



St Luke's Catholic Primary School Complaints Policy

Mission Statement

As God's family we learn, love and laugh.
Together: Love one another, forgive one another
Work together, play together,
Worship together, be happy together.

Introduction

The school actively seeks to promote a harmonious environment and positive relationships amongst pupils, parents, staff and governors but acknowledges that there may be occasions where individuals may wish to communicate their dissatisfaction about any aspect of the school, be it activities, lessons, facilities or another person. It is anticipated that most such occasions shall result in a dialogue between the dissatisfied party and a member of staff or the Head teacher and that such dialogue shall reach a mutually satisfactory conclusion and resolution of the matter. However, we recognise that not all instances shall be so resolved. On occasions where dialogue does not reach a mutually satisfactory conclusion, the individual concerned may wish to access a process through which such a criticism may be considered and addressed. This complaints policy and the accompanying procedure provide the framework within which any person may raise a criticism related to any aspect of the school and have confidence that it will be considered seriously and dealt with appropriately, regardless of the nature of the complaint.

Vision

To provide a happy, secure environment with Christ at the centre of all we do, enabling all children to fulfill their potential in academic, social, spiritual, moral, emotional and creative ways and so prepare them for life's journey.

Aims and objectives of the policy

This complaints policy aims to:

- Encourage the resolution of problems by informal means wherever possible;
- Ensure that concerns are dealt with quickly, fully and fairly and within clearly defined time limits;
- Provide effective responses and appropriate redress;
- Maintain good working relationships between all people involved with the school.

Scope

Complaints may be raised by any interested party, be they pupils, parents, staff, governors, neighbours or any other member of the community. The complaints may relate to the schools activities, facilities, pupils, staff, premises, governors or any other area related to the school.

Definition

A complaint is any critical communication received by the school where the complainant wishes to formalise their communication and place the matter on record.

Objective

This policy provides a set of guidelines and a procedure for handling all such communications and ensuring that the complainant is informed of the outcome, or where this is not possible for reasons of confidentiality, why this is the case.

Principles

- To provide a means for dealing with any such formal complaint
- To ensure that all such complaints are dealt with in an agreed timeframe
- To define the roles and responsibilities that must be fulfilled in order for the procedure to function effectively
- To identify instances where issues of confidentiality arise and how such instances should be handled

Links to other policies

All complaints will be evaluated against current policy and procedure. Where the complaint relates to a matter where relevant policy or procedure have been complied with, i.e. where the complaint is at odds with established policy, the complaint shall be rejected and the complainant notified accordingly. If such a rejection is then subject of an appeal, the relevant policies and procedures must be formally reviewed and agreed by the relevant staff and/or Governors. Only if it is agreed that the policy and procedure are correct may the complaint be finally rejected.

After defining the key principles, this policy sets out the 5 separate stages of the complaints procedure itself.

This policy sets out the 5 stage procedure which St Luke's Catholic Primary School will follow whenever it receives a complaint for which there are not alternative statutory procedures (see section 1.3).

Primary Responsibility

- 1 Informal discussion and resolution **Informal Stage School Staff**
- 2 Investigation by head teacher **Formal Stage School Staff**
- 3 Complaints committee review **Governing Body**
- 4 LA investigation **LA**
- 5 Further recourse **Other**

Each of these stages will usually occur in order and there will usually be no return to previous stages (exceptions to this are noted within the procedure).

It is stressed that the majority of complaints are resolved on an informal basis (stage 1).

Circumstances under which this procedure should not be used

This guidance does not refer to areas where the Local Authority, has the lead role and for which different procedures must be followed. These areas are:

- Complaints about the national curriculum
- Collective worship
- Religious education
- Non-approved external qualifications or syllabuses
- Temporary withdrawal of pupils from all or part of the national curriculum
- Pupil admissions
- Pupil exclusions

Issues related to child protection, criminal investigations and employee grievances must also all be handled separately from this policy.

This complaints policy is distinct from formal staff disciplinary proceedings and this should be made clear to all concerned. There may be occasions where a complaint gives rise to disciplinary procedures which put the complaints process on hold. If and when this occurs, the complainant should be informed. Any non-disciplinary aspects of the complaint should continue to be dealt with through the usual complaints procedures.

If another policy is more appropriate than this complaints policy for any given situation then it should be used in preference to it.

This policy does not cover complaints made against the Local Authority. Any complaint of this sort should be dealt with in accordance with the Council's 'Corporate Complaints Procedure'.

