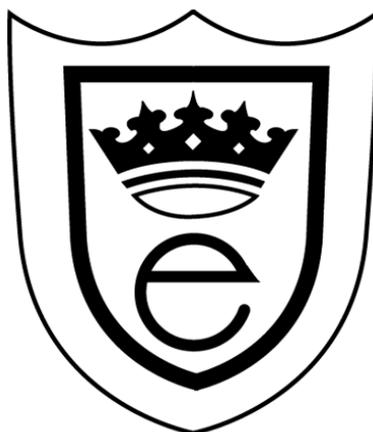


St Elizabeth's Catholic Primary School



Complaints Policy

School Mission Statement and Values

Our mission at St Elizabeth's Catholic Primary School is to educate our children to reach their full potential in the context of a Catholic community in which each individual shares, or is in sympathy with, the teachings of the Catholic Church and the Christian way of life.

Our core values of **equality, excellence, kindness, forgiveness, perseverance, friendship, courage, service and respect** were chosen by our pupils to be the overriding principles to which the whole school aspires, together with our golden rule, "Love one another as I have loved you" (John 13:34).

We seek to make St Elizabeth's School a secure, happy and inclusive environment that is a place:

- of the highest quality teaching and learning;
- of compassion, co-operation and reconciliation;
- where each child is seen and appreciated as a unique individual;
- in which every child's talents are developed and their needs met;
- where mistakes are learning opportunities;
- in which each child is empowered to keep themselves safe and healthy;
- where endeavour and excellence are encouraged and celebrated;
- in which cultural diversity is respected and valued;
- where we worship together, share our Christian witness, draw strength from our local parishes and serve our wider community.

Policy Review

This policy will be reviewed in full by the Governing Body every two years.

The policy was last reviewed and agreed by the Governing Body in June 2017.

It is due for review in June 2019.

St Elizabeth's Catholic Primary School

Complaints Policy

At St Elizabeth's, dealing with parental concerns is an intrinsic part of our ethos and mission. We aim to be open and approachable at all times and we are committed to treating all parties with dignity and respect.

Informal Procedure

As a matter of daily routine, schools receive numerous contacts from parents and other interested parties. Many of these will be resolved simply by providing information or through the arrangement of an informal meeting. St Elizabeth's always welcomes feedback and parents are encouraged to voice any concerns straightaway, preferably to the staff member involved. The initial approach should normally be made to the school office, or to the individual member of staff who is likely to be able to provide the necessary information. In some cases it may be necessary to request a meeting with a senior member of staff. Any such request should be made via the school office, preferably in writing. The request will need to include sufficient details to allow the school to decide whether a meeting is necessary, who should be asked to attend the meeting and to make any necessary preparations. The procedure is likely to stop at this stage if the concern has been explained satisfactorily, or a shared understanding of the issue being raised has been reached. The ideal is that all matters can be resolved at the informal stage.

Formal Procedure

Where a matter is more serious, or when an informal approach has failed to resolve the issue, it may be raised formally as a complaint. This should be done in writing. At every stage of the formal procedure, the handling of the complaint will be non-adversarial, swift (using agreed time limits), fair (using independent investigation where necessary) and confidential. Throughout the process, the school will be willing to listen, to learn, to admit mistakes, to apologise if appropriate, to address any issues raised and to change school practice if appropriate.

In using this procedure:

- staff should be aware that complainants may feel intimidated by the school as an institution and unsure whether they will be treated fairly
- complainants should be aware that those complained about, especially individual members of staff, may feel very vulnerable during this process

Throughout the procedure, therefore, the aim of all parties should be not only to resolve the complaint but also to develop and sustain good relationships between all members of the school community. However formal or serious the complaint, or however dissatisfied the complainant, the aim will always be reconciliation between all parties and a renewed commitment to work together amicably. The Gospel values of justice and forgiveness should always underpin the entire process.

Please note: Our Safeguarding Policy always takes precedence over our complaints procedure.

Framework of principles

Our complaints procedure:

- encourages resolution of problems by **informal** means wherever possible;
- is easily **accessible** and **publicised**;
- is **simple** to understand and use;
- is **impartial**;
- is **non-adversarial**;
- allows **swift** handling with established **time-limits** for action and keeping people informed of the progress;
- ensures a full and **fair** investigation by an independent person where necessary;
- respects people's desire for **confidentiality**;
- addresses all the issues and provides an **effective** response and **appropriate** redress, where necessary; and
- provides **information** to the school's senior management team so that services can be improved
- Ensures the procedure is **without prejudice**, with all **equality** and **disability** rights being respected.

Definition of complaint

A school complaint is any communication received by a person or persons with a legitimate interest in the school that expresses dissatisfaction about the standard of teaching of members of the teaching staff, or about the conduct, actions or omissions of members of the teaching or non-teaching staff employed at the school.

Where a complainant is a pupil under the age of 11 years, the complaint may be pursued only by, or on behalf of, the child's parent or carer. Where someone other than a pupil or a parent or carer is pursuing a complaint on their behalf, this can be done only with the express consent of the pupil or parent concerned.

Timescales

The following time limits should apply to all complaints handled under the school's complaints procedure. Complaints need to be made within a three month timescale. Complaints received after three months after the original incident will not be accepted.

STAGE 1 - Informal:

It is reasonable that parents seeking to resolve issues should receive a response within **15 school working days** of making initial contact, unless there is a good reason not to do so. The response should offer the complainant a full explanation, or set out the steps that are proposed to resolve the complaint.

STAGE 2 - Formal:

Review by headteacher or Chair of Governors.
Should be responded to in **15 school working days**.

STAGE 3 – Formal:

Review by governing body panel
Should be responded to in **20 school working days**.

The longer time limit for Stage 3 reflects the fact that these complaints may be complex and therefore likely to take longer to resolve. Where it is not possible to respond to complaints within these timescales, the complainant should be informed in writing of the reason for the delay and given an anticipated response date.

Contact details

Headteacher: **Mrs Jane Hines**

In Headteacher's absence contact: **Mrs Kerry Diver**

Chair of Governors: **Dr. Oona Stannard**

Part A

Complaining about the actions of a member of staff other than the headteacher

STAGE 1 - Informal: Complaint heard by staff member

At this early stage it is expected that the complainant would communicate directly with the member of staff concerned (or other designated post-holder/middle manager, such as a key-stage co-ordinator). This may be by letter, email, telephone, or in person by appointment.

Most concerns can be resolved by simple clarification or the provision of information and it is anticipated that the majority of complaints will be resolved at this informal stage.

In the case of serious concerns it would be appropriate to address the complainant directly to the headteacher (or other designated member of staff on behalf of the headteacher – in such cases the headteacher must be satisfied that the process has been conducted properly and accept responsibility for the same). **Part A - Stage 2** of the procedures.

STAGE 2 - Formal: Complaint heard by headteacher

If the complaint is not resolved at the informal stage 1 (or stage 1 does not apply), the complainant must put the complaint in writing and pass it to the headteacher, who will be responsible for its investigation.

The complainant may be referred back to the informal stage of the procedure, or if the complaint is judged to be vexatious, then the complainant will be informed that their complaint will not be accepted and will not be investigated.

The complainant should include details that might help the investigation, such as names of potential witnesses, dates and times of events, and copies of relevant documents.

The headteacher may meet with the complainant to clarify the complaint. It may be appropriate to offer the complainant the opportunity to be accompanied by a friend at any such meeting.

The headteacher will collect all other evidence that they think is necessary. Where this involves an interview with a member of staff who is the subject of the complaint, a friend or representative may accompany that member of staff if they wish.

The investigation will begin as soon as possible and when it has been concluded, the complainant and the member of staff concerned will be informed in writing of the outcome. This may be to the effect that:

- There is insufficient evidence to reach a conclusion, so the complaint cannot be upheld.

- The concern is not substantiated by the evidence.
- The concern was substantiated in part or in full. Some details may then be given of action the school may be taking to review procedures, but details of the investigation or of any disciplinary procedures will not be released.
- The matter has been fully investigated and appropriate procedures are being followed which are strictly confidential (for example, where staff disciplinary procedures are being followed).

The complainant will be formally advised that consideration of their complaint by the headteacher is now concluded.

If the complainant considers that **the decision of the headteacher is unreasonable, or that the headteacher has acted unreasonably** in considering the complaint, then the complainant may bring a complaint against the headteacher under **Part B – Stage 2** of this procedure. At this stage the complaint will be heard and fully investigated by the chair of governors.

STAGE 3 - Formal: Complaint heard by governing body review panel

In the unlikely event that the complainant remains **dissatisfied with the way in which the process has been followed/or the outcome**, the complainant may request the governing body to review the process followed by the headteacher in the handling the complaint.

Any such request must be made in writing within **two weeks** of receiving notice of the outcome from the headteacher, and include a statement specifying any perceived failures to follow the procedure.

The procedure outlined in **Part C – Stage 3** should then be followed.

Part B

Complaining about the actions of the headteacher

STAGE 1 - Informal: Complaint heard by headteacher

At this early stage it is expected that the complainant would communicate directly with the headteacher. This may be by letter, email, telephone, or in person by appointment.

Most concerns can be resolved by simple clarification or the provision of information and it is anticipated that the majority of complaints will be resolved at this informal stage.

In the case of serious concerns it would be appropriate to raise them directly with the chair of the governing body, (or designated governor responsible for investigating complaints).

Part B – stage 2 of the procedures.

STAGE 2 – Formal: Complaint heard by chair of governors

If the complaint is not resolved at the informal stage 1 (or stage 1 does not apply), the complainant must put the complaint in writing and pass it to the chair of governors (or designated governor responsible for investigating complaints), who will be responsible for its investigation.

The complainant should include details that might help the investigation, such as names of potential witnesses, dates and times of events, copies of relevant documents.

The complainant will be invited to meet the chairman (or designated governor) to present oral evidence or to clarify the complaint.

The chair (or designated governor) will collect any other evidence they think is necessary. This may include the interviewing of witnesses and others who may provide relevant information.

The headteacher will be provided with a copy of the complaint and any additional evidence presented by the complainant or collected by the chair.

Once there has been an opportunity for the headteacher to consider the complaint, they will be invited to meet separately with the chair (or designated governor) to present written and oral evidence in response. A friend or representative may accompany the headteacher at this meeting.

When the investigation has been concluded, the complainant and the headteacher will be informed in writing of the outcome. This may be to the effect that:

- There is insufficient evidence to reach a conclusion, so the complaint cannot be upheld.
- The concern is not substantiated by the evidence.

- The concern was substantiated in part or in full. Some details may then be given of action the school may be taking to review procedures, but details of the investigation or of any disciplinary or capability action will not be released.
- The matter has been fully investigated and appropriate procedures are being followed which are strictly confidential (for example, where staff disciplinary procedures are being followed).

The complainant will be told that consideration of their complaint by the chair is now concluded.

STAGE 3 - Formal: Complaint heard by governing body review panel

In the unlikely event that the complainant remains **dissatisfied with the way in which the process has been followed/or the outcome**, the complainant may request the governing body to review the process followed by the chair of governors (or designated governor) in the handling the complaint.

Any such request must be made in writing within **two weeks** of receiving notice of the outcome from the chair, and include a statement specifying any perceived failures to follow the procedure.

The procedure outlined in **Part C – Stage 3** should then be followed.

Part C

Formal Review process

STAGE 3 – Formal: Complaint heard by governing body's review panel

Any review of the process followed by the headteacher or the chair will be conducted by a panel of at least three members of the governing body.

The panel can:

- 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; or
- recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not recur.

The review will normally be conducted by considering written submissions, but reasonable requests to make oral representations should also be considered.

The panel will first receive written evidence from the complainant.

The panel will then invite the headteacher or the chair (or designated governor), as appropriate, to make a response to the complaint.

The panel may also have access to the records kept of the process followed (to eliminate doubt or ambiguity, it is helpful to specify to all parties the persons who are allowed access to records).

The complainant is not entitled to access any details of the investigation except for any statements that may have been provided by their child. Any information relating to the application of disciplinary procedures is strictly confidential.

The complainant, and the headteacher or the chair, as appropriate, will be informed in writing of the outcome. This may be to the effect that:

- There is insufficient evidence to reach a conclusion, so the complaint cannot be upheld.
- The concern is not substantiated by the evidence.
- The concern was substantiated in part or in full but that the procedural failure did not affect the outcome significantly so the matter is now closed.
- The concern was substantiated in part or in full and the governing body will take steps to prevent a recurrence or to rectify the situation (where this is possible).

Further Stages

Referral to the Secretary of State

Complainants do not have a general right of appeal should they disagree with the governors' decision. They may, however, raise the matter with the Secretary of State for Children, Families and Schools, if they consider the governing body is acting 'unreasonably', or is failing to carry out its statutory duties properly. If the governors have followed a proper procedure and considered the complaint reasonably the Secretary of State cannot overturn the decision.

The governing body must give full consideration to any recommendations or directions the Secretary of State may make.

Complaining to Ofsted

As well as inspecting schools and monitoring how they perform, Ofsted also consider complaints if they affect the school as a whole. For example:

- the school is not providing a good enough education;
- the pupils are not achieving as much as they should, or their different needs are not being met;
- the school is not well led and managed, or is wasting money; or
- the pupils' personal development and wellbeing are being neglected
- Safety including bullying.

Following a complaint to Ofsted

If requested to do so, the governing body must provide Ofsted with any information specified by Ofsted that the school holds and any other information that the school considers to be relevant to the investigation of the complaint.

If, for the purpose of an investigation, Ofsted considers it appropriate to meet the parents, the governing body must co-operate with Ofsted to arrange the meeting, including allowing a meeting to take place on school premises, fixing a date for the meeting and notifying parents and the LA of the meeting. A representative of the governing body and the LA may also attend the meeting.

If Ofsted prepares a report of an investigation, that report must be passed to the governing body. The governing body must then send a copy of the Ofsted report to all registered parents.

Statutory and established procedures

The Governing Body has determined these Complaints Procedures to deal with school complaints from parents, carers and pupils. They cover all areas of complaint, **except** in relation to those matters already provided for by existing statutory procedures, which include:

- admissions to community schools
- exclusions from schools and pupil referral units
- special education provision
- school organisation
- complaints by school staff or prospective staff
- education staff and child protection
- public examination administration
- school records on individual pupils

School complaints procedure flowchart

A summary of dealing with complaints – three stage approach

