



St Joseph's Catholic Primary School

Complaints Procedure Policy

Mission Statement

Our Mission is to live in the way Jesus wanted. He told us to "Love One Another as I have loved you"

We aim to fulfil our Mission by:

Living as a good news community, valuing all members equally.

With Jesus as a role model, developing in everyone a sense of self respect, belonging and respect for others.

Striving to enable all children to reach their full potential through a broad, balanced and inclusive curriculum.

Working together to achieve excellence in everything we do.

Developing strong home/school and parish links.

Ensuring the success of everyone involved in the school community, nurturing their individual talents and supporting their individual needs.

Having high expectations of everyone.

Nurturing the faith journey of everyone through meaningful prayer and liturgy.

Ensuring a calm and positive atmosphere in all areas of the school.

St Joseph's Catholic Primary School aims to resolve all complaints at the earliest possible stage, and where possible, informally, 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. It is designed to ensure that the school's complaints procedure is straightforward, impartial, non-adversarial, allows a full and fair investigation, respects confidentiality and delivers an effective response and appropriate redress.

This complaints procedure is not limited to parents or carers of children that are registered at the school. Any person, including members of the public, may make a complaint to St Joseph's Catholic Primary School about any provision of facilities or services that we provide. Unless complaints are dealt with under separate statutory procedures (such as appeals relating to exclusions or admissions), we will use this complaints procedure. 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 Once a complaint has been made, it can be resolved or withdrawn at any stage.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 Headteacher will be the first point of contact when following the complaints procedure.

Legal framework

This policy has due regard to all relevant legislation including, but not limited to, the following:

- Freedom of Information Act 2000
- Education Act 2002
- The Education (Pupil Information) (England) Regulations 2005
- Equality Act 2010

- Immigration Act 2016
- The School Information (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2016
- UK General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)
- Data Protection Act 2018

This policy has also due regard to guidance including, but not limited to, the following:

- HM Government (2016) 'Code of Practice on the English language requirement for public sector workers'
- DfE (2021) 'Best practice guidance for school complaints procedures 2020'

This policy operates in conjunction with the following school policies:

- Records Management Policy
- Data Protection Policy
- Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy
- Grievance Policy
- Behaviour Policy
- Suspension and Exclusion Policy
- Whistleblowing Policy

Definitions

For the purpose of this policy, a **complaint** may be generally recognised as an expression or statement of dissatisfaction about actions taken or a lack of action.

A **concern** may be treated as an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important, and for which reassurances are sought.

The school will class concerns as complaints and follow the same procedures for both, as outlined within this policy.

It is in everyone's interest that concerns and complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. Many issues can be resolved informally, without the need to use the formal stages of the complaints procedure. Our school takes concerns seriously and will make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.

Complaints can be resolved formally, through this procedure, or informally dependent on the complainant's choice. Any complaint or concern will be taken seriously, whether formally or informally, and the appropriate procedures will be implemented.

A **grievance** is an issue raised by a member of staff where they feel the school has not implemented a policy or process fairly or properly. Grievances will be dealt with in line with the school's Grievance Policy.

For the purpose of this policy, **duplicate complaints** are identical complaints received from a complainant's spouse, partner, grandparent or child. These complaints will not be addressed again, the individual making the second complaint will be informed that the complaint has been dealt with on a local level and if they are dissatisfied with the result, they can appeal to the DfE.

Any new details provided by a complainant's spouse, partner, grandparent or child, will be investigated and dealt with in line with the complaints procedure.

Roles and Responsibilities

Complainant

The complainant will:

- express the complaint and their concerns in full at the earliest possible opportunity
- co-operate with the school in seeking a solution to the complaint
- respond promptly to any requests for information or meetings
- ask for assistance as needed
- treat all those involved in the complaint with respect
- refrain from publicising the details of their complaint on social media and respect confidentiality

Investigator

The investigator's role is to establish the facts relevant to the complaint by:

- providing a comprehensive, open, transparent and fair consideration of the complaint through:
 - sensitive and thorough interviewing of the complainant to establish what has happened and who has been involved
 - interviewing staff and children/young people and other people relevant to the complaint
 - consideration of records and other relevant information
 - analysing information
- liaising with the complainant and the complaints committee as appropriate to clarify what the complainant feels would put things right.

