

Christ Church CE Academy



Parental Complaints Policy

This Church of England Aided School aims to serve its community by providing an excellent education for pupils of all abilities and backgrounds in the context of Christian belief and practice.

It encourages an understanding of the meaning and significance of faith and requires the valuing of other faiths.

It promotes Christian values and spiritual development through the experience it offers to all its pupils,

These values are implicit in this policy.

Status

April 2018	Draft for staff
April 2018	Accepted by governors
April 2020	Date for Review

Parental Complaints

It is the responsibility of individual Schools and Academies to respond to complaints about their school.

The school also has a duty under the Education Act 2002 to publicise the complaints procedure. The procedure can be found in the school's prospectus, on the school's website, and copies are available from the school office.

The local authority will encourage parents to contact the school directly if they have concerns or complaints. The LA's Complaints Officer has agreed to try to inform the Head Teacher of any calls that have been made to the LA regarding a complaint about their school.

Academies have their own complaints procedure, which is independent of the LA. This Academy should ensure the involvement of the Wakefield Diocesan Academies Trust.

A complaint is defined as:

“An expression of dissatisfaction or disquiet in relation to a school or teacher, which requires a response.”

Pupils, parents or carers can make a complaint to the school about most aspects of its function including:

- Attitude / behaviour of staff
- Teaching and learning
- Application of behaviour management systems
- Bullying
- Provision of extra-curricular activities

Members of the general public may also make complaints to the school if the school is associated with the issue being complained about e.g.

- Behaviour of pupils during break-times
- Disturbance to neighbours during school hours
- Health and Safety issues of premises
- Behaviour of staff

The school is not responsible for the actions or behaviour of pupils outside school hours.

Legal, child protection or disciplinary proceedings take precedence over complaints procedures and timescales.

General Principles

The school differentiates between a concern and a complaint. By taking informal concerns seriously at the earliest stage, the numbers that develop into formal complaints can be kept to a minimum.

The underlying principle is that concerns will be handled without the need for formal procedures. For example, it would be helpful if the staff receiving the first approach were able to resolve issues on the spot, including apologising, where necessary.

Formal procedures need only to be started when initial attempts to resolve the issue are unsuccessful and the person raising the concern remains dissatisfied and wishes to take the matter further.

Our school:

- welcomes complaints as a positive means of promoting pupil/parent satisfaction
- uses complaints as a way of identifying opportunities to do things better
- listens to pupils and parents
- seeks to resolve complaints swiftly
- replies with an acknowledgement letter in the first instance if a complaint is sent in by letter and states we are looking into the matter (*nothing inflames a situation more than failure to acknowledge*)
- has clear, simple to understand and use, published procedures for making complaints (**schools are required by law to have, and to make available to parents, their complaints procedures**)
- keeps complainants informed about progress
- provides redress where a complaint is found to have substance
- regularly reviews how effective the complaints procedure is

Investigating Complaints

The person who takes forward the first formal procedure makes sure s/he:

- establishes what has happened so far and who has been involved
- clarifies the nature of the complaint and what remains unresolved
- meets the complainant or contacts them if further information is required
- clarifies what the complainant feels would put things right
- interviews those involved, with an open mind
- keeps notes of any interviews.
- keeps the chair of governors informed without giving any details at this stage

Resolving Complaints

At each stage, the school keeps in mind ways the complaint can be resolved. It might be sufficient to acknowledge that the complaint is valid in whole or in part. It might also be appropriate to offer:

- 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 taken to make sure it will not happen again
- an undertaking to review school policies in light of the complaint.

The school encourages complainants to state what actions they feel might resolve the problem at any stage. ***Please remember: an admission that the school could have handled the situation better is not the same as an admission of negligence.***

The Awkward or Vexatious Complaints

A good complaints procedure limits the number of complaints that become protracted. But there will be occasions when a complainant becomes dissatisfied even though all stages of the procedure have been followed. If the complainant tries to re-open the same issue, again, the chair of governors can write to say that the procedure has been exhausted and the matter is now closed.

Timescales

The school will consider and resolve complaints as quickly and efficiently as possible and set realistic time limits for each action. However, where investigations are complex, new time limits can be set as long as school informs the complainant of the reason for the delay and give them new deadlines.

Stage 1 – Complaint Heard by a Staff Member

It is in everyone's interest to resolve complaints at the earliest possible stage. The experience of the first contact between the complainant and the school can be crucial in determining whether the complaint will escalate. Staff should be fully aware of the procedures and know what to do if and when they receive a complaint.

A complainant might feel they would have difficulty discussing a complaint with a particular member of staff. Be flexible and refer the complainant to another member of staff. If the complaint is about the headteacher, the complaint should be referred straight to the chair of governors.