Circumstances under which stages of the procedure should be missed out

This policy sets out the most suitable and effective process for dealing with the majority of complaints which are not covered by alternative statutory procedures (see above). In most cases any concern or complaint, regardless of whose attention it is initially brought to, should be discussed informally (stage 1) before being submitted at any of the following consecutive formal stages.

Occasionally there will be circumstances under which it is unsuitable for complaints to be dealt with in this way. In all cases where the complaint concerns the school's head teacher directly, stage 2 will be missed out and the formal complaints procedure will begin at stage 3.

In some cases, it may be deemed inappropriate for individuals to discuss their concerns informally. In such cases, complainants may be directed to contact the head teacher directly (i.e. begin at stage 2). Complainants may choose to contact the head teacher directly of their own accord. In these cases it will be at the discretion of the head teacher as to whether or not it is appropriate for the complainant to discuss the matter informally (i.e. return to stage 1).

If and when complaints about the school are brought to the attention of the Local Authority, the majority of complainants will be advised to contact the school and to follow the procedures set out within this document from stage 1 onwards.

Monitoring complaints

At all formal stages of the complaints procedure, the following information should be recorded:

- The name of the complainant;
- The date and time at which complaint was made;
- The details of the complaint;
- The desired outcome of the complainant;
- How the complaint is investigated (including written records of interviews held);
- Results and conclusions of investigations;
- Any action taken;
- The complainant's response (satisfaction or further pursuit of complaint).

Upholding or not upholding complaints

At each stage of the complaints procedure, the conclusion will be either:

1 That the complaint is upheld (in part or in full) and, where appropriate, some form of Action is taken.

Or

2 That the complaint is not upheld and reasons for this are clearly given.

In the first instance, 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 that have been taken to ensure that it will not happen again;
- an undertaking to review school policies in light of the complaint.

In the second instance, the complainant may either choose to take no further action or to take their complaint to the next relevant stage.

Publicity and communication

There is a legal requirement for schools to publicise their complaints procedures.

This policy will be included within the school's handbook and may also be included, as appropriate, within the following:

- the school website;

- the information given to new parents when their children join the school;
- home school newsletters;

All staff and members of the governing body should be made aware of the complaints procedure and the various stages involved.

At all stages of the complaints procedure, everybody involved needs to be clear about what is happening and what their responsibilities are. In addition, the complainant should be told how to proceed to the next stage of the procedure if and when their complaint is not upheld.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality is vital. All conversations and correspondence will be treated with discretion. Complainants have the right to know what use will be made of personal information and, accordingly, personal information will only be shared between staff on a 'need to know' basis.

Equal access, accompaniment and representation

Appropriate steps should be taken to ensure that any individual has the opportunity to raise their concerns or submit a formal complaint. This includes the right to be accompanied or represented by a friend or relative at discussions and hearings and/or to submit formal complaints which have been written by another individual on their behalf.

It is an expectation that equal respect will be granted to each person involved within the process and that differences between people will be respected and understood.

Support offered by Local Authority

The Local Authority offers advice and guidance to head teachers and governing bodies who feel they need extra support when dealing with a complaint.

If a complaint concerns the head teacher, the governing body will be required to work with the Local Authority from the outset.

In exceptional circumstances, the Local Authority is able to investigate on behalf of either the head teacher or school governors. Where possible, the intention will always be for the LA to support the school in its own investigations rather than take complete responsibility for them itself.

Time between stages

Although each of the stages within the procedure should occur consecutively, it is not necessary for each stage to immediately follow the last. Complainants may need some time to decide whether or not they wish to pursue the matter any further.

After each stage, the complainant and the individual who is dealing with their complaint at that time should agree an appropriate time limit within which the next stage should be accessed, if at all. If the complaint is not submitted to the next stage within this agreed time limit it should be considered as closed.

Changes to time limits and deadlines

In general, the time limits and deadlines contained within this policy should be adhered to. However, in certain circumstances it may be deemed inappropriate or impossible to guarantee that this is possible.

Where a complaint leads to criminal proceedings this will always be the case. If and when it becomes necessary to alter the time limits and deadlines set out within this policy, the complainant should be told and given an explanation as to why this has been the case.

Appeals

If at any stage, as the result of a complaint, a decision or course of action is taken with regards to an individual (apart from the complainant) which they feel is ungrounded, unjustified or incorrect, they have the right to appeal.

It is recommended that school governing bodies use their established appeal procedures in order to facilitate this.

Vexatious Complaints

The Chair of Governors can write to a complainant and refuse to consider their complaint at stage 3 if he or she feels that there are insufficient grounds to do so, if the complaint has already been considered at this stage or if it has been closed.

In both cases, the complainant has the right to take their complaint to the LA (stage 4) who will, if appropriate, investigate the school's adherence to the complaints policy.

STAGE 1: Informal discussion

Introduction

The vast majority of concerns and complaints can be dealt with informally. There are many occasions where concerns are resolved straight away without the need to submit a formal complaint. Indeed, many concerns raised at this level might not be classified as complaints. When a complaint is made directly against the school's head teacher, stage 2 is not required and the formal procedure begins at stage 3.

Who to speak to informally

Individuals may decide to raise their concerns with a member of school administrative staff, class teacher, senior teacher, governor or head teacher depending on their wishes and the type of issues they want to discuss.

Monitoring

It is not necessary to record or monitor complaints at this level.

Time scales

There are no specific time scales for dealing with concerns at this stage. However, as at all stages, issues should be considered and dealt with as quickly and effectively as possible.

Response

The individual who raised the issue should be informed of any action to be taken to resolve the issue. If appropriate, this might be confirmed in writing.

Options for complainant

If the individual is dissatisfied with the response they have been given and would like to take their complaint further, they should be referred to the school's complaints procedure and told how to move on to the next stage.

STAGE 2: Referral to the head teacher

Introduction

This is the first stage of the formal complaints process and, as a result, all communications between parties need to be carefully recorded and monitored as set out in the 'monitoring complaints' section of this document.

Informal discussion with head teacher

Before proceeding with a formal investigation, the head teacher will meet with the individual and discuss their concerns and wishes. It may still be appropriate and satisfactory to reach an informal resolution at this point. If not, the head teacher will decide whether the individual's complaint will be

dealt with by this policy or another statutory procedure and advise them on what they will need to do.

Submitting a formal complaint

By this stage it must be clear that the concern is a definite complaint which will be dealt with according to this policy and should be formally submitted in writing to the head teacher.

As indicated within the 'equal access, accompaniment and representation' section of this policy, all complainants have the right to submit formal complaints, at this or any stage, which have been written by another individual on their behalf.

Acknowledgement and time scales

The head teacher should formally acknowledge the complaint within 3 school days of receiving it and begin an investigation.

The investigation

The head teacher will need to investigate the complaint and review any relevant documentation and information. If necessary, the head teacher will interview witnesses and take statements from those involved. If the complaint centres around a pupil, the pupil will also usually be interviewed.

As indicated within the 'equal access, accompaniment and representation' section of this document, all individuals have the right, at this or any other stages, to be accompanied or represented by a friend or relative at discussions and hearings. This includes the right of teachers to be accompanied by a representative from their Trade Union.

When pupils are interviewed, an additional member of staff should always attend.

Response

The head teacher will provide the complainant with a full written response within 10 school days of acknowledging it. This response will determine whether or not the complaint has been upheld, the reasons why, and what action (if any) will be taken.

Options for complainant

If the individual is dissatisfied with the response they have been given and would like to take their complaint further, they should be referred to the school's complaints procedure and told how to move on to the next stage.

Stage 3: Review by governing body complaints committee

Introduction

Complaints only rarely reach this formal level, but it is important that governing bodies are prepared to deal with them.

Upon receiving a formally submitted complaint at this stage the Chair of Governors will usually choose to deal with it by holding a complaints committee hearing. However, in some cases, it may be possible and appropriate for the Chair of Governors to resolve the issue with the complainant by other means without the need for a complaints committee review.

The complaints committee must be clerked. The clerk may be a member of the school staff, the clerk to the governing body or another governor. When stage 2 has been missed out, this is the first stage under which a formal complaint about the head teacher will be dealt with.

The committee

It is recommended that school governing bodies annually agree five governors who will be able to form part of a complaints committee if and when this becomes necessary at any point. The three governors appointed to the complaints committee in any case will usually be chosen from this group of five.

The committee will generally consist of three governors who have not previously been involved with dealing with the complaint. The committee should elect its own chair.

Submitting a formal complaint

The complainant must submit a written request to the chair of governors for their complaint to be considered by a complaints committee.

Acknowledgement and time scales

The chair of governors should acknowledge receipt of this letter within 5 school days if possible but no more than ten at most by writing to the complainant. This letter will inform them that their complaint will be heard by a complaints committee within 15 school days of the date of this letter.

Preparation

The chair of governors will then contact the clerk and ask him or her to begin making preparatory arrangements.

The clerk will convene a meeting of the complaints committee. The membership of the complaints committee will be confirmed, a date and time will be arranged for a hearing and all existing relevant documentation will be given to the three appointed governors.

The clerk should then formally write to the complainant, the head teacher and any other relevant staff or witnesses and inform them:

- Of the date, time and venue of the hearing;
- Of the aims and objectives of the hearing and how it will be conducted;
- That any documentation they wish the committee to consider must be returned to the Clerk no later than 5 school days before the hearing takes place;
- Of the rights of equal access, accompaniment and representation as set out within this document;
- How and when the committee will reach their decision.

It is the responsibility of the clerk to ensure that all parties receive all relevant documents at least 3 school days before the date of the hearing so as to allow individuals to familiarise themselves with them.

The hearing

The hearing should allow each party involved to explain their understanding or interpretation of events and for other parties to question them. The hearing will, therefore, usually operate according to the following format:

- The chair will introduce all parties to one another and explain the principles, objectives and format of the hearing
- The complainant will be given the opportunity to explain their complaint. Following this the head teacher and the complaints committee will be allowed to ask the complainant questions.
- The head teacher will then be given an opportunity to explain the school's official response, interpretation or view about the complaint. Following this the complainant and committee will be allowed to question the head teacher.
- Every party will be given the opportunity to call witnesses and question witnesses called by other parties.
- The head teacher and the complainant will both be given the chance to give final statements.
- The hearing will be concluded by the chair who should explain that the committee will consider its decision and write to both parties within 5 school days informing them of the outcome.

This format will need to be altered under certain circumstances, including instances where the Local Authority, rather than the head teacher, has played an investigating role. Ultimately, the chair of the meeting has control over its proceedings.

After the hearing

The committee will then consider the complaint and all the evidence presented and:

- Reach a unanimous, or at least a majority decision, on the complaint;
- Decide upon the appropriate action (if any) to be taken;
- Where appropriate, suggest changes to, or request a review of, the school's systems or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not happen again.

This information will be included in both the letters to the head teacher and the complainant.

Options for complainant

If the individual is dissatisfied with the response they have been given and would like to take their complaint further, they should be referred to the school's complaints procedure and accompanying public guidance leaflet and told how to move on to the next stage.

STAGE 4: Complaint to Local Authority

Introduction

Complainants are entitled to complain to Local Authority (LA) if they believe that their complaint was not handled fairly and in accordance to the school's complaints policy. Complaints can only be considered once the school's procedures have been completed in full.

Complaints very rarely reach this level. However, it is important that the LA and the school are ready to deal with them if necessary and that the complainant is fully informed of how and when they can complain at this level.

Submitting a formal complaint

Complaints must be submitted, in writing, to the following address:
The Director of Children's Services
Education Department
Cheshire West and Chester Council
Chester

This written complaint must include the following information

- Details of the original complaint;
- The judgement and action taken by the governing body;
- Reasons for believing that the original complaint was not dealt with fairly and in accordance with the school's complaint's procedure;
- The expected or desired outcome.

The investigation

The LA will examine all relevant documentation considered by the school in their original investigation as well as the records and correspondence produced at each stage.

The response

The LA will write to the complainant and inform them of their findings. Copies of this letter will be sent to the head teacher and chair of governors.

Possible outcomes

If the LA decides that the school has failed to handle the original complaint fairly and according to its complaints policy the matter will be referred back to the governing body.

The governing body will then be requested to reinvestigate the complaint at stage 3 (review by governing body complaints committee). The governing body will need to re-appoint a new complaints committee.

Options for complainant

If the individual is dissatisfied with the response they have been given and would like to take their complaint further, they should be referred to the school's complaints procedure and told how to move on to the next stage.

STAGE 5: The Local Government Ombudsman and the Secretary of State

Introduction

Individuals have the right to contact to the Local Government Ombudsman or the Secretary of State for Education and Skills with regards to the way their complaint has been handled.

Usually, neither will take any action until both the school and the Council's procedures have been exhausted.

Complaining to the Local Government Ombudsman

If a complainant feels that there has been maladministration in the manner in which a complaint has been dealt with, they can take this to the Local government Ombudsman. The Ombudsman can investigate complaints about how something has been done but he or she cannot question what has been done simply because someone does not agree with it. The Ombudsman cannot investigate the internal management of schools.

For information on how to make your complaint, write to your Ombudsman's office or phone the Advice line on **0845 602 1983**.

