



**St. John's C.E. Primary School
Friern Barnet**

Schools Complaints Procedure Guidelines & Policy

This document is divided into two sections. Section 1 – Guidelines and Principles; Section 2 – The Policy Statement

SECTION 1

Raising Concerns and Resolving Complaints

From time to time parents, and others connected with the school, will become aware of matters which cause them concern. To encourage resolution of such situations the Governing Body has adopted a “School Complaints Procedure”.

The procedure is devised with the intention that it will:

- Usually be possible to resolve problems by informal means
- Be simple to use and understand
- Be non-adversarial
- Provide confidentiality
- Allow problems to be handled swiftly through the correct procedure
- Address all the points at issue
- Inform future practice so that the problem is unlikely to recur.

General Principles

1. The procedure is intended to be extended to those persons who may have a legitimate complaint relating to the school and where any complaint may not be pursued through another statutory procedure. (It is anticipated that, primarily, these persons will be parents, as defined by Section 576 of the Education Act 1996, and those with parental responsibility, as defined in the Children Act 1989.)
2. The responsibility for dealing with general complaints lies solely with the school. The procedures of LAs, Diocesan Boards and other agencies are expected to reflect existing legislation and ensure that any complaint received by them, which does not fall to them by statute to resolve, will be redirected to the school immediately and that the complainant be informed accordingly.
3. Any procedure should include provision that “An anonymous complaint will not be investigated under this procedure unless there are exceptional circumstances.” These would include serious concerns such as child protection issues or bullying allegations, where the school would either involve appropriate external agencies or else conduct its own internal review to test whether there is any corroborative evidence which might trigger a formal investigation.

4. There should be a mechanism for terminating spurious complaints and those brought by vexatious complainants.
5. In advising complainants of the outcome of their complaint it is important to be most circumspect in the details provided. To do otherwise may prejudice the ability of any employee complained about to continue in post. The release of certain information might be an obstacle to the fair application of disciplinary/capability procedures or otherwise contravene the employee's employment or data protection rights.
6. In the event that a complainant believes that the appropriate procedures have not been followed, by the person dealing with their complaint, the complainant may request that the governing body reviews the process that has been followed in order to verify whether the procedure has been adhered to. Any review request that is based solely on dissatisfaction with the outcome, rather than any identified failure to deal with a complaint according to procedure, should not be accepted
7. Any governors involved in the process should receive prior training for their role.
8. It is important that any potential complainant is aware of the correct channel through which to pursue their complaint. This will reduce the likelihood of letters of complaint being directed, say, to the LA, Secretary of State, Councillors, MP, local paper, individual governors, the Diocese or the Bishop.
9. It may be helpful to place a limit on the time after which a complaint will normally not be considered (e.g. complaints must be raised within 3 months of the event being complained of, save in exceptional circumstances).

Informal Procedure (Guidelines)

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. Therefore 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 has been reached of the issue being raised.

Formal Procedure (Guidelines)

Where a matter is more serious, or else an informal approach has failed to resolve the issue, it may be raised formally as a complaint. This should be done in writing (see model form). On receipt of the complaint the school will normally arrange a meeting with the complainant to clarify details of their concerns and of the resolution that is being sought. Once the school has this information a decision will then be taken about the need for further investigation and the appropriate procedure to be followed. This may involve additional meetings with the complainant to obtain further information.

Statute requires every school to have a large number of formal procedures in place. These include those for: pupil behaviour and discipline; exclusion of pupils; staff capability; staff conduct; and for “general” complaints relating to the school or to the provision of facilities or services.

Similarly, statute requires that a number of matters must be dealt with by other bodies, such as the Local Authority: provision to meet special educational needs; failure of a school to provide the National Curriculum; Exclusion Appeals; Admission Appeals.

When the school’s procedures have been completed the complainant will be informed that the matter of their complaint has been dealt with and is now closed as far as the school is concerned. They will be provided with as much additional information as is possible in the circumstances, while respecting any right to confidentiality of third parties.

Selecting the Most Appropriate Procedure (Guidelines)

Any approach may have the potential to develop into a complaint. For that reason it is very important to follow the appropriate procedure from the outset, so that the interests of the individuals may be safeguarded and in order to seek to identify a resolution as quickly as possible.

Therefore schools should have clear procedures for receiving enquiries and complaints and an effective mechanism for “triage” so that they are directed to the appropriate person(s) for resolution.

Governing Body Meetings (Guidelines)

a) Complaints panel

If the school receives a formal complaint about one of the limited number of matters, that is not dealt with by another statutory process, it may be necessary to convene a governing body panel to consider the matter and formulate a response.

The complaint is likely to relate to matters such as:

- the content or the application of a governing body policy;
- school facilities;
- services that the school provides.

If a governing body committee already has delegated power with respect to a policy that is being complained of, a panel of members from that committee should be convened. Otherwise the clerk should convene a panel of 3 governors, who have not previously been involved with the complaint.

The complainant should submit the details of their concerns, in writing, to the clerk. The clerk will seek similar written responses from the school, where this is necessary.

A meeting of the panel will take place, usually within 10 school days, to consider the matter. The complainant (who may be accompanied by a friend if they wish) and representative(s) from the school (who may also be accompanied by workplace colleagues or representatives from their professional associations) may be invited to attend this meeting in order to clarify the matter. As the panel meeting is intended to be investigatory, rather than adversarial, the persons giving evidence or making representations to the panel will normally attend separately.

When the panel has collected sufficient information, it will deliberate and then inform the complainant, the head teacher and the governing body of the outcome, in writing.

Consideration of the complaint by the governing body and the school, save for any actions that are agreed, will terminate at this point.

If the complainant is not satisfied that the appropriate procedure has been followed, they may request a review of that process by another panel of the governing body.

b) Review Meeting

Any review of the process followed by the school will be conducted by a panel of 3 members of the governing body. This will usually take place within 10 school days of receipt of a written request.

The review will normally be conducted through a consideration of written submissions, but reasonable requests, from any of the parties, to make oral representations should be considered sympathetically.

The panel will first receive written evidence from the complainant.

The panel will then invite representatives of the school (usually the head teacher or the chair of the governing body panel that has considered the matter), as appropriate, to make a response to the complaint.

The panel may also have access to the records kept of the process followed.

The complainant and the school representative(s) will be informed in writing of the outcome, usually within 5 school days of the panel meeting.

The matter will then be closed as far as the school is concerned.

Vexatious Complainants (Guidelines)

It is clear from experience that the vast majority of complaints are resolved by informal contact. Problems arise where the complainants are unreasonable and are not seeking to have a situation remedied but instead are determined to extract retribution for some real or imagined wrong.

It is these latter circumstances that can lead a school, which is acting very reasonably, to be drawn into an interminable saga with letters flying back and forth with each reply demanding more and more answers to more and more questions. Often an attempt to clarify the situation will trigger a multitude of questions, none of the possible answers to which serve any constructive purpose. It is these vexatious complainants from which schools need protection.

See: The model policy statement re 'Vexatious/Spurious or Abusive Complaints (Appendix 3)

*nb. This policy and guidelines have been put together according to advice provided by the NAHT in their document 'School Complaints Procedures.' Further helpful information can be found in this publication (eg. Model letters, etc.)

School Complaints Procedure (Policy Statement)

See following pages

SECTION 2

SCHOOL COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE POLICY STATEMENT

School Complaints Procedure

General Principles:

This procedure is intended to allow you to raise a concern or complaint relating to the school, or the services that it provides.

An anonymous concern or complaint will not be investigated under this procedure, unless there are exceptional circumstances.

To enable a proper investigation, concerns or complaints should be brought to the attention of the school as soon as possible. In general, any matter raised more than 3 months after the event, being complained of, will not be considered.

Raising a Concern or Complaint

1) Informal Stage

It is normally appropriate to communicate directly with the member of staff concerned. This may be by letter, by telephone or in person by appointment, requested via the school office. Many concerns can be resolved by simple clarification or the provision of information and it is anticipated that most complaints will be resolved by this informal stage.

In the case of serious concerns it may be appropriate to address them directly to the head teacher (or to the chair of the governing body, if the complaint is about the head teacher).

If you are uncertain about who to contact, please seek advice from the school office or the clerk to the governing body.

2) Formal Stage

If your concern or complaint is not resolved at the informal stage you may choose to put the complaint in writing and pass it to the head teacher, who will be responsible for ensuring that it is investigated appropriately. If the complaint is about the head teacher, your complaint should be passed to the clerk to the governing body, for the attention of the chair of the governing body.

A School Formal Complaint Form is provided to assist you (Appendix 1)

You should include details which might assist the investigation, such as names of potential witnesses, dates and times of events, and copies of relevant documents.

It is very important that you include a clear statement of the actions that you would like the school to take to resolve your concern. Without this, it is much more difficult to proceed.

Please pass the completed form, in a sealed envelope to the school office. The envelope should be addressed to the head teacher, or to the clerk to the governing body, as appropriate.

The head teacher (or chair) may invite you to a meeting to clarify your concerns and to explore the possibility of an informal resolution. If you accept that invitation, you may be accompanied by a friend, if you wish, to assist you in explaining the nature of your concerns.

It is possible that your complaint will be resolved through a meeting with the head teacher (or chair). If not, arrangements will be made for the matter to be fully investigated, using the appropriate procedure. In any case you should learn in writing, usually within 5 days of the school receiving your formal complaint, of

how the school intends to proceed. This notification should include an indication of the anticipated timescale.

Any investigation will begin as soon as possible and when it has been concluded, you will be informed in writing of its conclusion.

If you are not satisfied with the manner in which the process has been followed, you may request that the governing body reviews the process followed by the school, in handling the complaint. Any such request must be made in writing to the clerk to the governing body, within 10 school days of receiving notice of the outcome, and include a statement specifying any perceived failures to follow the procedure. The procedure described below will be followed.

A Review Request form is provided to assist you (Appendix 2)

Review Process

Any review of the process followed by the school will be conducted by a panel of 3 members of the governing body. This will usually take place within 10 school days of receipt of your request.

