St Paul's C of E Primary School

Complaints Policy

Revised and adopted by the Governing Body December 2025
Review Date: March 2026
Next Date: March 2028

St Paul's CE Primary School

If you have a concern or a complaint about our school we would like you to tell us

We welcome suggestions for improving our work in the school. Be assured that no matter what you want to tell us, our support and respect for you and your child will not be affected in any way. Please tell us of your concern as soon as possible. It is difficult for us to investigate properly an accident or problem which has happened some time ago.

What to do first

Most concerns and complaints can be sorted out quickly by speaking with your child's class teacher. If you have a complaint which you feel should be looked at by the Headteacher in the first instance you can contact her straight away if you prefer. You may need an appointment to do this, and can make one by ringing or calling in to the school office. You can take a friend or relation to the appointment with you if you would like to.

All staff will make every effort to resolve your problem informally. They will make sure that they understand what you feel went wrong, and they will explain their own actions to you. They will ask what you would like the school to do to put things right. Of course, this does not mean that in every case they will come round to your point of view but it will help you, and the school, understand both sides of the question. It may also help to prevent a similar problem arising again.

What to do next

If you are dissatisfied with the teacher's response (or with the Headteacher's initial reaction if he/she has already been involved) you can make a complaint to the Headteacher. This should be made in writing. If your complaint is about an action of the Headteacher personally, then you should refer it to the Chair of Governors. You can contact him/her by addressing your letter to him and giving it in at the school office. You may also find it helpful at this stage to have a copy of the full statement of the General Complaints Procedure as this explains in detail what procedures are followed. This is available from the school office.

The Headteacher will ask to meet you for a discussion of the problem. Again you may take a friend or someone else with you if you wish. The Headteacher will conduct a full investigation of the complaint and may interview any members of staff or pupils involved. You will receive a written response to your complaint.

If you are still unhappy

The problem will normally be solved by this stage. However, if you are still not satisfied you may wish to contact the Chair of the Governing Body to ask for a referral of your complaint to a Governors' Complaints Panel. It will then be heard by a group of three governors who have no previous knowledge of the problem and so will be able to give it a fresh assessment. You will be invited to attend and speak to the panel at a meeting which the

Headteacher will also attend. The General Complaints Procedure statement explains how these meetings operate.

Further action

Complaints about school problems are almost always settled within school but in exceptional cases it may be possible to refer the problem to an outside body such as the Local Education Authority or the Secretary of State for Education and Employment. Again there is more information on this in the General Complaints Procedure.

General Complaints Procedure

Introduction

This is intended as a good practice guide, applying to most general complaints which we are likely to receive from parents. It is **not** intended to cover those aspects of school life for which there are specific statutory requirements: in particular, arrangements under s409 of the Education Act 1996 for complaints about the delivery of the National Curriculum and the provision of collective worship and religious education. Parents who are not satisfied with an LA's decision about special needs assessments may appeal to the SEN Tribunal. Concerns about schools admissions and exclusions also have specific appeal rights.

In addition allegations of child abuse, financial improprieties or other criminal activities will need to be dealt with through different procedures, as will complaints about contracted staff.

Some complaints about general matters of policy, such as the overall resourcing of a school, would also need to be dealt with differently.

General Principles: The Right Approach

As part of our general home/school policy, we encourage parents to express their views on what goes on within school, so that staff receive an early warning of potential difficulties, and many problems can be prevented from arising.

Certain general underlying principles will be observed whenever concerns or complaints are raised:-

Publicity

Parents will always know **how** they can raise concerns or lodge a formal complaint.

A summary of how the school deals with complaints will be **included in the information which is given to new parents** when their children join the school.

If parents contact the LA with their concerns when the school's internal procedures have not been fully exhausted, they should be referred back to the school.

Procedures should be as <u>speedy</u> as possible - consistent with fairness to all concerned.

Each stage of the procedure will have known time limits. Where it is not possible to meet these, information about progress must be given to the complainant. Care should be taken not to drag things out with unnecessary bureaucracy.

Support for complainant

Parents raising concerns or complaints will be invited to be accompanied by a friend, a relative or a representative at any stage of the procedure.

Support for a person complained against

Staff should be told about the procedure and be kept informed of progress.

The **complaints procedure is distinct from formal disciplinary proceedings for staff** and this needs to be made clear to all concerned.

Confidentiality

It is very important to treat conversations and correspondence with discretion. It is vitally important that parents feel confident that their complaint will not penalise their child. However, from the outset all parties to a complaint will need to be aware that some information may have to be shared with others involved in the operation of the complaints procedure.

