



Complaints Policy

The Status of the policy: Statutory

Purpose:

This policy describes what you should do if you have any concerns about the school. It covers complaints that are not dealt with under statutory procedures (for example admissions or staff capability) and it is based on a National Governors' Association model document.

Links with other policies:

Whistleblowing Policy
Behaviour Policy
Admissions Arrangements
Data Protection and Freedom of Information Policy

Monitoring and evaluation:

This policy is reviewed every three years or more frequently should legislation require it. It is monitored by the Safety and Community Committee.

Date of approval by governing body: March 2017

Date of next review: March 2020

If you require a copy of this document on paper, in audio format or in Braille, please contact the School Office.

Introduction

St Mary's CE Primary School(the School) endeavours to provide the best education possible for all of its pupils in an open and transparent environment. We welcome any feedback that we receive from parents, pupils and third parties, and we accept that not all of this will be positive. Where concerns are raised the school intends for these to be dealt with:

- Fairly
- Openly
- Promptly
- Without Prejudice

In order to do so, the governing body of the School has approved the following procedure which explains what you should do if you have any concerns about the school. All members of staff will be familiar with the procedure and will be able to assist you.

Which procedure do I need?

Sometimes, when concerns are more specific, there are alternative and more appropriate policies for dealing with them. The following list details specific topics of complaints, and the correct policy to refer to. You can access these policies on the school website or ask for a copy from the main school reception.

- Pupil admissions; please contact the clerk to the governing body
- Pupil exclusions; please see the School's Behaviour Policy
- Staff grievance, capability or disciplinary; these are covered by the School's staff policies.
- Where the complaint concerns a third party used by the school; please complain directly to the third party themselves.
- Anonymous complaints – please refer to the Whistleblowing Policy.
- Subject Access Requests and Freedom of Information Requests – please see the School's Data Protection and Freedom of Information policy

Raising concerns

The majority of concerns can be dealt with without resorting to this procedure. Where you have a concern about any aspect of the school or your child's education or wellbeing, please raise this with the relevant staff member directly by first calling or emailing the school office to schedule an appointment. Ideally, the relevant staff member will be able to address your concerns on the spot, or can arrange a meeting with you to discuss the issue.

All concerns will be dealt with confidentially, although the staff member may need to take notes if they feel that the matter may need to be taken further or it may arise again in the future. Any such notes will be kept in accordance with the School's Data Protection and Freedom of Information policy. However, such notes would be able to be used to as evidence if further investigation was required, or if the concern became a formal complaint.

Safeguarding

Wherever a complaint indicates that a child’s wellbeing or safety is at risk, the school is under a duty to report this immediately to the local authority. Any action taken will be in accordance with the School’s Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy, which can be found on the school website.

Confidentiality

In order for complaints to be resolved as quickly and fairly as possible, the School requests that the complainants do not discuss complaints publicly through any channels including digital and print. Complaints will be dealt with confidentially for those involved, and we expect complainants to observe these principles of confidentiality also.

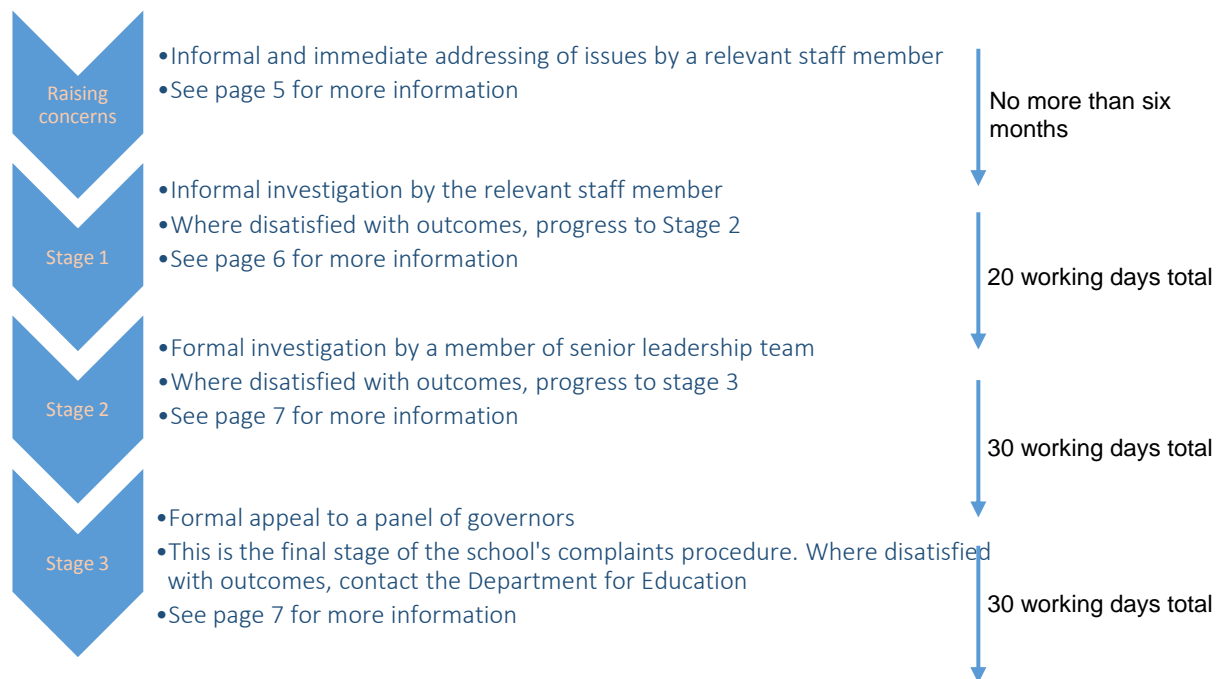
Complaints that result in staff capability or disciplinary

If at any formal stage of the complaint it is determined that staff disciplinary or capability proceedings are necessary in order to resolve the issue, the details of this action will remain confidential to the headteacher and/or the individual’s line manager. The complainant is entitled to be informed that action is being taken and the eventual outcome of any such action, but they are not entitled to participate in the proceedings or receive any further detail about them. Complainants are expected to treat information that action is being taken confidentially, as well as the eventual outcome if requested to do so.

Procedure

If you need to raise an issue in the first instance, please do so with the relevant member of staff who will be happy to talk to you and seek to establish a solution. If you are not satisfied with this response and believe the issue has not been resolved, please use the following procedure as detailed below.

Timeline



Timeframes

The School will endeavour to abide by the suggested timeframes stated under each stage but acknowledges that in some circumstances, this is not always possible due, for example, to the complexity of information needed to review a complaint or difficulties regarding an individual's availability to deal with the complaint. If it becomes apparent that it is not possible to complete any stage of the complaints procedure within a given timeframe, the individual responsible for handling the complaint will contact the complainant as soon as possible, notify the complainant of this and where possible come to an agreed timeframe that works for all parties involved.

The School reserves the right not to investigate complaints that have been made three months after the act or omission which is the subject of the complaint took place, except in exceptional circumstances. Exceptional circumstances may include where significant new evidence has subsequently come to light, where the complaint is of an especially serious nature or where there is reasonable justification for why the complainant has been unable to raise the complaint before this time. The headteacher will review the situation and decide whether or not to enact the complaints procedure, informing the chair of governors of the decision.

Who should I approach?

Educational matters: Classroom teacher

Pastoral care: Classroom teacher

Disciplinary matters: Classroom teacher

Financial/Administration matters: School Business Manager

Complaint about a staff member's conduct: direct approach to the staff member themselves. Where this does not resolve the situation, their line manager should be approached.

Complaints about the headteacher or the governors

Where a complaint is in respect of the headteacher, the complainant should first directly approach the headteacher in an attempt to resolve the issue informally. If the complainant is not satisfied with this outcome they should notify the clerk to the governors (see contact details at the end of the document). The Stage 2 process will then commence, but with the chair of governors as the individual responsible for the investigation rather than the headteacher or a Senior Leadership Team (SLT) member.

Where a complaint regards a governor, the same process applies as for the headteacher. Where a complaint concerns the chair of governors, the individual should contact the clerk to the governors. Informal resolution will be sought, but where this fails, the complaints procedure at Stage 3 will take immediate effect. The vice chair or an independent investigator *will* mediate any proceedings.

Stages of the Complaint

Stage 1 – Informal investigation by a staff member

Where as a result of raising a concern the complainant still feels that the issue has not been addressed, or where the outcome has been that the complaint needs further investigation than can be resolved briefly, they may progress by making an informal complaint. In doing so, the following steps will be followed:

1. Complainant contacts the staff member via the school office or email.

2. The complainant must explain in writing
 - An overview of the complaint so far
 - who has been involved
 - why the complaint remains unresolved
 - action they would like to be taken to put things right.
3. The staff member will respond within 5 working days (excluding those which fall in the school holidays) of having received the written complaint. They will explain what action they intend to take.
4. Where the complaint is about a member of staff or a school governor, the allocated senior leadership team member (SLT) will arrange an informal mediation meeting between the two parties to see if a resolution can be reached.
5. The staff member will provide a written confirmation of the outcome of their investigation within 15 working days (excluding those which fall in the school holidays) of having sent confirmation of the intended action. Where the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome, they are able to progress to stage 2 of the complaints process, and launch a formal written complaint.
6. The staff member will make a record of the concern and the outcomes of the discussion which will be held centrally in accordance with the School's Data Protection and Freedom of Information policy.

