

COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE



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HOLY FAMILY CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL

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General Complaints Procedure

Informal Procedure

As a matter of daily routine, schools have many contacts with parents and other interested parties some of which have the potential to result in a dispute. The overwhelming majority of these potential disputes are dealt with by exchanging information, by clarification, by explanations or by offering a simple acknowledgement that something has gone wrong. In some cases, in order to settle a dispute, there may be a need to arrange a meeting with a more senior or experienced member of staff. If the matter is resolved at this early stage, it is usually regarded as closed. If a meeting with a senior member of staff has been deemed necessary, a note of the meeting should be kept in case the difficulty recurs in future.

Scope of the Formal Procedure

Where a matter is more serious, it may be raised as a formal complaint to be dealt with under this procedure. This procedure is designed to be used in the case of formal complaints from parents, neighbours and the public as well as any other third party. It should not be used in circumstances where other specific procedures such as the Safeguarding, Grievance or Discipline Procedures are more appropriate. The general principles of the procedure are, however, likely to be applicable in a wide variety of circumstances. Child protection or safeguarding issues, however apparently trivial, must be addressed to the Local Authority Designated Officer for Safeguarding (LADO) in the first instance. In such cases, if the LADO is satisfied that no external agency, such as Police or Social Services, needs to be involved, the complaint may be referred back to the school to be dealt with under this General Complaints Procedure. Other statutory procedures are in place to deal with complaints about admissions, exclusions or SEN provision. These procedures incorporate a course of appeal to an authority beyond and independent of the school.

Principles

The aim is always to resolve complaints as quickly as possible and at the lowest possible level. Discretion is strongly recommended and only those who need to be involved to help settle the matter should be involved in the discussions.

At every stage, the procedure should be regarded as investigatory to establish facts so that the appropriate decision makers have the information needed to take the appropriate action.

Anonymous complaints will not normally be investigated under this procedure unless there is substantial independent evidence provided at the instigation of the complaint and/or it is in the public interest to pursue the complaint and/or it is clear that a conclusion might be reached without the evidence of the complainant. In the first instance, wherever possible, the complainant should raise his or her complaint with the person against whom it is made and every effort should be made to find a resolution without recourse to any further procedure. The person complained about should always have the right to reply as soon and as simply as possible to avoid any unnecessary distress.

If this fails or is not appropriate because of the serious nature of the complaint, it should be raised with the headteacher. The headteacher may decide that it can be referred back to another senior member of staff depending on the nature of the complaint.

The headteacher will respond in writing to complainant without unreasonable delay. The timescale cannot be prescribed because some investigations will be more complex than others, but if there is to be a delay, the complainant should be informed and given reasons as soon as possible.

Where a complaint has been addressed in writing and the complainant remains dissatisfied, s/he should write to the chairperson of the governing body setting out the reasons. The chairperson of the governing body (or another person on his or her behalf, such as an officer from the Local Authority) will investigate and report back to the complainant in writing. This investigation should normally include an interview with both the complainant and the headteacher as well as any other relevant witnesses.

Any person interviewed as part of this investigation may be accompanied by another person who may be a friend, relative, workplace colleague or Trade Union representative. Any additional necessary personal support you may need, for example an interpreter or carer will always be allowed.

If any pupil needs to be interviewed as part of this procedure, the child's parents must be informed and be given the right to attend.

Representation by a solicitor will not be allowed. Tape recording of the interview will not be allowed.

Review Process

If the complainant is not satisfied with the manner in which the complaint has been addressed, the complainant may request that the governing body reviews the process followed by the school in handling the complaint. This review will be conducted by a panel of three members of the governing body normally within ten working days of receipt of the submission. The review will normally be conducted through a consideration of the written evidence and submissions, but reasonable requests to make oral representations will normally be allowed.

Summary of Key Steps

- Try to resolve the difficulty informally with the person most directly involved. If necessary, ask for a meeting at a mutually convenient time.
- Formal stage one: Raise the matter with the headteacher. Request a meeting. It is preferable to set out the complaint in writing before the meeting whenever possible. A pro forma can be provided to help with this, but is not essential.
- Formal Stage two: Raise the matter with the chair of the governing body. At this stage, the complaint must be in writing and both the written complaint and the headteacher's written response must be made available to the chairman. The chairman will respond to you in writing.
- Formal stage three: Review by a panel of three governors. The panel will need the original complaint, the headteacher's written response, the chairman's response and a final representation from the complainant.