

# **ST MARY'S CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL**

## **COMPLAINTS POLICY**

### **CELEBRATING EXCELLENCE THROUGH OUR FAITH AND LEARNING**

## **PART 1 GENERAL PRINCIPLES**

### **Concerns and Complaints – Introduction**

St Mary's Catholic Primary School aims to work in partnership with parents in the best interests of the children. Any concerns and complaints will be given careful consideration and will be dealt with fairly and honestly. We will provide sufficient opportunity for any issue to be fully discussed, and aim to resolve it through open dialogue and mutual understanding.

There is a difference between a concern and a complaint. A 'concern' may be defined as 'an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought'. A complaint may be generally defined as 'an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action'.

### **Actions Before Making Any Complaint**

Our complaints procedure is not intended to replace the normal informal discussions which take place between parents, staff and the Headteacher on problems and concerns as they arise. Most issues can be resolved through this dialogue. These concerns might include such matters as a child's work or progress, relations with staff, relations with other pupils including bullying, or a child's personal welfare.

The first point of contact regarding concerns should always be the class teacher. Appointments to see the class teacher are available both before and after school and may be made via the office. Please bear in mind though that teachers require time immediately before school to prepare for the day, and may have involvement with clubs or staff meetings after school, so may not always be available at short notice.

When meeting with the class teacher to raise concerns, patience is required. The class teacher may need time to perform an investigation or put corrective measures in place and then determine their effectiveness. This informal stage may require several meetings to reach a conclusion satisfactory to all parties. Desired actions and timescales will be discussed.

If a parent feels that a concern has not been solved through discussions with the class teacher, or that it is of a sufficiently serious nature, then an appointment to discuss it with the Headteacher should be made. The parent should indicate that the appointment is regarding a complaint.

## Referral of Complaints

The majority of formal complaints against the school will fall within the remit of the Governing Body to consider, with the exception of those listed below, for which there are separate statutory procedures:-

| <u>Exceptions</u>   | <u>Who to contact</u>   |
|---|---|
| Statutory Assessment of Special Educational Needs   | <p>The provision for pupils with special educational needs is the responsibility of the Governing Body and any complaints about SEN provision should be addressed using the school's complaints procedure.</p> <p>Complaints about any aspect of the SEN Service, including statutory assessment procedures, should be made direct to South Gloucestershire Council.</p>  |
| Exclusion of pupils from the school   | <p>South Gloucestershire Council.</p> <p>Further information can be found at <a href="http://www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions">www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions</a>.</p>  |
| Child protection related issues or allegations of child abuse                                       | <p>Must be reported to First Point on 01454 866000, email <a href="mailto:FirstPoint@southglos.gov.uk">FirstPoint@southglos.gov.uk</a>.</p> <p>If it is out of office hours then concerns should be raised with the Emergency Duty Team on 01454 615165 or the Police on 999.</p>   |
| Whistleblowing  | <p>The school has an internal whistleblowing procedure for their employees and voluntary staff. Other concerns can be raised direct with Ofsted by telephone on: 0300 123 3155, email <a href="mailto:whistleblowing@ofsted.gov.uk">whistleblowing@ofsted.gov.uk</a> or by writing to: WBHL, Ofsted Piccadilly Gate Store Street Manchester M1 2WD. The Department for Education is also a prescribed body for whistleblowing in education.</p> |
| Staff grievances and disciplinary procedures  | <p>These matters will invoke the school's formal grievances procedures. Complainants will not be informed of the outcome of any investigation.</p>  |
| Complaints about services provided by other providers who may use the school premises or facilities | <p>Providers should have their own complaints procedures to deal with complaints and should be contacted direct.</p>  |

## **General Principles Regarding Any Complaint**

The following principles will apply to any complaint

- The complaint will be handled with care and sensitivity;
- All stages of the complaints procedure will be investigatory rather than adversarial;
- Confidentiality will be respected at all times;
- Responses to any complaint will be prompt (usual timescales are detailed below);
- The Complainant will be given adequate feedback and kept informed of timescales;
- Any investigation will be thorough and fair and seek resolution and/or make recommendations;
- Any investigation will address all the points at issue which are in the school's jurisdiction.

Complaints should normally be raised within 3 months of any incident, although complaints made outside this time limit will be considered if there are exceptional reasons for the delay. Once a complaint is made it will be dealt with as submitted and should not be added to during the process.

If any Governor is contacted directly by a parent regarding a complaint, then that Governor will refer the parent to this complaints procedure. Individual Governors cannot act unilaterally by investigating a complaint or making any prior judgement about it. The Governor can only refer the parent to the class teacher, the Headteacher or the Chair of Governors as appropriate.

If the complaint is one that may result in disciplinary or legal action against the Headteacher, or the complaint is regarding the Headteacher, then the complaint should immediately be escalated to Stage 1b (informal investigation by the Chair of Governors) and, if that fails, to Stage 2 (see below) via submission of a Formal Complaint Form (Appendix C) to the Chair of Governors, who will convene a complaints panel.

If at any stage of a complaint it becomes apparent that the Complainant is seeking some sort of financial compensation then any investigation will be halted whilst advice is sought from the Local Authority Risk and Insurance Manager.

Children from the school should only be called on as witnesses in very exceptional circumstances and, in such circumstances, should be accompanied by a parent or member of staff during any meetings.

If an anonymous complaint is received, or the Complainant requests anonymity, then the Complainant will be urged to identify themselves in the interests of fairness and of dealing effectively with the complaint. However if the anonymous complaint is of a sufficiently serious nature then the Headteacher or Chair of Governors will decide whether action is appropriate. If an anonymous complaint raises child protection issues then the complaint will be referred immediately to the Local Authority.

The Complainant should not attempt to bypass steps in the complaints procedure. Escalation to the Local Authority or Secretary of State levels before the formal school

procedures have been exhausted will result in the Complainant being referred back to the schools procedure by those bodies.

## **PART 2: DEALING WITH COMPLAINTS – PROCEDURES**

The following procedures will need to be invoked when initial attempts to resolve the issue (see Part 1 above) are unsuccessful and the person raising the concern remains dissatisfied and wishes to take the matter further.

There are 2 stages in the procedures:

- Stage 1 – Complaint investigated informally by (a) the Headteacher or (b) the Chair of Governors
- Stage 2 – Complaint investigated formally by a panel of governors.

### **Stage 1 (Informal) - School Level**

**a) Complaint handled by the Headteacher** If a parent feels that a concern has not been solved through discussion with the class teacher, or that it is of a sufficiently serious nature, then an appointment to discuss it with the Headteacher should be made. The parent should indicate that the appointment is regarding a complaint.

If the Headteacher cannot resolve the complaint at the initial meeting then the school may carry out an investigation of the complaint. It will be the Headteacher's responsibility to decide who should conduct the investigation. This may be the Headteacher or may be a member of the Senior Leadership Team, especially if there is the likelihood of a personnel issue emerging from the investigation.

The investigation will be completed within **10 school days** and a follow on meeting held with the parent to discuss the results of the investigation. Further meetings may be held as required if both parties agree that the concern may be resolved by subsequent meetings, whilst still at the informal level. The Headteacher will also respond in writing to the Complainant, including a response to each point of complaint made.

The Headteacher will make written notes of any informal complaint using the Parental Concern Form (appendix 1). The notes will include details of the concern, how it was dealt with, by whom and the outcome. In the event of the complaint proceeding to the formal stage, these notes will be made available to the Complaints Panel.

If discussions between the Headteacher and the Complainant prove fruitless, and the issue cannot be resolved to the Complainant's satisfaction, then the Headteacher will advise the Complainant that they may make a formal complaint to the Governing Body, by putting the complaint in writing (using the Complaints Form – Appendix 2) to the Chair of Governors **within 15 school days**. Complainants are very strongly advised to use the complaints form as this will help ensure the complaint can be effectively investigated.

**b) Complaint about the Headteacher** The above procedures apply if the complaint is about the Headteacher, but the informal investigation will be undertaken by the Chair of Governors unless the Chair decides it is necessary to move straight to Stage 2.

