

Personal Details

Name

Address

.....

Postcode

Daytime telephone number

Evening telephone number

If applicable, name of child (ren) and year at school

.....

Your relationship to the school, e.g. parent, carer, neighbour, member of the public, student:

.....

Please give details of your compliment: