



**St. Mary's CE (Aided) Primary
School
General Complaints
Policy**

**A Christ-centred school with a child-centred
curriculum**

Introduction: The Principles

The Staged Approach:

The staged approach is designed to ensure that every effort is made to deal with complaints **informally at school level**, in partnership with parents. The formal stages should only be triggered in **exceptional** circumstances:

- Stages 1, 2 & 3 are **informal stages** which are dealt with at school level
- Stages 4, 5 and 6 are **formal stages** involving the governing body (Complaints Panel), the LA and Local Government Ombudsman

The model policy is designed to manage all complaints. Complaints vary in their nature and complexity. Therefore, the school will need to consider at which stage a complaint should be dealt with when it is initially raised and which member of staff is best placed to deal with it.

Our principle aim is to deal with complaints:

- Openly
- Fairly
- Promptly
- Without prejudice

Our procedures for dealing with complaints will:

- Be publicised on the school website
- Be simple to understand and use
- Be focused on outcomes
- Have established time limits for action
- Keep people informed at all stages
- Where necessary, respect people's desire for confidentiality
- Be carefully monitored and evaluated

St. Mary's Staged Approach to Managing General Complaints

At St. Mary's we have six stages to our Complaints Procedure. Stages 1,2 and 3 are informal. Stages 4,5 and 6 are formal.

Any person expressing continued dissatisfaction will be advised of the next stage in the procedure.

Stage One: Meet and / or speak to the relevant teacher

- ◆ Complainants are advised to speak to the teacher concerned so everyone has a clear picture of the situation from all points of view. Most problems can be resolved at this informal stage.
- ◆ The member of staff who is dealing with the complaint will ensure that the person is reassured that the matter will be investigated and is clear what action has been agreed. All staff will be aware of the need for confidentiality.
- ◆ If either the complainant or staff member feels the matter needs to be taken further, a senior member of staff will be contacted.
- ◆ Records of any actions are always kept in the child's school file. It is not always necessary to provide the complainant with a written record at this stage. The Head and Senior Teachers monitor these records.

Stage Two: Meet and / or speak to the Headteacher or Senior Member of Staff

- ◆ More serious concerns which remain unresolved at the end of Stage 1 will be referred to the Headteacher or a senior member of staff. They will then investigate the matter further. Any meetings that are held with the complainant in relation to the complaint will be arranged ASAP.
- ◆ A log of all contacts relating to the complaint will be kept in the pupils records.
- ◆ The Headteacher or senior member of staff should communicate the outcome to the complainant either verbally or in writing. The agreed actions will be put in writing.
- ◆ If, as a result of the investigation, issues arise relating to staff discipline or capability, **details should remain confidential to the Headteacher.** However, the complainant should be informed that the school has taken appropriate follow-up action.

Stage Three: Discussion with the Chair of Governors or a nominated governor

- ◆ The Headteacher will refer the matter to the Chair of Governors.
- ◆ The Chair may decide to refer the complaint to a nominated governor in case s/he is needed to sit on the formal Complaints Panel at Stage 4.
- ◆ The governor will explore the matter further. This may involve meeting with the complainant and / or member of staff. The outcome and agreed actions will be recorded. The complainant should be informed of the outcome ASAP.
- ◆ If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome, move to the formal stage of the complaints procedure.

Stage Four: Formal Complaint to Chair of Governors

- ◆ Governors should only proceed with the formal stage of the Complaint Procedure if they have received a complaint in writing addressed to the Chair of Governors and all previous stages have been exhausted. However, it is important that this does not disadvantage people who may experience difficulty with putting their complaint in writing.
- ◆ Acknowledgement of the complainant's written complaint should normally be sent by the Clerk to the Governing Body within 5 days.
- ◆ It is essential that this process is fair and objective. **To avoid a conflict of interest, it is vital that the full governing body does not hear the complaint at this stage.** Any governor who has been involved with the complaint at an earlier stage would be unable to give objective consideration to the issue.
- ◆ The Governing Body should convene a small panel of 3 or 5 governors who have not previously been involved in the complaint. This panel will meet within 15 school days of receiving the complaint. Governors will establish a Complaint Panel at the beginning of the year (much along the lines of the Pupil Discipline Committee) or set up a panel as and when needed.
- ◆ The Chair of the panel will notify the Headteacher and the complainant as to whether they will be invited to present their case in person to the panel. Alternatively, the panel may decide to consider written material only. Both

parties must be treated equally. If the Headteacher is invited to the meeting, so must the complainant.

- ◆ If the complaint relates to a staff disciplinary or capability matter about which the Headteacher has already taken action, the governors will focus on how the original complaint was managed to avoid prejudicing any ongoing disciplinary or capability procedures.
- ◆ The Headteacher and complainant should be informed of the Panel's decision ASAP but within 10 school days.

Stage Five: Refer to the Director of Education/ Director of Education for the Diocese.

- ◆ If the complainant is not satisfied with the procedures followed by the Governors' Complaint Panel, s/he may put their concerns in writing to the Director of Education / Director of Education for the Diocese.
- ◆ The Education Department or Diocese will follow up the complaint and a written response will usually be sent within 21 school days.

Stage Six: Refer to the Local Government Ombudsman or the Secretary of State

- ◆ Complainants who believe that their concerns have not been addressed and that maladministration by West Sussex County Council has caused them injustice can make a further complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman.
- ◆ Complainants who believe that West Sussex County Council has acted unreasonably in the exercise of its statutory powers may appeal to the Secretary of State for Education.

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