COMPLAINTS POLICY

Chair of Governors: Beverley Linsley

Head Teacher: Barbara Brown

Updated November 2021

Review date November 2022

PRINCIPLES

The school's priority is to serve the needs of pupils and parents. We try to serve as efficiently and as courteously as possible but things can and do go wrong. We welcome well-founded complaints and comments as an opportunity to improve the quality of the services we offer.

The following general principles will apply:

- The desirability of settling differences informally and at the appropriate level
- The need for more formal mechanisms for dealing fairly and effectively with complaints which have proved impossible to settle informally
- Ensuring that parents, staff and governors are informed of the procedures.

Wherever possible concerns about the service Sacred Heart Primary School provides will be resolved by informal means. Anyone who has concerns should first discuss the matter with the School. The following procedure will be invoked only when all informal means have been unsuccessful and the person raising the concern wishes to make a formal complaint.

COMPLAINTS ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Complaints about school issues should be raised, in the first instance, with school staff.

Who can complain?

Anyone can complain if they receive a service, seek a service or are affected by the school.

How a complaint can be made

Complaints may be made in person, by telephone or in writing. A person with a complaint should normally seek to contact, at a reasonable time, the member of staff responsible for the relevant issue. All staff will seek to help a complainant even where the issue is not that individual's area of responsibility.

INFORMAL COMPLAINT

An informal complaint is an initial approach by an individual to an appropriate member of the school staff expressing dissatisfaction with some aspect of the service, its action or inaction. Informal complaints are often spoken rather than written; however made, they are complaints which are resolved quickly and simply, usually at the point of service delivery, and do not involve detailed or lengthy investigation. A person with a complaint should normally first contact the relevant member of staff responsible for the issue at time that is reasonable for both parties.

If a satisfactory solution has not been reached through informal means, you can consider making a formal complaint in writing to the Head Teacher, as explained below.

FORMAL COMPLAINT

Stage 1: Complaint to the Headteacher for investigation

1. On receipt of a written complaint, the Headteacher should acknowledge the complaint in writing and provide a Complaint Form. In some cases the Headteacher will have already been involved in looking at the matter; in others it will be his/her first involvement. In either case, the Headteacher's role should be impartial and objective.

2. On receipt of the completed Complaint Form, the Headteacher should determine whether Stage 1 was handled appropriately and consider providing an opportunity to meet with the complainant to:

- supplement any information already provided regarding what has happened so far and who has been involved
- clarify the nature of the complaint and what remains unresolved
- establish what the complainant feels would put things right.

3. If the complaint is against a member of staff, the Headteacher must provide a copy of the Complaint Form to the staff member against whom the complaint has been made and meet them to:

- supplement any information already provided regarding what has happened so far and who has been involved
- establish any background to the complaint and what remains unresolved
- establish what the member of staff feels would put things right.

4. If necessary, the Headteacher should interview witnesses and take statements from those involved.

5. The Headteacher should keep reasonable written records of meetings, telephone conversations and other documentation.

6. Once all the relevant facts have been established, the Headteacher should produce a written response to the complainant. The Headteacher may wish to meet with them to discuss/ resolve the matter before confirming the outcome in writing.

7. The written response should include a full explanation of the decision and the reasons for it. Where appropriate, it should Identify steps to resolve the issues, communicating and acting upon them in a positive, reassuring manner. These may include:

- An explanation which warrants no further action
- An apology
- An acknowledgement that the matter could have been handled differently
- A description of steps to be taken to ensure that it will not happen again
- An undertaking to review school policies in light of this complaint.

8. Stage 1 should be completed in ten school days. However, it is recognised that this timetable is likely to prove impossible for complaints which are complex. In such cases, the Headteacher should write to the complainant giving a revised target date.

9. The complainant should also be advised that if they are not satisfied with the response and wish to take the matter further, they can do so by writing to the Chair of the Governing Body (c/o Sacred Heart Primary School) within three weeks of receiving the outcome letter.

Complaints against the Headteacher

If a complaint is wholly or mainly about the Headteacher, the complainant should write to the Chair of the Governing Body (c/o Sacred Heart Primary School). The Chair of the Governing Body will invite the Headteacher to respond to the complaint in writing within ten school days. The Chair will send a copy of the Headteacher's response to the complainant and the complainant will be asked to indicate within five school days of receipt of the response whether s/he is satisfied with the response.

If the complainant is satisfied with the response or does not reply within the timescale, no further action will be taken. If the complainant is still dissatisfied and wishes to take the matter further, Stage 2 should commence as described below.

Stage 2: Complaint heard by Appeal Panel of Governing Body

1. If the complainant remains dissatisfied, they must write to the Chair of Governors giving details of the complaint together with a copy of the Complaint Form.

2. The Chair of the Governing Body should write to the parent to acknowledge the complaint within two school days of sight of the complaint. A copy of the acknowledgement and the Complaint Form should be sent to the Headteacher and the Clerk to the Governing Body.

3. If the complaint has been investigated at Stage 1 the result of the investigation must be made available to the Chair by the Headteacher. However, where the complaint is against the Headteacher and the complaint is referred to Stage 2, the Chair of the Governing Body must decide, in consultation with the Chair of the Complaints Committee (if another governor) whether and how the complaint should be investigated.

4. Governing Bodies are advised to establish a complaints panel from which three governors can be drawn by the Clerk to constitute a Committee. The Headteacher should not serve on the committee.

5. The Committee should consider the complaint on the basis of the written evidence and usually also set up a hearing and hear both parties. Governors may also take evidence on their own initiative. Governors should reconsider the issues raised in the original complaint and not confine themselves to consideration of procedural issues. If they decide to set up a hearing, the Committee should follow the procedure set out in paragraphs 7 - 21

6. The Chair of the Committee should take a decision at the beginning of Stage 2 on whether to seek the services of a clerk to:

- deal with the administration of the procedure;
- provide independent advice on procedure and evidence;
- ensure that the relevant facts are established;
- minute the meeting and
- draft the decision letter.

7. The Clerk/Chair of the complaints committee should write to the parent to explain how the review will be conducted. The letter should be copied to the Headteacher.

8. The Clerk/Chair of the Complaints Committee should confirm the date of the meeting with the other governor members of that committee.

9. The parent and Headteacher should be invited to attend the meeting. The date and time of the meeting should be convenient to the parent and Headteacher, within reason. The notification should inform the parent of his/her right to be accompanied to the meeting by a friend/representative. It should also explain how the meeting will be conducted and of the parent's right to submit further written evidence to the committee no less than 3 working days before the meeting.

10. The Headteacher should also be invited to prepare a written report for the Committee in response to the complaint.

11. All relevant correspondence regarding the complaint should be circulated to the committee members, the parent and the Headteacher in advance of the meeting.

12. If the Headteacher and/or the parent wish to call witnesses, the agreement of the Chair of the Committee should be obtained in advance of the meeting.

13. It is the responsibility of the Chair to ensure that the meeting is properly conducted. However, the proceedings should be as informal as possible.

14. The aim of the meeting should be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant. However, at the end of the meeting the Committee will need to issue a finding in writing either upholding or not upholding the complaint or upholding some parts and not others.

15. If either party wishes to introduce previously undisclosed evidence or witnesses, it is in the interest of natural justice to adjourn the meeting so that the other side has time to respond to the new evidence. Late evidence of witnesses should not be accepted unless there is a good reason for the lateness.

16. The meeting should allow for:

- the parent to explain his or her complaint and the Headteacher to explain the reasons for his or her decision;
- the Headteacher to question the complainant about the complaint and the complainant to question the Headteacher;
- panel members to have an opportunity to question both the complainant and the Headteacher;
- any party to have the right to bring witnesses (subject to the approval of the Chair) and all parties having the right to question all the witnesses
- final statement by the Headteacher and parent.

17. The Chair of the Committee should explain to the parent and the Headteacher that the Committee will consider its decision, and a written response will be sent to both parties as soon as possible. The complainant, Headteacher and any witnesses will then leave.

18. The panel will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented and reach an unanimous, or at least a majority, decision on the complaint. Where appropriate the Committee can decide on the action to be taken to resolve the complaint and/or suggest recommended changes to the school's system or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not happen again.

19. Governors will not pay financial compensation as a response to a complaint, though may spend money on an appropriate educational purpose.

20. The Clerk/Chair will send a written statement outlining the decision with reasons to both the complainant and the Headteacher.

21. The complainant should be advised that if they are dissatisfied with the response, they have the right to take the matter further by complaining to the Secretary of State for Education and Skills.

22. Stage 2 should be completed in 15 school days. However, it is recognised that this timetable is likely to prove impossible for complaints which are complex. In such cases the Chair of the Complaints Committee should write to the parent giving a revised target date.

23. In exceptional circumstances the Committee may decide, after taking advice from impartial external sources (e.g. the Local Authority or Diocese) not to proceed to consider the complaint on the grounds that the complaint has already been dealt with or is malicious.

Complaint about a Governor

If a parent or member of staff has a complaint about a Governor, the same principles apply as set out above:

- If possible, the individual governor should first be approached on an informal basis for a resolution of the complaint.
- If the complainant remains dissatisfied, or if the matter is too serious or inappropriate for informal discussion, they should initiate a formal complaint by writing to the Headteacher and/or Chair of Governors and give details of the complaint.
- The Headteacher and Chair of Governors will work together and consult all parties involved to establish the facts of the case, reach a conclusion and, where possible and appropriate, decide on a course of action to address the complainant's demands
- The Headteacher and Chair of Governors will inform the complainant of the outcome of their considerations and what further options, if any, might be available.

Publicising the Complaints Procedure

Reference is made to the Complaints Policy in the School Prospectus and published on the school website. Copies may be downloaded or sent to anyone who indicates that they wish to make a complaint, prior to the start of the process.

Conclusion

Sacred Heart Primary School hopes this procedure will not be needed. For the very rare occasion when it is, it will be followed faithfully and objectively. If a complainant tries to re-open the same issue, the Chair of Governors will inform him/her that the procedure has been followed and is now closed.

APPENDIX 1: DEFINITIONS

COMPLAINTS

A Complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, action or lack of action by the School or its staff affecting an individual or group.

A complaint is not:

- A request for a service
- A request for information or explanation of school policy or practice
- A matter for which there is a right of appeal within the LEA or to an independent body or a legal remedy.

It should be noted that even where an appeal procedure is in place, a complaint could still arise regarding the way that procedure is operated.

INFORMAL COMPLAINTS

An informal complaint is one which can be resolved locally and quickly, which does not require an in-depth investigation, and which generally does not require to be put in writing.

FORMAL COMPLAINTS

A formal complaint is one which cannot be quickly resolved to service user's satisfaction, and, therefore, requires an investigation and which is generally put in writing.

ANONYMOUS COMPLAINTS

The School does not wish to receive anonymous complaints and will not undertake to act on information received in this way.

Notification of Complaint:

Please complete and return to the Head teacher or Chair of Governors who will acknowledge receipt and explain how this matter will be dealt with.

Your name:	**Student's name:**
Your relationship to the student:	
Address:	
Day time telephone number:	
Evening telephone number:	
Please give details of your complaint: **Continue over leaf or write on a separate sheet if preferred**	
What action, if any, have you already taken to try and resolve your complaint? (Who did you speak to and what was the response)?	
What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?	
Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details:	
Signature:	**Date:**
For School use only	
Date acknowledgement sent:	
By whom:	
Complaint referred to:	
Date:	