It will be at the Headteacher or Governing Body's discretion to decide whether the gravity of an anonymous complaint warrants an investigation.

Staff awareness

All school staff have clear information about which staff have which responsibilities at school so that parents do not get continually passed from one to another.

Record keeping

Recording will begin at the point when a concern or initial complaint has become the kind of complaint that cannot be resolved on the spot but needs investigation.

Recording at the earliest stages need only be a very basic record kept by the teacher of the complaint, giving the date, name of parent and general nature of the complaint. This will all be logged onto CPOMS.

General Complaints - Stages of Procedure

STAGE 1

The First Contact: Guidelines for Dealing with Concerns and Complaints Informally

Parents will have an opportunity for discussion of their concern with the appropriate member of staff who will clarify with the parent the nature of the concern, and reassure them that the school wants to hear about it. The member of staff may explain to the parent how the situation happened and at this point identify what sort of outcome the parent is looking for.

If the member of staff first contacted cannot immediately deal with the matter, she/he makes a clear note of the date, name, contact address or phone number on CPOMs and a member of SLT is alerted.

Any member of staff will know how to refer, if necessary, to the person with responsibility for the particular issue raised by the parent. She/he will check later to make sure the referral has been successful.

If the concern relates to the Headteacher, the parent is advised to contact the Chair of the Governing Body.

The staff member dealing with the concern makes sure that the parent is clear what action (if any) or monitoring of the situation has been agreed, putting this in writing only if this seems the best way of making things clear.

Where no satisfactory solution has been found within 2 weeks, parents are asked if they wish their concern to be considered further by making a written complaint to the headteacher.

STAGE 2

Referral to the Headteacher for Investigation

The Headteacher (or designate) acknowledges the complaint orally or in writing with 3 working days of receiving the written complaint. The acknowledgement gives a brief explanation of the school's complaint procedure and a target date for providing a response to the complaint. This should normally be within 2 weeks; if this proves impossible, a letter is sent explaining the reason for the delay and giving a revised target date.

The Headteacher (or designate) provides an opportunity for the complainant to meet him/her to supplement any information provided previously. It is made clear to the complainant too that if she/he wishes she/he may be accompanied to any meeting by a friend, relative, representative, or advocate who can speak on his or her behalf, and that interpreting facilities are available if needed.

If necessary, the Headteacher (or designate) should interview witnesses and take statements from those involved. If the complaint centres around a pupil, the pupil should also be interviewed. In some situations, circumstances may prevent this e.g. where this would seriously delay the investigation of a serious/urgent complaint or where particular circumstances mean that a pupil has specifically said she/he would prefer that parents or guardians were not involved. In such circumstances another member of staff with whom

the pupil feels comfortable should be asked to attend. If a member of staff is complained against, the needs of that person should be borne in mind.
The Headteacher (or designate) keeps written records of meetings, telephone conversations, and other documentation on CPOMS.

Once all the relevant facts have been established, the Headteacher (or designate) should than produce a written response to the complainant, or may wish to meet the complainant to discuss/resolve the matter directly.

A written response includes a full explanation of the decision and the reasons for it. When appropriate, this includes what action the school will take to resolve the complaint. The complainant is advised that should she/he wish to take the complaint further she/he should notify the Chair of the Governing Body within five weeks of receiving the outcome letter.

If a complaint is against the action of a Headteacher, or if the Headteacher has been very closely involved at Stage 1, the Chair of the Governing Body should carry out all the Stage 2 procedures.

STAGE 3

Review by the Governing Body

Upon receipt of a written request by the complainant for the complaint to proceed to stage 3, the procedures outlined below should be followed.

The Clerk to the Governing Body should write to the complainant to acknowledge receipt of the written request. The acknowledgement should inform the complainant that the complaint is to be heard by three members of the school's Governing Body within 20 working days of receiving the complaint. The letter should also explain that the complainant has the right to submit any further documents relevant to the complaint. These must be received in time for the documents to be sent to the three members.

The Clerk to the Governors should arrange to convene a Governors' Complaints Panel elected from members of the Governing Body. It may be necessary for the Governing Body to appoint reserves to this Panel to ensure that three governors are available to carry out their task within the set time.

The Panel members should be governors who have had no prior involvement with the complaint. If she/he has not previously been involved, the Chair of the Governing Body should chair the Panel; otherwise the Vice-Chair should do it. Generally it is not appropriate for the Headteacher to have a place on the Panel. Governors will want to bear in mind the advantages of having a parent (who is also a governor) on the Panel. Governors will also want to be sensitive to issues of race, gender and religious affiliation.

The Chair/Vice-Chair will ensure that the complaint is heard by the Panel within 20 working days of receiving the letter. All relevant correspondence regarding the complaint should be given to each Panel member as soon as the composition of the Panel is confirmed. If the correspondence is extensive, the Chair of the Panel should prepare a thorough summary for sending to Panel members.

The Chair/Vice-Chair will write and inform the complainant, Headteacher, any relevant witnesses, and members of the Panel at least 5 working days in advance, of the date, time and place of the meeting. The notification to the complainant should also inform him/her of the right to be accompanied to the meeting by a friend/advocate/interpreter. The letter will also explain how the meeting will be conducted and the complainant's right to submit further written evidence to the Panel.

The Chair/Vice-Chair of the Governing Body should invite the Headteacher to attend the Panel meeting and prepare a written report for the Panel in response to the complaint. The Headteacher may also invite members of the staff directly involved in matters raised by the complainant to respond in writing or in person to the complaint. Any relevant documents including the Headteacher's report should be received by all concerned - including the complainant - at least 5 working days prior to the meeting.

The involvement of staff other than the Headteacher is subject to the discretion of the Chair of the Panel.

It is the responsibility of the Chair of the Panel to ensure that the meeting is properly minuted.

The aim of the meeting should be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant. However, it has to be recognised that sometimes it may only be possible to establish facts and make recommendations which will satisfy the complainant that his or her complaint has at least been taken seriously.

The Panel should remember that many parents are unused to dealing with groups of people in formal situations and may feel inhibited when speaking to the Panel. It is therefore recommended that the Chair of the Panel ensures that the proceedings are as informal as possible.

If either party wishes to introduce previously undisclosed evidence or witnesses, it is in the interests of natural justice to adjourn the meeting so that the other side has time to consider and respond to the new evidence.

The meeting should allow for

- the complainant to explain their complaint and the Headteacher to explain the school's response
- the Headteacher to question the complainant about the complaint and the complainant to question the Headteacher and/or other members of staff about the school's response
- Panel members to have an opportunity to question both the complainant and the Headteacher
- any party to have the right to call witnesses (subject to the approval of the Chair) and all parties having the right to question all the witnesses
- final statements by both the complainant and the Headteacher

The Chair of the Panel will explain to the complainant and the Headteacher that the Panel will now consider its decision, and a written decision will be sent to both parties within 15

working days. The complainant, Head teacher, other members of staff and witnesses will then leave.

The Panel will then consider the complaint and all the evidence presented and (a) reach a unanimous, or at least a majority decision on the complaint and (b) decide upon the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint and (c) where appropriate, suggest recommended changes to the school's systems or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not happen again.

A written statement outlining the decision of the Panel must be sent to the complainant and Headteacher. The letter to the complainant should explain whether a further appeal can be made, and it so, to whom.

A copy of all correspondence and notes are kept on file in the school's records. These records are to be kept separately from the pupil's personal records.

STAGE 4

Review by the LEA

Where mediation services are available, the statement sent to the complainant must explain that the decision of the Governing Body Panel is final but that there is an LEA team of officers who offer consultation, investigation and mediation services at the request of either party.

Parent writes to Chief Education Officer outlining complaint. The complaint will be investigated and the complainant will receive a written reply.

STAGE 5

Beyond the LEA

The Secretary of State:

Complaints can be taken to the Secretary of State for Education and Employment under section 496 of the Education Act 1996, on the grounds that a Governing Body or LEA is acting or proposing to act unreasonably, or under Section 497 of the same Act, on the grounds that either the Governing Body or the LEA has failed to discharge its duties under the Act. The Secretary of State may contact the Governing Body or the LEA for more information in order to consider the complaint.

The Local Government Ombudsman:

Complaints about the maladministration of Local Authority services including the way it operates any general school complaints procedure could be made to the Ombudsman. However the Ombudsman does not look at internal school management matters and

usually expects that thorough attention has been given to a complaint locally before investigation by the Ombudsman.

Monitoring and Evaluation

St Paul's C of E Primary School will evaluate the effectiveness of its strategies by continual review of procedures. Monitoring and Evaluation will take place by the Headteacher and Education Welfare Officer.

This policy will be reviewed on a regular basis to take into account any changes in official guidelines or procedures issued by the DCSF and LA. It was last reviewed in March 2026

Headteacher Mrs J Rowley

Chair of Governors Mr M Gaunt