**c) Complaint about an individual governor** – any complaint about an individual governor should be addressed to the Clerk to the Governors, who will forward it to the Chair of Governors. If the complaint is about the Chair of Governors, it should then be forwarded to the Vice-Chair of Governors.

## **Stage 2 (Formal) – Governing Body**

When the Chair of Governors has received a formal complaint, a panel of three Governors will be convened to hear the complaint, and make a decision about it on behalf of the Governing Body. The Governors appointed to the panel will have had no previous involvement in the complaint. As many governors as possible will receive training in dealing with complaints.

The primary function of the Complaints Panel is to decide on the merits or otherwise of the complaint. However, the panel will also play an important role in attempting to resolve the complaint (see Appendix 3 for details of the investigation process). The panel will reach a decision on whether the complaint is upheld or rejected and may call for certain action to be taken by the school or the parents. Details of the roles and responsibilities can be found in appendix 4.

The Complaints Panel, supported by a clerk, will invite written evidence from all parties to the complaint. Any written evidence will be circulated to all parties prior to any meetings. The Complaints Panel will then meet with all parties to the complaint, formally and separately. These meetings will be held as soon as possible, given the time constraints of all parties, at locations acceptable to all parties. Each party may be accompanied by a friend who can only speak on their behalf in exceptional circumstances if the Complaints Panel agrees that this is necessary. All parties will be given a fair opportunity to express their point. The procedure for the meeting with the complainant will be as follows:-

- Introductions will be performed by the Chair of the Complaints Panel
- The Complainant makes a statement of their complaint and the outcome sought
- The panel will question the Complainant
- The Complainant may make a final statement

Meetings with other parties will follow a similar pattern. The meetings will be minuted, normally by the Clerk to the Governors. It may be appropriate for a member of staff such as a member of the administration team to act as clerk, although consideration will be given to the sensitivity of the particular complaint. Meetings will not be recorded electronically.

The decision reached by the panel will be notified in writing to the Complainant and any subject(s) of the complaint. It will also be reported back to the next meeting of the Full Governing Body. Only a brief summary to the full governing body will be provided, with no detailed or named information.

Written replies to Complainants will aim to answer all the points of concern, be factually correct, avoid jargon, and tell the Complainant what to do next if they are still not satisfied.

It may be appropriate for the nominated complaints governor to telephone the Complainant regarding the outcome. However this will always be followed up with a letter to make sure there is no misunderstanding.

When a formal complaint is received by the Chair of Governors a letter of acknowledgement and a request for written evidence will be sent to the Complainant **within 10 school days**. All other parties to the complaint will receive a letter outlining the complaint and requesting written evidence. The letters will detail the Governors involved in the Complaints Panel and the nominated Chair. Any written evidence should be sent to the nominated Chair of the Complaints Panel. The panel will convene the complaints meetings as soon as is practically possible after the receipt of all written evidence, at mutually acceptable times. Following the conclusion of the complaints meetings with all parties, the panel will provide a written response to the complaint within **15 school days**.

N.B - Where it is not possible to respond to a complaint within the stated timescales, the Complainant will be informed in writing of the reason for the delay and given an anticipated response date.

### **Staff Disciplinary Procedures**

It may be necessary to suspend the complaints procedure in respect of a complaint which indicates that there may be a need for disciplinary action to be taken against a member of staff. The decision to suspend the complaints procedure will be taken when it has been established that there may be a case to answer. In this instance the advice of the Local Authorities Human Resources department will be sought.

The Complainant will be notified that the complaints procedure has been suspended and the likely timescale for its reactivation. The resolution of the complaint will be notified to the Complainant at the conclusion of any disciplinary proceedings. However the details of any disciplinary proceedings will not be released to the Complainant.

### **Vexatious Complaints**

The number of complaints that become protected will be very limited. A complaint may become vexatious when it has been properly considered and dealt with, but the complainant is not prepared to accept the conclusion or persists in making the same or substantially the same complaint. Continuing with such complaints can unreasonably take up time and resources and detract from the responsibility to others in the school community. If the Chair of Governors judges that a complaint has become vexatious he/she will inform the complainant in writing of this, stating that the matter is now closed.

### **School Policy Regarding Harassment Or Abusive Behaviour**

The Headteacher and Governing Body are fully committed to the improvement of the school. They welcome feedback from parents / carers and will always try to resolve any concerns as quickly as possible.

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

Unreasonable behaviour may include:

- Actions which are out of proportion to the nature of the complaint, persistent – even when the complaints procedure has been exhausted, personally harassing, or unjustifiably repetitious;
- An insistence on pursuing unjustified complaints and / or unrealistic outcomes to justified complaints;
- An insistence on pursuing justifiable complaints in an unreasonable manner e.g. using abusive or threatening language; or making complaints in public or via social networking sites;
- Refusing to attend appointments to discuss the complaint.

The school regards harassment as the unreasonable pursuit of issues or complaints, particularly, but not limited to, 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 disproportionately adverse effect on the school community.

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 a reasonable time to respond to a complaint;
- Follow the school's complaints procedure.

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 be unreasonable or unacceptable, and request a changed approach;
- 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

In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, the concerns and actions taken will be put in writing immediately and the police informed. This may include banning an individual from the school. If a parent's behaviour is a cause for concern, the school

can ask him/her to leave school premises. In serious cases, the Headteacher or the local authority can notify them in writing that their implied licence to be on school premises has been temporarily revoked subject to any representations that the parent may wish to make. Schools should always give the parent the opportunity to formally express their views on the decision to bar in writing.

The decision to bar will then be reviewed, taking into account any representations made by the parent, and either confirmed or lifted. If the decision is confirmed the parent should be notified in writing, explaining how long the bar will be in place. Anyone wishing to complain about being barred can do so, by letter or email, to the Headteacher or Chair of Governors. However, complaints about barring cannot be escalated to the Department for Education once the school's own complaints procedure has been completed; the only remaining avenue of appeal is through the Courts and independent legal advice must therefore be sought.

### **Appeal To The Secretary Of State**

A complaint may be made to the Secretary of State for Education if a person believes that a Governing Body or Local Authority is acting "unreasonably", or is failing to carry out its statutory duties properly. However, intervention can only occur if the Governing Body has failed to carry out a legal duty or has acted unreasonably in the performance of a duty. Intervention would have to be expedient in the sense that there would have to be something that the Secretary of State could instruct either party to do to put matters right.

The School Complaints Unit (SCU) considers complaints relating to LA maintained schools in England on behalf of the Secretary of State. The SCU will look at whether the complaints policy and any other relevant statutory policies were adhered to. The SCU also looks at whether statutory policies adhere to education legislation. However, the SCU will not normally re-investigate the substance of the complaint. This remains the responsibility of the school.

The SCU will not overturn the school's decision about a complaint except in exceptional circumstances where it is clear the school has acted unlawfully or unreasonably. If the SCU finds that the school has not handled a complaint in accordance with its procedure, it may request that the complaint is looked at again. The Secretary of State must be satisfied that a decision is unreasonable in the sense that no reasonable authority or governing body, acting with due regard to its statutory responsibilities, would have reached that decision. The Secretary of State cannot do anything until the school has finished looking into the complaint.

Further information can be obtained from the SCU by calling **0370 000 2288** or by going online at: [www.education.gov.uk/help/contactus](http://www.education.gov.uk/help/contactus)

## **PART 3: MANAGING AND RECORDING COMPLAINTS**

The school will record the progress of the complaint and the final outcome. A complaint may initially be made in person, by telephone, or in writing. At the end of a meeting or telephone call, the member of staff will ensure that the complainant and the school have the same understanding of what was discussed and agreed. A brief note of meetings and telephone calls will be kept and a copy of any written response added to the record. The

school complaint form can be found in Appendix 2. **The complainant is strongly encouraged to complete the complaint form.**

The Headteacher is responsible for the records and will hold them centrally. Records of complaints will be kept for a minimum of six years.

### **Governing Body Monitoring of Complaints**

The Governing Body will monitor the level and nature of complaints and review the outcomes on a regular basis to ensure the effectiveness of the procedure and make changes where necessary. Complaints information shared with the whole governing body will not name individuals.

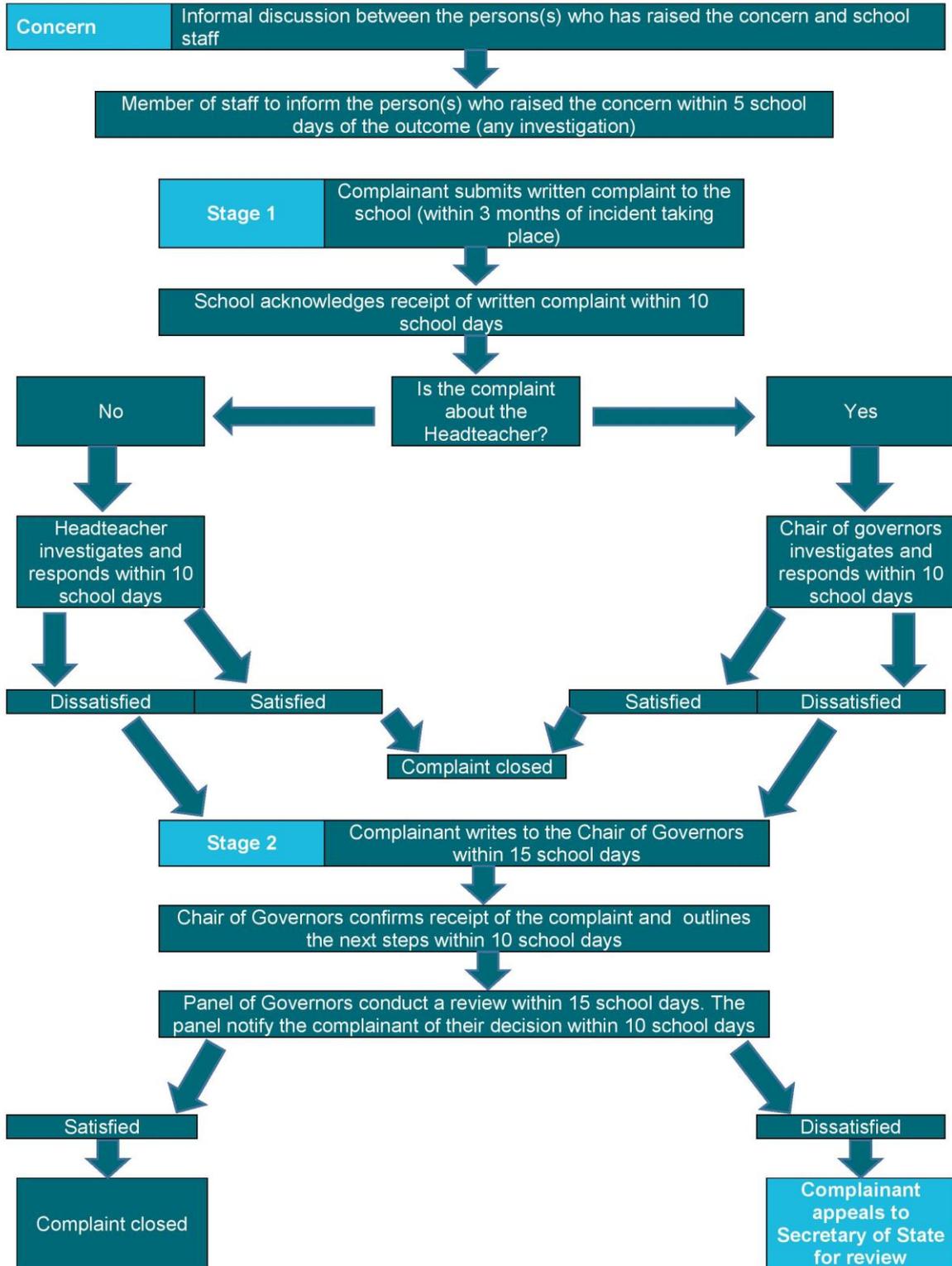
As well as addressing an individual's complaints, the process of listening to and resolving complaints will contribute to school improvement. When individual complaints are heard, the school will consider whether there are underlying issues that need to be addressed.

### **Publicising the Procedure**

There is a legal requirement for the Complaints Procedures to be publicised. The Governing Body has decided to fulfil this requirement by including it in the school website.

**The Complaints Procedure and any associated forms will be readily available to parents.**

## Managing a complaint





What actions have already been taken in relation to the concern?  
[Who have they spoken or written to and what was the outcome?]

Agreed actions to address the problem at this stage?

**Follow Up / Review Meeting Date:-**

|            |  |
|------------|--|
| Signature: |  |
| Date:      |  |

## Appendix 2

### St Mary's Catholic Primary School Complaint Form

Please complete this form and return it 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 schools roll ]:

.....

Pupil's name [ if relevant to your complaint ]:

.....

Your Address:

Daytime telephone number: .....

Evening telephone number: .....

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.

Number of Additional pages attached =

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?

Signature:

Date:

**School use:**  
Date Form received:  
Received by:  
Date acknowledgement sent:  
Acknowledgement sent by:

|                        |  |  |  |
|------------------------|--|--|--|
| Complaint referred to: |  |  |  |
| Date:                  |  |  |  |

### **Appendix 3** **Investigation Procedure**

The investigation of an allegation or a complaint should always be carried out thoroughly and responsibly, irrespective of whether the complaint appears to be trivial or serious. The outcome of such an investigation will have significance not only for the complainant but also for any member of staff against whom a complaint has been made.

Any anonymous complaint will not be investigated, unless there are exceptional circumstances. These would include serious concerns such as Child Protection issues or bullying allegations, where the school should 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.

#### **Preparing for an Investigation**

Where the school receives a formal complaint, it should be acknowledged and a commitment made that the complaint will be investigated and the outcome of the investigation notified to the complainant in due course.

It is essential that there is a clear understanding of the complaint. Where necessary the nature of the complaint should be confirmed with the complainant. e.g. through an initial meeting. (If an investigator is appointed there may need to be more detailed follow-up.)

Any member of staff against whom a complaint has been made, should be notified that a complaint has been received and that the appropriate school procedure will be followed. It is usually not appropriate to provide the member of staff with details of the evidence on which the complaint is based until any investigation has been completed. However the member of staff does need to be able to understand the nature of any allegations against them.

Once any complaint has been confirmed the school needs to determine which procedure (school or LA) is most appropriate and to select an appropriate person to conduct any investigation.

#### **Conducting the investigation**

The investigation must be carried out in accordance with the provisions of the relevant procedure.

Arrangements should be agreed so that accurate notes can be taken of all interviews and the outcome of the investigation be accurately recorded.

The complainant should be given the opportunity to offer documentation and to identify potential witnesses or sources of evidence.

The member of staff subject to the complaint should be advised that they may be accompanied by a friend or trade union representative when invited to be interviewed.

Where children are potential witnesses, discretion should be exercised over their involvement. Pupils should only be interviewed when the nature of the complaint is

sufficiently serious to warrant it and adult witnesses are not available. Only in extreme circumstances will younger pupils be interviewed.

Any interviews should be conducted as soon as possible to ensure that recollections are as fresh as possible and to minimise the possibility that evidence will become tainted through witnesses discussing alleged incidents with other persons.

In conducting interviews, the investigator should prepare the questions to be asked prior to the interview. These can always be supplemented during the interview. The investigator should allow the interviewee to answer in their own way. Their responses should be listened to attentively. Any temptation to cut an interviewee short or to seek to "lead" them must be resisted. The interviewee should be given the opportunity of providing other relevant information at the end of the interview.

Interviewees should, however, be advised that their responses must be confined to the substance of the complaint. Any attempt by the interviewee to introduce information relating to other members of staff or to issues unrelated to the complaint should be resisted.

