



## **St Anne's Catholic Primary School**

### **School Complaint Procedures**

(Note for school governors: this policy must be read in conjunction with the diocesan **Guidance to Governing Bodies on the Management of School Complaint Procedures**)

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **The Catholic School**

As the first educators of their children, parents have a duty to take an active interest in their school. Canon Law requires that there is a partnership between the parent and the school "...there must be the closest co-operation between parents and the teachers to whom they entrust their children to be educated. In fulfilling their task, teachers are to collaborate closely with parents and willingly listen to them." (Canon 796).

The partnership between the parent and the school is integral to the ethos and mission of the Catholic school and should be characterised by a mutual respect by which parents feel they are able to bring their concerns to the attention of someone in the school, at any time, with the expectation they will be listened to and their concerns addressed.

### **Dealing with concerns**

Not all concerns are complaints. A concern is an issue raised by a parent, pupil or other person that is resolved quickly and informally. Most concerns are resolved by the person to whom the concern is addressed e.g., the class teacher or the phase leader. It is only when a resolution cannot be reached at the informal stage the concern becomes a complaint and the formal part of the procedure is applied. Schools should treat all concerns seriously and take prompt action to reach a resolution.

Many concerns are expressed because of misunderstandings. Schools can work to reduce these concerns by:

- providing parents with regular information;
- involving parents and pupils in school reviews and evaluations;
- inviting feedback from parents e.g. policy developments;
- providing adequate times in the school year for parents to meet with teachers;

- regular communication between the teacher and the parent by notes home or entries in the day book/diary/journal;
- inviting parents in if the school has concerns.

The examples given above apply to communications with parents as the vast majority of concerns are expressed by parents. Other parties, e.g. neighbours, may also express concerns which should be treated as seriously as those expressed by parents.

Concerns that are resolved informally are not complaints and there is no requirement to record them as complaints. It is strongly advised that schools should keep notes on each concern expressed with regard to the nature of the concern, the person who dealt with it, how it was addressed and resolved. It may be that a concern that was resolved becomes a complaint at a later date. It is important the school is able to show that it took prompt action to resolve the concern in its initial stage. The senior leadership team should be informed of all concerns so that services can be improved if necessary.

## **1 Aims**

- 1.1 To provide an effective means of complaint for the whole community of the school.
- 1.2 To ensure that the complainant's concerns have been taken seriously and have been addressed in a fair way.
- 1.3 To ensure that the resolution reached will enable relationships to be strengthened so that the school and those who use its services can continue to work together. It is important then, that the gospel values of justice and reconciliation underpin the whole process.
- 1.4 To provide an additional means of monitoring and improving the school service.

## **2 Definition of a complaint**

- 2.1 The clear expression of dissatisfaction by a person or persons, not employed by the school or on the Governing Board, with any interest in the school about the standard of teaching, conduct, actions or lack of action, of members of the teaching or non-teaching staff employed at the school or anyone else working under the direction of the head teacher.

## **3 Further Guidance**

- 3.1 All complaints should be treated as confidential and only the members concerned with investigating the complaint should have access to the file.

3.2 Reference to the Complaint Procedure should be made in a variety of communications to ensure the whole school community is aware of the service.

3.3 The purpose of these guidelines is to provide a means to resolve complaints. It is important that every effort is made to resolve complaints at school level.

3.4 Many complaints can be dealt with informally (stage 1).

3.5 The Diocese or the Governor Support Service at the Local Authority will be able to advise and guide Governors on these procedures.

## **4 The Stages of the Complaints Procedure**

### **4.1 Stage 1: Informal**

4.1.1 The complaint, made in writing, telephone or in person should be addressed to the teacher, phase leader or member of the leadership team who will log the complaint (see Appendix 1 for sample record form) and either investigate the complaint personally or refer it to a more senior member of staff. The staff member dealing with the complaint will acknowledge receipt of the complaint giving the name of the member of staff investigating the complaint (see Appendix 2 for guidelines on investigating complaints). Complainant arranges to meet teacher, phase leader or member of the leadership team on informal basis at convenient time for both to discuss the complaint. If the complaint concerns the headteacher or a member of the governing body it should be referred to the chair of governors and the headteacher or governor should be informed. If the complaint concerns the chair of governors it should be referred to the vice chair and the chair informed.

4.1.2 The investigation should be completed within ten school days of receiving the complaint. There may be occasions when more time is needed. If this is the case the complainant should be informed immediately and within the ten school days timescale. The complainant should be given the reasons why more time is needed with an approximation of the number of extra days. Head teacher to be informed about the complaint, the meeting between the complainant and the staff member and the outcome.

