

# **St. Augustine's Catholic Primary School**

## **Complaints Procedure**

We live, love and learn together in the light of the life of Christ.

### **Rationale**

Catholic schools aim to be places where love of one's neighbours is obvious at all times. Christ said to his disciples at the Last Supper, "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you."

Catholic schools are staffed by teachers who are not only qualified and expert in their own field but who also, having freely chosen to become teachers in a Catholic institution, commit themselves to care and help children in every way possible consistent with the Catholic doctrine, principles and Catholic ethos of the school. Nevertheless, as in any organisation, parents may from time to time, raise a concern.

The main purposes of this Complaints Procedure are:-

- To resolve problems
- To give parents a means to raise issues and have them addressed
- To show parents who the most appropriate person to whom a complaint should be raised
- To encourage all to raise and respond to concerns whilst the matter is fresh in their minds
- To stress that at all stages the discussions, considerations and hearings should be investigatory rather than adversarial in their nature

The role of the individual Governor

- No individual Governor may deal with a complaint or concern
- A parent may approach a Governor to ask what they should do if they have a concern
- Governors should not get into discussion with a parent but should advise them of procedure i.e. contact class teacher initially, then the head
- If the situation is such that the Governor has to listen, this may affect impartiality and they must inform the Chair of Governors accordingly

### **1. Initial concerns**

#### **a) Informal resolution**

- Ideally matter raised within 5 school days
- Ideally resolved within 10 school days
- If not resolved then copy of complaints policy given to complainant

## **2. Formal procedures**

### **b) Formal resolution**

- Complainant must raise complaint within 10 school days of receiving Complaints Policy
- Head (Complaint's co) advise of appropriate procedure
- Governors must not act individually or get involved in early stages in case needed for a panel
- Other matters such as Admissions, Child Protection, Curriculum, SEN, Pupil Exclusion and Staff Disciplinary are not part of this policy

## **3. The Formal Complaints Procedure**

### **a) Stage 1 complaint heard by Head**

- Head will seek to resolve complaint within 5 school days
- If complaint concerns the head – referred to Chair of Governors for Stage 1
- If head thinks circumstances warrant it, may refer straight to Chair
- Within 5 days a “Note of meeting” will be sent to complainant
- Note will summarise conclusions
- Inform Complainant they may appeal if they wish within 10 school days of stage 1 meeting
- Normally appeal will be sent to Clerk to Governors

### **b) Stage 2 – complaint heard by Governing Body Complaints Appeal Panel**

- Complainant write to Clerk including a complaints form
- Clerk will ask for guidance from Diocese and convene a Governors Complaints appeal Panel
- This is the last school-based stage
- Not whole Governing body
- Between 3 & 5 members
- Non should have prior involvement
- Should not include either head or chair
- Should elect their own chair
- May have an advisor e.g. from Diocese Education Service
- Both parties present whilst complaint is being described unless Chair feels this would not be appropriate i.e. where relationships have broken down significantly
- If so, then stage 2 can be held in 2 parts, each with their own witnesses
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### **Remit of the Appeal Panel**

The panel can:-

- Dismiss the complaint in whole or in part
- Uphold the complaint in whole or in part
- Decide upon appropriate action to resolve complaint
- Recommend changes to school structure or systems to ensure no recurrence
- Ensure impartiality and independence

- Aim to resolve the matter and achieve reconciliation
- Ensure that the procedure is as welcoming as possible
- Understand that the complainant may not be satisfied with the resolution

### **Roles & Responsibilities**

**The school will ensure that the meeting is clerked.**

**The clerk will:-**

- Ensure all have copies of the complaints procedure
- Set the date, time and venue, convenient to all but within 20 days of receipt of request for Stage 2 procedures
- Collect any evidence and names of witnesses 10 school days before the hearing
- Collate evidence and send to all parties 5 school days before the hearing
- Meet and welcome parties
- Record proceedings
- Notify all parties of decision within 5 school days of the hearing

**The Chair will:-**

- Explain the remit of the panel and ensure each can put their case without interruption
- Ensure issues are addressed
- People are put at their ease
- Conduct the meeting informally but with all treated with respect and dignity
- Ensure the panel is open minded and independent
- Ensure no-one has a vested interest in the outcomes
- Each side is given opportunity to share their case
- All sides have copies of written material
- Opportunity to adjourn if other matters related to the complaint need to be discussed
- New issues are referred to a fresh process

### **Check list for Panel Hearing**

- Ensure the hearing is as informal as possible
- Witnesses only needed for part of hearing in which they give evidence
- Chair introduces the panel
- Complainant is asked to explain their complaint, followed by witnesses
- The head (if conducted stage 1) may then question anyone to clarify
- The head may then explain the school's actions
- The complainant may question both head and school witnesses
- Panel may ask questions at any time *up to this point* after which no further questions may be asked
- The complainant is invited to sum up their complaint
- The head is asked to sum up the school's actions and response to complaint
- The chair explains that written decision will be sent to both by clerk within 5 school days from hearing

- Both parties leave to allow panel to make decision, clerk and advisor may stay but panel makes decision

If 2 groups are convened then

- Each party attend panel separately and will not meet before or after the hearing
- The hearing continues as above

### **Notification of the Panel's decision**

- The Chair will ensure that the complainant is notified of the panel's decision within 5 school days, in plain English
- If clarification is required this will be provided by the chair
- If complainant is not satisfied that all was conducted properly, the letter will advise of a further Right of Review

### **Anonymous complaints**

- Not investigated in this way unless exceptional circumstances e.g. Child Protection, bullying where external agencies or internal review for evidence may trigger a formal investigation

### **Vexatious complaints**

- If, despite all stages being followed, the complainant tries to re-open the case, then the Chair will inform that all avenues have been exhausted and the matter is closed

### **Right of Review of the Conduct of Procedure**

- If not happy that all was conducted properly, the letter will contain information that there is a right to request an investigation into due process by applying to Director of Schools at the Diocesan Education Service
- The request must be made within 10 days of the hearing
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- This is a review of the process and cannot reverse the judgements but will check to see if the judgements were made in a reasonable way
- Copy of report sent to complainant, head chair of panel and chair of Governors
- The report may give recommendations to Governing Body

### **Notes**

Communications should be by first class post

If not enough Governors found who are available, may need to look outside of Governing body e.g. to a neighbouring Body

If any party fails to attend, the panel will follow written submission. Any rearrangement will only be undertaken in exceptional circumstances and within 10 days of original hearing.

Appendix A

Please complete and return to..... (Clerk to Governors), who will acknowledge receipt and explain action to be taken.

Your name	
Pupil's name	
Your relationship to the pupil	
Address	
Daytime telephone number	Night time telephone number
Please give detail of your complaint	
<i>If necessary please continue on a separate sheet</i>	
What action, if any, have you already taken to try to resolve your complaint? (Who did you speak to? What was the response?)	