If a staff member directly involved feels compromised and unable to deal with the matter, once again refer to another staff member. This does not have to be a more senior member of staff; the ability to consider a complaint objectively and impartially is more important.

If a complainant approaches a governor in the first instance, the complainant should be referred to an appropriate member of staff. Governors should not act on individual complaints outside the formal procedure or be involved in the early stages in case they need to sit on a panel at the later stage.

Stage 2 – Complaint Heard by the Headteacher

The headteacher will have shaped the way complaints are handled in a school and will have decided who the most appropriate person to deal with a complaint is. In a large school it may be the deputy head or a head of year. The headteacher should be kept informed of any investigation carried out and should be involved in the final decision.

If the complaint is by letter the headteacher should acknowledge the complaint within 3 school days. The acknowledgement should include a summary of the complaints procedure and a target date of 15 school days for providing a response. If this date cannot be met, the complainant should be contacted and given a reason for the delay and a revised target date.

The headteacher should meet with the complainant to discuss their concerns and find solutions. The complainant may bring a friend, family member or advocate to the meeting and Interpreting services should also be made available where necessary. The Head Teacher may find it useful to have another member of staff present to observe and record the meeting and promote staff safety. Care should be taken in these circumstances not to create an intimidating atmosphere for the complainant.

The Head Teacher should make whatever enquiries they s/he consider necessary to ascertain the facts and the legitimacy of decisions taken. This may include:

- Interviewing staff / pupils
- Reviewing minutes of meetings
- Reviewing school records

Pupils should be interviewed in the presence of another member of staff, or in the case of serious complaints (e.g. where the possibility of criminal investigation exists) in the presence of their parents. Again, care should be taken in these circumstances not to create an intimidating atmosphere.

It is important that the headteacher investigates complaints thoroughly and objectively. If s/he they feel unable to do this (e.g. if s/he has been directly involved in the decision making process that led to the complaint) s/he they should delegate responsibility for investigating the complaint to another member of the management team or the chair of governors. It is strongly advised that the headteacher (or designated person) should keep a record of interviews, telephone conversations and other documentation.

Once all the relevant facts have been established, the headteacher should provide a written response to the complainant. This should include a full explanation of decisions taken and the reasons for them. Where appropriate, it should include details of actions the school will take to resolve the complaint.

It may be useful at this point to offer the complainant a meeting to discuss the response and seek reconciliation. The complainant should be provided with details of how to contact the Governing Body if they are not satisfied with the response.

Stage 3 – Complaint Passed to Chair of Governors

The Chair of Governors decides whether to convene the Complaints Committee to look into the complaint or commission the Wakefield Diocesan Academies Trust (WDAT) to start an investigation.

If the complaint is about the headteacher then the Chair is advised to seek guidance from (WDAT) before proceeding.

Stage 4 - The Governors' Complaints Committee

If the Complaints Committee is activated this is the last school based stage of the process and should not be perceived as a "rubber stamping" exercise.

The Complaints Committee will comprise at least 3 people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint, one of whom must be independent of the management and running of the school.

The meeting will allow for:

- The complainant to explain their complaint and the headteacher to explain the school's response.
- Witnesses to be brought by the complainant or the headteacher.
- The headteacher and the complainant to ask questions of each other and any witnesses.
- The committee to ask questions of the complainant, headteacher and any witnesses.
- The complainant and the headteacher to summarise their position

Having considered all the evidence and questioned all parties, the Committee can:

- dismiss the complaint in whole or in part
- uphold the complaint in whole or in part
- decide on the appropriate action to resolve the complaint
- recommend changes or actions to school system and procedures to make sure that similar problems do not recur or
- request an investigation by an officer of the local authority and/or from the WDAT

A written response detailing the decisions, recommendations and the basis on which these have been made will be sent to the complainant within 15 school days.

The Complaints Committee will feedback to the Headteacher and governors may choose to revisit or review their policies.

The school will retain a copy of all correspondence and records of meetings.

Withdrawing a Complaint

Complaints may be withdrawn in writing at any time.

The headteacher and Chair of Governors will review the issue of concern and consider whether further investigation is required through other internal management systems.

The Complainant will be notified of the right to appeal to the Secretary of State for Education or the Local Government Ombudsman if they are unhappy with the way in which procedures have been carried out.

Advice from the LA

Sometimes a complainant contacts the LA in the first instance. We cannot investigate a complaint, we can only investigate how the school has handled the complaint. So when a parent rings up we advise them to ring school and speak with the Headteacher (if a small school) or a senior member of staff (Headteacher, Deputy Headteacher or Head of Year) in a large school.

Not acknowledging a complaint either by a phone call or a letter could exacerbate the problem. It is in the schools best interest to arrange a meeting with the complainant to discuss and resolve the complaint as soon as possible.