Stage 2 – formal investigation by a member of the senior leadership team

1. The complainant may submit a formal complaints form via the school office, addressed to the headteacher or specific member of the SLT. A copy of the form can be found on page 11.
2. The headteacher will respond in writing within 10 working days (excluding those that fall in the school holidays) of the date of receipt of the complaint to acknowledge receipt of the complaint and explain what action will be taken, giving clear timeframes and confirmation of who will deal with the complaint.
3. A log of all correspondence in relation to the complaint will be kept in accordance with the School's Data Protection and Freedom of Information policy.
4. The headteacher or SLT member will consider all relevant evidence; this may include but is not limited to:
 - a statement from the complainant,
 - where relevant a statement from an individual who is the subject of the complaint
 - any previous correspondence regarding the complaint
 - any supporting documents in either case
 - interview with anyone related to the complaint.

5. The headteacher or SLT member may decide to have a meeting with the complainant (and where relevant, the subject of the complaint) if they feel that it would be appropriate for the investigation.
6. After considering the available evidence, the headteacher or SLT member can:
 - Uphold the complaint and direct that certain action be taken to resolve it
 - Reject the complaint and provide the complainant with details of the stage three appeals process
 - Uphold the complaint in part: in other words, the headteacher or SLT member may find one aspect of the complaint to be valid, but not another aspect. They may direct for certain action to be taken to resolve the aspect that they find in favour of the complainant.
7. The headteacher or SLT member must inform the complainant of their decision in writing within 20 working days (excluding those that fall in the school holidays) of having issued written acknowledgement of the receipt of the complaint (subject to the comments on timelines in the section “Timeframes” above). They must explain clearly why they have come to the decision that they made. They must detail any agreed actions as a result of the complaint. Finally, they must provide the complainant with details of how to progress the complaint to stage 3 if they are not satisfied, providing them with the contact details of the clerk to the governors (see the end of the procedure for these).

Stage 3 – Appeal – review by a panel of the governing body.

If the complainant wishes to appeal a decision by the headteacher or SLT member at stage 2 of the procedure, or they are not satisfied with the action that the headteacher took in relation to the complaint, the complainant is able to appeal this decision.

They must write to the Clerk to the Governors, c/o St Mary’s CE Primary School or email governors@st-marys.richmond.sch.uk as soon as possible after receiving notice of the decision of the headteacher or SLT member, briefly outlining the content of the complaint, the grounds on which the complainant would like to appeal the decision at Stage 2 and requesting that a complaints appeal panel is convened.

The clerk will fulfil the role of organising the time and date of the appeal hearing, inviting all the attendees, collating all the relevant documentation and distributing this 5 days in advance of the meeting, recording the proceedings in the form of minutes, and circulating these and the outcome of the meeting.

The complainant must request an appeal panel within 4 weeks of receiving the decision of the headteacher or SLT member or it will not be considered, except for in exceptional circumstances. Whether such exceptional circumstances exist shall be determined by the complaints appeal panel. On receipt of this written notification, the following steps will be followed:

1. The clerk will write to the complainant within five working days (not including the school holidays) to confirm receipt of the appeal request and detail further action to be taken.

2. The clerk will convene a panel of three school governors. All three panel members will have no prior knowledge of the content of the complaint.
3. The appeal hearing will take place within 20 working days (excluding those which fall in the school holidays) of receipt of the date of the confirmation letter from the clerk to the complainant, confirming the appeal.
4. In addition to the panel, the following parties will be invited, where applicable:
 - the complainant
 - the headteacher or SLT member who dealt with the complaint at Stage 2
 - where the complaint regards a member of staff, the staff member who is the subject of the complaint.

The complainant is also able to bring a companion with them to the hearing if they wish. Where the subject of the complaint is a member of staff, that staff member is also able to bring a companion with them.

The companion will be a friend or a colleague. Neither party is able to bring legal representation with them. If after the hearing any party feels that legal action is necessary, please see the contact details at the end of the procedure.

5. If the attendance of any pupils is required at the hearing, parental permission will be sought if they are under the age of 18. Extra care will be taken to consider the vulnerability of children where they are present at a complaints hearing.
6. Where the complaint is about a governor/trustee, the complainant may request that the appeal is heard by an entirely independent panel. The decision whether to agree to such a request is at the discretion of the governing body, who will notify the clerk of their decision. Where an entirely independent panel is required, timescales may be affected while the school source appropriate individuals for the review.
7. The panel can make the following decisions:
 - Dismiss the complaint in whole or in part
 - Uphold the complaint in whole or in part
 - Decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint
 - Recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not recur.
8. All parties who attended the meeting will be informed in writing of the outcome of the appeal within 5 working days (excluding those which fall in the school holidays).

This is the final stage at which the School will consider the complaint. If the complainant remains dissatisfied and wishes to take the complaint further, please see the contact details at the end of the document. The School will not consider the complaint further beyond this stage 3,

Unreasonable complaints

Where a complainant raises an issue that has already been dealt with via the School's complaints procedure, and that procedure has been exhausted, the School will not reinvestigate the complaint except in exceptional circumstances, for example this could include where significant new evidence has subsequently come to light. The headteacher will review the situation and decide whether or not exceptional circumstances exist and whether the complaint should be reinvestigated, informing the chair of the governors of his or her decision.

If a complainant persists in raising the same issue, the headteacher will write to them explaining that the matter has been dealt with fully in line with the school complaints procedure, and therefore the case is now closed. The complainant will be provided with the contact details of the Department for Education (see the end of this document) if they wish to take the matter further.

Unreasonable complaints may include the following scenarios:

- The complaint can be fairly characterised as manifestly unreasonable
- The complainant refuses to co-operate fully with the school's relevant procedures.
- The complainant changes the basis of the complaint or raises substantively new issues as the complaint progresses (either as an attempt to prolong the complaint process or otherwise).
- The complainant seeks an unrealistic outcome, taking into account amongst other things the resources, purpose, welfare and wellbeing of the whole School community and/or ethos of the School.
- Excessive demands are made on the time of staff and school governors and/or the complaint is clearly intended to aggravate, is vexatious and/or is brought in bad faith.
- The complainant acts in a way that is abusive or offensive or has used physical violence towards school staff or governors
- The complainant is repeatedly unwilling to accept documented evidence given as being factual or denies receipt of an adequate response in spite of correspondence specifically answering their questions or does not accept that facts can sometimes be difficult to verify when a long period of time has elapsed
- The complainant does not clearly identify the precise issues which they wish to be investigated, despite reasonable efforts of staff to help them specify their concerns.

This list is not exhaustive.

The headteacher will use their discretion to choose not to investigate complaints which the headteacher deems to be unreasonable. Where the headteacher decides to take this course of action, he/she must inform the chair of governors that he/she has done so, explaining the nature of the complaint and why they have chosen not to investigate. If the chair deems it appropriate to, they can redirect the headteacher and/or a SLT member as appropriate to investigate the complaint. The full complaints procedure will commence from stage one on this direction or from the stage it had reached under the complaints procedure prior to the decision not to investigate the complaint further.

If the chair upholds the headteacher's decision not to look into the complaint and the complainant deems this decision to be so unreasonable that no other rational body in the same position would have made that decision, then the complainant may write to the Department for Education (see the contact details at the end of the document).

Contact details for external organisations if not satisfied with the outcomes of the complaints procedure in full.

- If you have any queries regarding any aspect of the complaints procedure, please direct these to the clerk to the governors at governors@st.marys.richmond.sch.uk
- If the complainant feels that the governing board acted 'unreasonably' in the handling of the complaint, they can complain to the Department for Education after the complaints procedure has been exhausted. Please note that unreasonable is used in a legal sense and means acting in a way that no reasonable school or authority would act in the same circumstances.
<https://www.gov.uk/complain-about-school>
- Ofsted will also consider complaints about schools.

Relevant legislation and guidance

The Equality Act 2010 <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents>

The Data Protection Act 1998 <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/29/contents>

The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2014/3283/contents/made>

Education Act 2002 <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/32/contents>

The Department for Education *Best Practice advice for school complaints procedures*
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-complaints-procedures>

Equalities Statement

St Mary's positively celebrates diversity and inclusion is core to its Christian ethos. The Governing Body recognises that no one should receive less favourable unlawful treatment than another on the grounds of gender, marital or civil partnership status, colour, race, nationality, ethnic or national origin, disability, religious beliefs, age, or sexual orientation. It is the Governors' aim that no-one at the School should suffer unlawful direct or indirect discrimination, victimisation or harassment on any of these grounds. The Governing Body is committed to embedding fairness and equality at the heart of the school community, and in all aspects of the school's policies, procedures and practices.

St Mary's CE Primary School

Formal Complaints Form

Name	
Name of pupil, year group and your relationship to them (where applicable)	
Contact address	
Contact telephone day	
Contact telephone mobile	
Contact email address	
Details of the complaint	
Action taken so far (including staff member who has dealt with it so far) or solutions offered	
The reason that this was not a satisfactory resolution for you	
What action would you like to be taken to resolve the problem?	

Signed:

Date:

<i>Official use</i> Date received: Signed:
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