The investigator should:

- conduct interviews with an open mind
- keep notes of interviews or arrange for an independent note taker to record minutes of the meeting
- ensure that any papers produced during the investigation are kept securely pending any appeal
- be mindful of the timescales to respond
- prepare a comprehensive report for the Headteacher or complaints committee that sets out the facts, identifies solutions and recommends courses of action to resolve problems.
- ensure that the complainant is fully updated at each stage of the procedure
- liaise with staff members, Headteacher, Chair of Governors, Clerk and LAs (if appropriate) to ensure the smooth running of the complaints procedure
- be aware of issues regarding:
 - sharing third party information
 - additional support. This may be needed by complainants when making a complaint including interpretation support or where the complainant is a child or young person

The Headteacher or complaints committee will then determine whether to uphold or dismiss the complaint and communicate that decision to the complainant, providing the appropriate escalation details.

Clerk to the Governing Body

The Clerk is the contact point for the complainant and the committee and should:

- ensure that all people involved in the complaint procedure are aware of their legal rights and duties, including any under legislation relating to school complaints, education law, the Equality Act 2010, the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act (DPA) 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)
- set the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that the dates are convenient to all parties (if they are invited to attend) and that the venue and proceedings are accessible
- collate any written material relevant to the complaint (for example; stage 1 paperwork, school and complainant submissions) and send it to the parties in advance of the meeting within an agreed timescale

- attend the meeting and advise on the process and proceedings
- record the proceedings
- circulate the minutes of the meeting
- notify all parties of the committee's decision

Committee Chair

The committee's chair, who is nominated in advance of the complaint meeting, should ensure that:

- both parties are asked (via the Clerk) to provide any additional information relating to the complaint by a specified date in advance of the meeting
- the meeting is conducted in an informal manner, is not adversarial, and that, if all parties are invited to attend, everyone is treated with respect and courtesy
- complainants who may not be used to speaking at such a meeting are put at ease. This is particularly important if the complainant is a child/young person
- the remit of the committee is explained to the complainant
- written material is seen by everyone in attendance, provided it does not breach confidentiality or any individual's rights to privacy under the DPA 2018 or GDPR.

If a new issue arises it would be useful to give everyone the opportunity to consider and comment upon it; this may require a short adjournment of the meeting

- both the complainant and the school are given the opportunity to make their case and seek clarity, either through written submissions ahead of the meeting or verbally in the meeting itself
- the issues are addressed
- key findings of fact are made
- the committee is open-minded and acts independently
- no member of the committee has an external interest in the outcome of the proceedings or any involvement in an earlier stage of the procedure
- the meeting is minuted
- they liaise with the Clerk

Committee Member

Committee members should be aware that:

- the meeting must be independent and impartial, and should be seen to be so

No governor may sit on the committee if they have had a prior involvement in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it.

- the aim of the meeting should be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant

We recognise that the complainant might not be satisfied with the outcome if the meeting does not find in their favour. It may only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations.

- many complainants will feel nervous and inhibited in a formal setting

Parents/carers often feel emotional when discussing an issue that affects their child.

- extra care needs to be taken when the complainant is a child/young person and present during all or part of the meeting

Careful consideration of the atmosphere and proceedings should ensure that the child/young person does not feel intimidated.

The committee should respect the views of the child/young person and give them equal consideration to

those of adults.

If the child/young person is the complainant, the committee should ask in advance if any support is needed to help them present their complaint. Where the child/young person's parent is the complainant, the committee should give the parent the opportunity to say which parts of the meeting, if any, the child/young person needs to attend.

However, the parent should be advised that agreement might not always be possible if the parent wishes the child/young person to attend a part of the meeting that the committee considers is not in the child/young person's best interests.

- the welfare of the child/young person is paramount.

Making a complaint

The school is aware that any member of the public, including the parents of past and present pupils, can make a complaint about the provision of facilities or services that a school provides.

The school will consider all complaints, providing they are not anonymous, and ensure that the complaints procedure is:

- Easily accessible and publicised on its website.
- Simple to understand and put into practice.
- Impartial, non-adversarial and fair to all parties involved.
- Respectful of confidentiality duties.
- Fairly investigated, by an independent person where necessary.
- Continuously under improvement, using information gathered during the procedure to inform the school's SLT.
- Used to address all issues to provide appropriate and effective redress where necessary.