You can also use the Internet to see the Local Government Ombudsman web site at **www.lgo.org.uk**

Complaining to the Secretary of State

Complainants have a right of appeal to the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families under sections 496 or 497 of the 1996 Education Act, if they believe that the LA has acted unreasonably. If the Secretary of State agrees that a complaint is justified, the DCSF has the power to require the LA to take certain actions including issuing instructions to school governing bodies in appropriate circumstances, although in practice this would be very rarely exercised.

Contacting the Secretary of State

The DCSF Public Enquiry Unit can be contacted on:

Telephone: **0870 000 2288**

Fax: **01928 79 4248**

Email: **info@dfes.gsi.gov.uk**

The email address for all of the Department's Ministers is

Dcsf.ministers@dcf.gsi.gov.uk

If you wish to write to the Secretary of State by post:

Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families

Sanctuary Buildings

Great Smith Street

London

SW1P 3BT

Appendix 1

Review by Complaints Committee – Key Roles and Responsibilities

The Role of the Clerk

The clerk organises the complaints committee review. He or she will need to:

- Set the date, time and venue of the review, ensuring that the dates are convenient to all Parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible;
- Collate any written material and send it to parties in advance of the review;
- Meet and welcome the parties as they arrive at the review;
- Record the proceedings;
- Notify all parties of the committee's decision.

The Role of the Chair of Governors

The Chair of Governors should:

- Check that the correct procedure has been followed;
- If a review is appropriate, notify the clerk to arrange the committee.

The Role of the Chair of the Complaints Committee

The chair of the complaints committee has a key role. He or she will need to ensure that:

- The remit of the committee is explained to the parties and each party has the opportunity of putting their case without undue interruption;
- The issues are addressed;
- Key findings of fact are made;
- Parents and others who may not be used to speak at such a review are put at ease;
- The review is conducted in an informal manner with each party treating the other with

Respect and courtesy;

- The committee is open minded and acting independently;
- No member of the committee has a vested interest in the outcome of the proceedings or any involvement in an earlier stage of the procedure;
- Each side is given the opportunity to state their case and ask questions;
- Written material is seen by all parties. If a new issue arises it would be useful to give all Parties the opportunity to consider and comment on it.

The chair of the complaints committee needs to ensure that the complainant is notified of the committee's decision, in writing, with the committee's response within 5 school days. This letter will explain if there are any further rights of appeal and, if so, to whom they need to be addressed.

Appendix 2

Concern or complaint received

STAGE 1 (School)

Complaint discussed informally with class teacher or other relevant contact teacher.

Complainant advised of any action to be taken where appropriate.

Complainant not satisfied, proceed to next stage.

Complainant satisfied. No further action.

STAGE 2 (School)

Complaint discussed informally with Head teacher. If an informal resolution is not reached, complaint is submitted in writing to the Head teacher who formally acknowledges it within 3 school days.

Investigation conducted and findings fully reported to complainant within a further 10 school days.

Complainant not satisfied, proceed to next stage.

Complainant satisfied. No further action.

STAGE 3 (School)

Complaint submitted in written form to the Chair of Governors, who acknowledges it within 5 – 10 school days.

The Chair of Governors determines how the complaint is to be dealt with. If necessary, the Chair of Governors will select a panel of Governors to attend a complaints hearing. The committee must meet within 15 school days and the committee's findings will be reported to the complainant within 5 days of this hearing.

Complainant not satisfied, proceed to next stage.

Complainant satisfied. No further action.

STAGE 4 (LA)

Complaint submitted to LA on the basis that original complaint was not properly dealt with by the school's complaints procedure.

LA acknowledges complaint and informs the Chair of Governors. LA investigates

complaint and reports its findings to the Chair of Governors and complainant.
Complainant not satisfied, proceed to next stage.
Complainant satisfied. No further action.

STAGE 5 (other)

Complaint submitted in writing to the Local Government Ombudsman or the Secretary of State for Education and Skills. The Ombudsman only investigates issues of maladministration. The Secretary of State may intervene if a governing body or LA has not carried out its statutory duty or has acted unreasonably.

If the complaint or concern is about the Head teacher, stage 2 will be missed out and the formal procedure will begin at stage 3.

If circumstances mean it is inappropriate to do otherwise, all types of complaint may begin at later stage.



St Luke's Catholic Primary School

Complaints Form

Section 1 – to be completed by complainant

Complainant Details:

Name:

Telephone Number:

e-mail address

Address