The investigator should avoid reaching conclusions or passing judgement until the investigation has been completed and their report is being written.

#### Concluding the investigation

The report may contain:

- a brief outline of the process that has been followed
- a statement of the complaint/concern
- a summary of the findings, linked to the relevant evidence
- any recommendations for future action
- annexes containing copies of witness statements and other evidence collected during the investigation

The report of the investigation will usually be confidential to the school, as it is likely to contain sensitive personal information. If a request is received to release the report, under either the Data Protection Act or Freedom of Information, the school should seek legal advice from the LA.

A summary of the process undertaken and the outcome of the investigation may be provided to the complainant. Caution must be exercised in reporting back to the complainant as revealing certain details may prejudice the ability of an employee to continue in post.

Following consideration of the report by the relevant body, any final recommendations may also be shared with the parties, unless there is good reason not so to do. Wherever possible, recommendations should be constructive and not punitive.

## **Appendix 4** **Roles and Responsibilities**

### **The Complainant**

The complainant or person who makes the complaint will receive a more effective response to the complaint if he/she:-

- co-operates with the school in seeking a solution to the complaint;
- expresses the complaint in full as early as possible;
- responds promptly to requests for information or meetings or in agreeing the details of the complaint;
- asks for assistance as needed;
- treats all those involved in the complaint with respect.

### **The Investigator**

The Investigator is the person involved in Stages 1 and 2 of the procedure. The Investigator's role can include providing a comprehensive, open, transparent and fair consideration of the complaint through:-

- sensitive and thorough interviewing of the complainant to establish what has happened and who has been involved;
- consideration of records and other relevant information;
- interviewing staff and children/young people and other people relevant to the complaint;
- analysing information;
- effectively liaising with the complainant and the complaints co-ordinator as appropriate to clarify what the complainant feels would put things right;
- identifying solutions and recommending courses of action to resolve problems;
- being mindful of the timescales to respond; and
- responding to the complainant in plain and clear language.

The person investigating the complaint should make sure that they:

- conduct interviews with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning;
- keep notes of interviews or arrange for an independent note taker to record minutes of the meeting.

### **The Panel Clerk**

The Clerk is the contact point for the complainant for the panel meeting and is expected to:-

- set the date, time and venue of the hearing, 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 the parties in advance of the hearing;
- meet and welcome the parties as they arrive at the hearing;
- record the proceedings;
- circulate the minutes of the panel hearing;
- notify all parties of the panel's decision;

### **The Panel Chair**

The Panel Chair has a key role in ensuring that:-

- the meeting is minuted;

- the remit of the panel is explained to the complainant and both they and the school have the opportunity of putting their case without undue interruption;
- the issues are addressed;
- key findings of fact are made;
- parents/carers and others who may not be used to speaking at such a hearing are put at ease – this is particularly important with children;
- the hearing is conducted in an informal manner with everyone treated with respect and courtesy;
- the layout of the room will set the tone – care is needed to ensure the setting is informal and not adversarial;
- the panel is open-minded and acts independently;
- no member of the panel has an external interest in the outcome of the proceedings or any involvement in an earlier stage of the procedure;
- both the complainant and the school are given the opportunity to state their case and seek clarity;
- written material is seen by everyone in attendance – if a new issue arises it would be useful to give everyone the opportunity to consider and comment upon it; this may require a short adjournment of the hearing;
- liaise with the Clerk.

### **Panel Member**

Panellists will need to be aware that:-

- it is important that the review panel hearing is independent and impartial, and that it is seen to be so;
- no governor may sit on the panel if they have had a prior involvement in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it.
- the aim of the hearing, which will be held in private, will always be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant;
- however, it must be recognised that the complainant might not be satisfied with the outcome if the hearing does not find in their favour. It may only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations which will satisfy the complainant that his or her complaint has been taken seriously.
- many complainants will feel nervous and inhibited in a formal setting;
- parents/carers often feel emotional when discussing an issue that affects their child. The panel chair will ensure that the proceedings are as welcoming as possible.