Complaints are expected to be made as soon as possible after an incident arises to amend the issue in an appropriate timescale. The school upholds a **three month** time limit in which a complaint can be lodged regarding an incident. Complaints made outside this time limit will not be automatically refused and exceptions will be considered. In the case of any timescales changing, all parties involved will be informed of the changes in a timely manner.

Complaints should be made using the appropriate channels of communication, including the use of the **Complaints Procedure Form**. All complaints shall be considered, whether they are made in person, by telephone, in writing, electronically via email, or via a third party (such as the Citizen's Advice Bureau), providing they are not anonymous.

All complainants will be given the opportunity to fully complete the complaints procedure and a complaint can progress to the next stage of the procedure even if it is not viewed as "justified".

Complaints about staff

Any complaint made against a member of staff will be initially dealt with by the headteacher, and then by a committee of the governing board if not resolved.

Any complaint made against the headteacher shall be initially dealt with by the Chair of Governors. Advice can be sought from the Diocesan Schools' Department.

Complaints about governors

Complaints may be made against:

- The chair of governors
- The vice chair of governors
- Any other member of the governing board
- The governing board as a whole

These complaints should be made to the clerk to the governing board, who will then arrange for the complaint to be heard.

For complaints about the entire governing board, or the chair or vice chair of governors, the clerk to governors will determine the most appropriate course of action, depending on the nature of the complaint. This action may involve sourcing an independent investigator to initially deal with the complaint and then getting the complaint to be heard by co-opted governors from another school.

Under some circumstances, it may be necessary to deviate from the complaints procedure. Any deviation will be documented, along with the reasons for this.

Information about a complaint will not be disclosed to a third party without written consent from the complainant.

Complaints received outside of term time

We will consider complaints made outside of term time to have been received on the first school day after the holiday period.

Complaints relating to SEND

If you are concerned that your child has SEND, in the first instance you should speak to your child's class teacher who will then follow up your concerns. It is best to make an appointment to see them before or after school. We take your concerns very seriously as you know your child best. If you are not happy that your concerns are being addressed, you should speak to the SENCO or Headteacher. If you are still not happy, you can speak to the school SEND Governor. Complaints regarding Statutory assessments of SEND should be directed to the Local Authority. Where a matter can be resolved through a legal appeal, it will not be considered as a formal complaint. The key areas are: decisions relating to formal assessment of SEND and decisions to permanently exclude a child.

Complaints Procedure

Dealing with complaints – Initial concerns

Concerns should be handled, if at all possible, without the need for formal procedures. In most cases your child's teacher will be the first approach and may be able to resolve an issue immediately. If you are unable to speak to your child's teacher then please contact a member of SLT.

The requirement to have a complaints procedure need not in any way undermine efforts to resolve a concern informally. In most cases staff members will receive the first approach, as an expression of concern. It would be helpful if staff were able to resolve issues on the spot, apologising where necessary, without any implication of negligence. The nature of the complaint needs to be carefully scrutinised to make sure that it is a matter that can be handled under the Complaints Procedure, and not a matter that would give rise to other procedures being used.

Dealing with concerns – Formal procedures

The formal procedures will need to be invoked when initial attempts to resolve the issue are unsuccessful and the person raising concerns remains dissatisfied and wishes to take the matter further.

It is in everyone’s interest that complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. The experience of the first contact between the complainant and the school can be crucial in determining whether the complaint will escalate. To that end, if all staff are made aware of the procedures, they know what to do when they receive a complaint and understand the importance of treating complainants and complaints seriously and respectfully.

Resolving complaints

Not all complaints can be resolved to the satisfaction of the complainant. For example, there will be occasions, when after investigation, the staff member has been seen to act appropriately and reasonably. Therefore, it is possible that a complaint may not be upheld.

At each stage in the procedure schools will want to keep in mind ways in which, where appropriate, a complaint can be resolved. It might be sufficient to acknowledge that the complaint is valid in whole or in part. In addition, it may be appropriate to offer one or more of the following:

- an apology
- an explanation
- 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 taken to ensure it will not happen again
- an undertaking to review school policies in the light of the complaint.

It would be useful if complainants were encouraged to state what actions they feel might resolve the problem at any stage. An admission that the school could have handled the situation better is not the same thing as an admission of negligence.