- 4.1.3 If necessary the designated member of staff investigates. Within three days of the completion of the investigation, the investigator will contact the complainant to arrange a meeting. The purpose of the meeting with the complainant is to assure them that the investigation has been thorough and fair and to make every effort to reach a resolution (see Appendix 3 for possible resolution outcomes).
- 4.1.4 If resolved satisfactorily no further action is necessary.
- 4.1.5 The head teacher or designated member of staff contacts the complainant informing them that, if they are not satisfied, they have the right to refer their complaint to the Governing Board (Stage 2). From this stage on, complaints are considered to be formal. Such complaints should be in writing, with date, name and address of complainant and should be received by the Governing Body within ten days of the head teacher's notification.
- 4.1.6 In some cases it may not be appropriate to advise in writing as this may over-formalise a situation which could still be resolved informally.

## **4.2 Stage 2: Formal**

- 4.2.1 Complaints should be referred to the Chair of Governors.
- 4.2.2 The complainant must write to the Chair of Governors, giving details of the complaint. On receiving the letter of complaint, the Chair of Governors should acknowledge receipt of the complaint within five days and should attempt to respond having carried out an investigation, within 15 days.
- 4.2.3 If this is not possible, the reasons for the delay, plus a revised response date should be communicated in writing by the Chair within ten days.
- 4.2.4 During this time the Chair should investigate the complaint, which may include speaking with all parties, either individually or together.
- 4.2.5 The Chair should send a written summary of findings to the complainant within 15 working days including the right of appeal to the Governing Body's Complaints Committee.
- 4.2.6 If resolved satisfactorily no further action is necessary.
- 4.2.7 The complainant has ten working days to request an investigation by the Complaints Appeal Panel. The complainant must put the complaint in writing to the chair of governors also giving reasons why they have been dissatisfied with the outcomes of the first two stages. The chair of the

Complaints Appeal Panel will check that the procedures have been followed correctly up to this point and then arrange for a meeting of the governing body Complaints Appeal Panel. The Complaints Appeal Panel will consist of three governors.

### **4.3 Stage 3: Complaints Appeal Panel Hearing**

4.3.1 The date of the meeting should be agreed between all parties within five school days from receipt of the written referral of the complaint to Stage 3 and must take place within 15 school days of receipt.

4.3.2 The clerk to the governors will manage all administration for the meeting.

4.3.3 If the complainant or headteacher wishes to submit information in writing to the meeting it should reach the clerk at least five school days before the meeting.

4.3.4 The timescale may be altered with agreement of all parties if the referral to Stage 3 comes at the end of term, particularly the summer term. It will be in everyone's interest not to delay the meeting to the start of the next term since the aim of the procedure is to resolve issues as soon as possible to effect reconciliation.

4.3.5 Before the meeting takes place all parties should be given details outlining

- the purpose of the meeting\*
- the conduct of the meeting\*
- the order of the meeting\*
- the role of the clerk\*
- the role of the chair of the panel. \*

\*(see Appendix 4 The Management of the Governing Board Complaints Appeal Panel Meeting)

4.3.6 Minutes of the meeting should be recorded and kept on file.

4.3.7 The clerk will inform the complainant of the decision reached by the panel within five calendar days of the meeting. The letter should also state this was the final stage of the Complaint Procedures and there is no further appeal.

## **5 Vexatious complaints**

If the complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome of the complaint, when the complaints procedure has been exhausted, and attempts to reopen the issue, the chair of governors will inform them in writing that the matter is now closed as the complaint has been heard according to the published Complaint Procedures and there is nothing further that the school can offer.

## **6 Anonymous complaints**

The school will deal with anonymous complaints that raise safeguarding concerns but will not investigate other anonymous complaints (see Appendix 5).

## **7 Unreasonable complainants**

All complaints should be dealt with fairly and impartially and, to provide a high quality of service to those who complain, schools will not normally limit the contact complainants have with the school. However, schools do not expect their staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour and they will act to protect staff from that behaviour, including that which is abusive, offensive or threatening.

Unreasonable complainants are defined as 'those who, because of the frequency or nature of their contacts with the school, hinder our consideration of their or other people's complaints.' According to the Local Government Ombudsman see Appendix 6 for examples of unreasonable actions and behaviours.

<b>Date agreed by governing body on</b> 26 <sup>th</sup> March 2024	<b>Signature of Chair or Vice Chair</b>
<b>Date agreed for review</b> Summer 2026	<b>Frequency of Review</b> Annual
<b>Responsibility for Review</b> PPC Committee	

Appendices – see the diocesan ‘**Guidance to Governing Bodies on the Management of School Complaint Procedures**’ (September 2018)