The review will normally be conducted through a consideration of written submissions, but reasonable requests to make oral representations should be considered sympathetically.

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Appendix 1

St. John's C.E. Primary School
Formal Complaint Form

Please complete this form and return it, via the school office, to the head teacher (or clerk to the governing body), who will acknowledge its receipt and inform you of the next stage in the procedure.

Your name:

Relationship with school (e.g. parent of a pupil on the school roll):

Pupil's name (if relevant to your complaint):

Your address:

Telephone numbers: Daytime: Evening:

e-mail address:

Please give concise details of your complaint, (including dates, names of witnesses etc.), to allow the matter to be fully investigated. You may continue on separate paper, or attach additional documents, if you wish.

What action, if any, have you already taken to try to resolve your complaint? (i.e. who have you spoken with or written to and what was the outcome?)

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

Signed Date

Appendix 2

St. John's C.E. Primary School
Complaint Review Request Form

Please complete this form and return it to head teacher (or clerk to the governing body), who will acknowledge its receipt and inform you of the next stage in the procedure.

Your name:

Relationship with school (e.g. parent of a pupil on the school roll):

Pupil's name (if relevant to your complaint):

Your address:

Telephone numbers: Daytime: Evening:

e-mail address:

I submitted a formal complaint to the school on and am dissatisfied by the procedure that has been followed.

My complaint was submitted to and I received a response from
on

I have attached copies of my formal complaint and of the response(s) from the school.

I am dissatisfied with the way in which the procedure was carried out, because:

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

Signed Date

Appendix 3

St. John's C.E. School Policy For Handling Unreasonably Persistent, Harassing Or Abusive Complainants

The head teacher and governing body are fully committed to the improvement of our school. We welcome feedback from parents/carers and will always try to resolve any concerns as quickly as possible. There is a procedure for parents to use if they wish to make a formal complaint.

Sometimes, however, parents or carers pursuing complaints or other issues treat staff and others in a way that is unacceptable. Whilst we recognise that some complaints may relate to serious and distressing incidents, we will not accept threatening or harassing behaviour towards any members of the school community.

The aim of this leaflet is to provide information about our school policy on unreasonably persistent complainants or harassment of staff.

What do we mean by 'an unreasonably persistent complainant'?

An unreasonably persistent complainant may be anyone who engages in unreasonable behaviour when making a complaint. This will include persons who pursue complaints in an unreasonable manner.

Unreasonable behaviour may include:

- actions which are
 - out of proportion to the nature of the complaint, or
 - persistent – even when the complaints procedure has been exhausted, or
 - personally harassing, or
 - unjustifiably repetitious
- an insistence on
 - pursuing unjustified complaints and/or
 - unrealistic outcomes to justified complaints
 - pursuing justifiable complaints in an unreasonable manner (eg using abusive or threatening language; or
 - making complaints in public or via a social networking site such as Facebook; or
 - refusing to attend appointments to discuss the complaint

What is 'harassment'?

We regard harassment as the unreasonable pursuit of issues or complaints, particularly if the matter appears to be pursued in a way intended to cause personal distress rather than to seek a resolution.

Behaviour may fall within the scope of this policy if:

- it appears to be deliberately targeted at one or more members of school staff or others, without good cause
- the way in which a complaint or other issues is pursued (as opposed to the complaint itself) causes undue distress to school staff or others
- it has a significant and disproportionate adverse effect on the school community

What does the school expect of any person wishing to raise a concern?

The school expects anyone who wishes to raise concerns with the school to:

- treat all members of the school community with courtesy and respect
- respect the needs of pupils and staff within the school
- avoid the use of violence, or threats of violence, towards people or property
- recognise the time constraints under which members of staff in schools work and allow the school reasonable time to respond to a complaint
- follow the school's complaints procedure

Schools' responses to unreasonably persistent complaints or harassment

This policy is intended to be used in conjunction with the school's complaints procedure. Taken together, these documents set out how we will always seek to work with parents, carers and others with a legitimate complaint to resolve a difficulty.

However, in cases of unreasonably persistent complaints or harassment, the school may take some or all of the following steps, as appropriate:

- inform the complainant informally that his/her behaviour is now considered by the school to be unreasonable or unacceptable, and request a changed approach
- inform the complainant in writing that the school considers his/her behaviour to fall under the terms of the Unreasonably Persistent Complaints/Harassment Policy
- require all future meetings with a member of staff to be conducted with a second person present. In the interests of all parties, notes of these meetings may be taken;
- inform the complainant that, except in emergencies, the school will respond only to written communication and that these may be required to be channelled through the Local Authority.

Physical or verbal aggression

The governing body will not tolerate any form of physical or verbal aggression against members of the school community. If there is evidence of any such aggression the school may:

- ban the individual from entering the school site, with immediate effect
- request an Anti-Social Behaviour Order (ASBO)
- prosecute under Anti-Harassment legislation
- call the police to remove the individual from the premises, under powers provided by the Education Act 1996.

Legitimate new complaints will always be considered, even if the person making them is (or has been) subject to the Unreasonably Persistent Complaints/Harassment Policy. The school nevertheless reserves the right not to respond to communications from individuals subject to the policy.