An effective procedure will identify areas of agreement between the parties. It is also of equal importance to clarify any misunderstandings that might have occurred as this can create a positive atmosphere in which to discuss any outstanding issues.

Where complaints cannot be resolved within the relevant stage of the procedure, complainants will be informed of what they can do next.

Withdrawal of a Complaint

If a complainant wants to withdraw their complaint, we will ask them to confirm this in writing.

Scope of this Complaints Procedure

This procedure covers all complaints about any provision of community facilities or services by St Joseph’s Catholic Primary School, other than complaints that are dealt with under other statutory procedures, including those listed below.

Exceptions	Who to contact
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Admissions to schools • Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs • School re-organisation proposals 	Concerns about admissions, statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs, or school re-organisation proposals should be raised with Barnsley Local Authority Admissions Team
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation 	Complaints about child protection matters are handled under our child protection and safeguarding policy and in accordance with relevant statutory guidance.

	If you have serious concerns, you may wish to contact the local authority designated officer (LADO) who has local responsibility for safeguarding or the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH). Contact details can be found via this link https://www.barnsley.gov.uk/services/children-families-and-education/safeguarding-families-in-barnsley/safeguarding-children-in-barnsley/local-authority-designated-officer-lado/
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exclusion of children from school* 	Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at: www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions . <i>*complaints about the application of the behaviour policy can be made through the school's complaints procedure.</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Whistleblowing 	We have an internal whistleblowing procedure for all our employees, including temporary staff and contractors. The Secretary of State for Education is the prescribed person for matters relating to education for whistle blowers in education who do not want to raise matters direct with their employer. Referrals can be made at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus . Volunteer staff who have concerns about our school should complain through the school's complaints procedure. You may also be able to complain direct to the LA or the Department for Education (see link above), depending on the substance of your complaint.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff grievances 	Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the school's internal grievance procedures.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff conduct 	Complaints about staff will be dealt with under the school's internal disciplinary procedures, if appropriate. Complainants will not be informed of any disciplinary action taken against a staff member as a result of a complaint. However, the complainant will be notified that the matter is being addressed.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complaints about services provided by other providers who may use school premises or facilities 	Providers should have their own complaints procedure to deal with complaints about service. Please contact them direct.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National Curriculum - content 	Please contact the Department for Education at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus

If other bodies are investigating aspects of the complaint, for example the police, local authority (LA) safeguarding teams or Tribunals, this may impact on our ability to adhere to the timescales within this procedure or result in the procedure being suspended until those public bodies have completed their investigations.

If a complainant commences legal action against St Joseph's Catholic Primary School in relation to their complaint, we will consider whether to suspend the complaints procedure in relation to their complaint until those legal proceedings have concluded.

Complaints Procedure to Follow

Stage 1

Formal complaints must be made to the Headteacher (unless they are about the Head), via the school office. This may be done in person, in writing (preferably on the Complaint Form), or by telephone.

The Headteacher will record the date the complaint is received and will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 5 school days.

Within this response, the Headteacher will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, ask what remains unresolved and what outcome the complainant would like to see. The Headteacher can consider whether a face to face meeting is the most appropriate way of doing this.

During the investigation, the Headteacher (or investigator) will:

- if necessary, interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish
- keep a written record of any meetings/interviews in relation to their investigation.

At the conclusion of their investigation, the Headteacher will provide a formal written response within 15 school days of the date of receipt of the complaint.

If the Headteacher is unable to meet this deadline, they will provide the complainant with an update and revised response date.

The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions the school will take to resolve the complaint.

The Headteacher will advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 1.

If the complaint is about the Headteacher or a member of the governing body (including the Chair or Vice-Chair), a suitably skilled governor will be appointed to complete all the actions at Stage 1.

Complaints about the Headteacher or member of the governing body must be made to the Clerk, via the school office.

If the complaint is:

- jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair or
- the entire governing body or
- the majority of the governing body

Stage 1 will be considered by an independent investigator appointed by the governing body of Hallam Diocese if appropriate. At the conclusion of their investigation, the independent investigator will provide a formal written response.

Stage 2

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome at Stage 1 and wishes to take the matter further, they can escalate the complaint to Stage 2 – a meeting with members of the governing body's complaints committee, which will be formed of the first three, impartial, governors available. This is the final stage of the complaints procedure.

A request to escalate to Stage 2 must be made to the Clerk, via the school office, within 5 school days of receipt of the Stage 1 response.

The Clerk will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 5 school days.

Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.

The Clerk will write to the complainant to inform them of the date of the meeting. They will aim to convene a meeting within 15 school days of receipt of the Stage 2 request. If this is not possible, the Clerk will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed.

If the complainant rejects the offer of three proposed dates, without good reason, the Clerk will decide when to hold the meeting. It will then proceed in the complainant's absence on the basis of written submissions from both parties.

The complaints committee will consist of at least three governors with no prior involvement or knowledge of the complaint. Prior to the meeting, they will decide amongst themselves who will act as the Chair of the Complaints Committee. If there are fewer than three governors available, the Clerk will source any additional, independent governors through another local school or through their LA's Governor Services team, in order to make up the committee. Alternatively, an entirely independent committee may be convened to hear the complaint at Stage 2.

The committee will decide whether to deal with the complaint by inviting parties to a meeting or through written representations, but in making their decision they will be sensitive to the complainant's needs.

If the complainant is invited to attend the meeting, they may bring someone along to provide support. This can be a relative or friend. Generally, we do not encourage either party to bring legal representatives to the committee meeting. However, there may be occasions when legal representation is appropriate.

For instance, if a school employee is called as a witness in a complaint meeting, they may wish to be supported by union and/or legal representation.

Note: Complaints about staff conduct will not generally be handled under this complaints procedure. Complainants will be advised that any staff conduct complaints will be considered under staff disciplinary procedures, if appropriate, but outcomes will not be shared with them.

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

At least 10 school days before the meeting, the Clerk will:

- confirm and notify the complainant of the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that, if the complainant is invited, the dates are convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible
- request copies of any further written material to be submitted to the committee at least 7 school days before the meeting.

Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least 5 school days before the date of the meeting. The committee will not normally accept, as evidence, recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.

The committee will also not review any new complaints at this stage or consider evidence unrelated to the initial complaint to be included. New complaints must be dealt with from Stage 1 of the procedure.

The meeting will be held in private. Electronic recordings of meetings or conversations are not normally permitted unless a complainant's own disability or special needs require it. Prior knowledge and consent of

all parties attending must be sought before meetings or conversations take place. Consent will be recorded in any minutes taken.

The committee will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented. The committee can:

- uphold the complaint in whole or in part
- dismiss the complaint in whole or in part.

If the complaint is upheld in whole or in part, the committee will:

- decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint
- where appropriate, recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future.

The Chair of the Committee will provide the complainant and St Joseph's Catholic Primary School with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within 10 school days.

The letter to the complainant will include details of how to contact the Department for Education if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled by St Joseph's Catholic Primary School.

If the complaint is:

- jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair or
- the entire governing body or
- the majority of the governing body

Stage 2 will be heard by a committee of independent, co-opted governors.

The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions the school will take to resolve the complaint.

The response will also advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied.

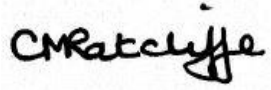
Next Steps

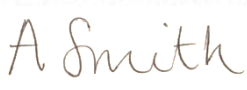
If the complainant believes the school did not handle their complaint in accordance with the published complaints procedure or they acted unlawfully or unreasonably in the exercise of their duties under education law, they can contact the Department for Education after they have completed Stage 2.

The Department for Education will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by St Joseph's Catholic Primary School. They will consider whether a school has adhered to education legislation and any statutory policies connected with the complaint.

The complainant can refer their complaint to the Department for Education online at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus, by telephone on: 0370 000 2288 or by writing to:

Department for Education
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD.

Approved by Chair of Governors: 

Approved by the Head of School: 

Approved Date: November 2024

Review Date: November 2025

Complaints Form

Please fill in this form if you wish to make a complaint about the school.

When you have completed it please send it to the Headteacher.

Your name:

Pupil's name:

Class:

Relationship to the pupil:

Your address:

Telephone no:

Have you already discussed this with a member of staff?

Yes

No

If so when and
who was it:

Please use the space below to tell us about your complaint.

(Please attach additional sheets if necessary)

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

Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details

Signed:

Date:

Thank you for your comments.

We will be in touch as soon as possible with regard to your complaint.

Official use
Date acknowledgement sent:
By who:
Complaint referred to:
Date: