

Complaints Procedure Policy



LOVE LEARN ACHIEVE

St John Fisher Mission Statement

The school, in partnership with parents, carers and with the parish of St John Fisher, offers to each one of its children a Catholic education centred on Christ, which enables them to grow in God's love, learning to be the best they can be in accordance with Christian values.

Approved by: Mrs. K. Blom

Date: January 2023

Last reviewed on: January 2023

Next review due by: January 2025

St. John Fisher RC Primary School complaints procedure

Who can make a complaint?

This complaints procedure is mainly aimed at parents or carers of children who are registered at the school, but it is not limited to them.

Any member of the public may make a complaint to St. John Fisher RC Primary School about any provision of facilities or services that the school provides.

Children who attend St. John Fisher RC Primary School have their own complaints procedure drawn up using the Common Principles for a Child Friendly Complaints Process outlined by the Children's Commissioner.

Unless complaints are dealt with under separate statutory procedures (such as appeals relating to exclusions or admissions), the school will use this complaints procedure.

The 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 defined as *'an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action'*.

It is in everyone's interest that concerns and complaints are resolved at the earliest opportunity. Many issues can be resolved informally, without the need to use the formal stages of the complaints procedure. St. John Fisher RC Primary School takes concerns seriously and will make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.

If you have difficulty discussing a concern with a particular member of staff, the Head teacher will refer you to another staff member. Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels unable to deal with a concern, the head teacher will refer you to another staff member. The member of staff may be more senior but does not have to be. The ability to consider the concern objectively and impartially is more important.

We understand however, that there are occasions when people would like to raise their concerns formally. In this case, St. John Fisher RC Primary School will attempt to resolve the issue internally, through the stages outlined within this complaints procedure.

How to raise a concern or make a complaint

A concern or complaint can be made in person, in writing or by telephone. They may also be made by a third party acting on behalf of a complainant, as long as they have appropriate consent to do so.

Concerns should be raised with either the class teacher or head teacher. If the issue remains unresolved, the next step is to make a formal complaint.

Complainants should not approach individual governors to raise concerns or complaints. They have no power to act on an individual basis and it may also prevent them from considering complaints at stage 2 of the procedure.

Complaints against school staff (except the head teacher) should be made in the first instance, to Ms. J. Kenna (the head teacher) via the school office. Please mark them as 'private and confidential.'

Please use the template complaint form included at the end of this procedure. If you require help in completing the form, please contact the school office. You can also ask third party organisations such as Citizens Advice to help you.

In accordance with equality law, we will consider making reasonable adjustments if required, to enable complainants to access and complete this complaints procedure. For instance, providing information in alternative formats, assisting complainants in raising a formal complaint or holding meetings in accessible locations.

Complaints about the head teacher/chair of governors/governing body

Complaints that involve or are about the head teacher should be addressed to Mrs. C. Blom (the chair of governors), via the school office. Please mark them as 'private and confidential'.

Complaints about the chair of governors or member of the governing body must be made to the clerk of the governing body, via the school office. Please mark them as 'private and confidential'.

If the complaint is about the head teacher or a member of the governing body (including the Chair or Vice-Chair), a suitably skilled governor will be appointed to complete Stage 1. The school may consider the services of an independent investigator. At the conclusion of its investigation, the independent investigator will provide a formal written response.

If the complaint is jointly about the chair and vice chair, or the entire governing body, or the majority of the governing body, stage 1 will be considered by an independent investigator appointed by the governing body. At the conclusion of its investigation, the independent investigator will provide a formal written response.

Anonymous complaints

The school will not normally investigate anonymous complaints. However, the head teacher or chair of governors, if appropriate, will determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation.

Duplicate complaints

If, after closing a complaint at the end of the complaints procedure, we receive a duplicate complaint from a spouse, a partner, a grandparent or a child not attending this school, we will remind them that we have already considered the complaint and the local process is complete. Complainants will be advised to contact the DfE if they are dissatisfied with our handling of the complaint.

Complaint campaigns

If we receive what we consider to be a large volume of complaints, all based on the same subject and possibly from complainants not connected to the school, then we will treat these complaints as being part of a campaign and respond in one of the following two ways, depending upon the nature and scale of the complaint:

- send the same response to all complainants; or
- publish a single response on the school's website.

Timescales

Complainants must raise the complaint within three months of the incident, or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within three months of the last of these incidents. We will consider complaints made outside of this time frame if exceptional circumstances apply.

If for any reason the consideration of a complaint takes longer to complete, you will be informed of revised time limits and kept updated on progress.

Complaints received outside of term time

We will consider complaints made outside of term time to have been received on the first school day after the holiday period.

Evidence

We ask that any supporting evidence the complainant would like to be considered be included with the complaint form. In order to meet the timelines for the complaints process any evidence received more than 3 school days after receipt of the complaint may not be considered.

Evidence that is accepted after this time-frame may result in the complaint process being delayed, you will be informed of revised time limits and kept updated on progress.

Recording of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded will not be accepted as evidence.

Scope of this complaints procedure

This procedure covers all complaints about any provision of community facilities or services by St. John Fisher RC Primary School other than complaints that are dealt with under other statutory procedures, including those listed below.

Exceptions	Who to contact
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Admissions to schools• Statutory assessments of special educational needs• School re-organisation proposals	Concerns about admissions, statutory assessments of special educational needs or school reorganisation proposals should be raised with Merton Local Authority.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Matters likely to require a	Complaints about child protection matters

Child Protection Investigation	<p>are handled under our child protection and safeguarding policy and in accordance with relevant statutory guidance.</p> <p>If you have serious concerns, you may wish to contact the local authority designated officer (LADO) who has local responsibility for safeguarding (02085453179) or the Merton Children and Families Hub – (020 85454226/4227)</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Suspension and permanent exclusion of children from school* 	<p>Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions.</p> <p><i>*complaints about the application of the behaviour policy can be made through the school's complaints procedure. Please see school website for the behaviour policy.</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Whistleblowing 	<p>We have an internal whistleblowing procedure for all our employees, including temporary staff and contractors.</p> <p>The secretary of state for education is the prescribed person for matters relating to education for whistle-blowers in education who do not want to raise matters direct with their employer. Referrals can be made at www.education.gov.uk/contactus.</p> <p>Volunteer staff who have concerns about our school should complain through the school's complaints procedure. You may also be able to complain direct to the local authority or the DfE (see link above), depending on the substance of your complaint.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff grievances 	<p>Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the school's internal grievance procedures.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff conduct 	<p>Complaints about staff will be dealt with under the school's internal disciplinary procedures, if appropriate.</p> <p>Complainants will not be informed of any disciplinary action taken against a staff member as a result of a complaint. However, the complainant will be notified that the matter is being addressed.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complaints about services provided by other providers who may use school premises or facilities 	<p>Providers should have their own complaints procedure to deal with complaints about service. Please contact them direct.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National curriculum - content 	<p>Please contact the DfE at www.education.gov.uk/contactus</p>

If other bodies are investigating aspects of the complaint, for example the police, local authority (LA) safeguarding teams or tribunals, this may impact on our ability to adhere to the timescales within this procedure or result in the procedure being suspended until those public bodies have completed their investigations.

If a complainant commences legal action against St. John Fisher RC Primary School in relation to their complaint, we will consider whether to suspend the complaints procedure in relation to their complaint until those legal proceedings have concluded.

What to expect under this procedure

Your rights as a person making a complaint

In dealing with complaint we will ensure:

- Fair treatment
- Courtesy
- A timely response
- Accurate advice
- Respect for privacy – complaints will be treated as confidentially as possible allowing for the possibility of consultation with other appropriate parties about the complaint; and
- Clear reasons for decisions.

Your responsibilities as a person making a complaint

When making a complaint it is important that you:

- Raise issues in a timely manner
- Treat our staff with respect and courtesy
- Provide accurate and concise information in relation to the issues raised
- Use these procedures fully and engage with them at the appropriate levels

Resolving complaints

At each stage in the procedure, St. John Fisher RC Primary School wants to resolve the complaint. If appropriate, we will acknowledge that the complaint is upheld in whole or in part. In addition, we may offer one or more of the following:

- an explanation;
- an admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better;
- an assurance that we will try to ensure the event complained of will not recur;
- an explanation of the steps that have been or will be taken to help ensure that it will not happen again and an indication of the timescales within which any changes will be made;
- an undertaking to review school policies in light of the complaint;
- an apology.

Withdrawal of a complaint

If a complainant wants to withdraw their complaint, we will ask them to confirm this in writing.

Stage 1

Formal complaints must be made to the head teacher (unless they are about the head teacher), via the school office. This should be done in writing using the complaints form (see appendix). The head teacher will record the date the complaint is received and will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 5 school days. Within this response, the head teacher will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, ask what remains unresolved and what outcome the complainant would like to see. The head teacher can consider whether a face-to-face meeting is the most appropriate way of doing this.

Note: The head teacher may delegate the investigation to another member of the school's senior leadership team but not the decision to be taken.

During the investigation, the head teacher (or investigator) will:

- if necessary, interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish;
- keep a written record of any meetings/interviews in relation to their investigation.

At the conclusion of their investigation, the head teacher will provide a formal written response within 20 school days of the date of receipt of the complaint. If the head teacher is unable to meet this deadline, they will provide the complainant with an update and revised response date.

The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions St. John Fisher RC Primary School will take to resolve the complaint.

The head teacher will advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 1.

If Stage 1 is being conducted by a governor or an independent investigator the clerk will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 5 school days.

Stage 2

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome at stage 1 and wishes to take the matter further, they can escalate the complaint to stage 2 – a review by the governing body's complaints committee. This is the final stage of the complaints procedure.

A request to escalate to stage 2 must be made to the clerk, via the school office, within 10 school days of receipt of the stage 1 response.

The clerk will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 5 school days.

Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.

The complaints committee will consist of at least three governors with no prior involvement or knowledge of the complaint. If there are fewer than three governors from St. John Fisher RC Primary School available, the clerk will source any additional, independent governors through another local school or through their local authority's

governor services team, in order to make up the committee. Alternatively, an entirely independent committee may be convened to hear the complaint at stage 2.

The committee will decide whether to deal with the complaint by inviting parties to a meeting or through written representations, but in making its decision it will be sensitive to the complainant's needs.

If the complainant is invited to attend a meeting:

- They may bring someone along to provide support. This can be a relative or friend. Legal representation is not permitted. Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.
- At least 5 school days before the meeting, the clerk will confirm and notify the complainant of the date, time and venue of the meeting and ensure that the date is convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible.
- The committee will not review any new complaints at this stage or consider evidence unrelated to the initial complaint to be included. New complaints must be dealt with from stage 1 of the procedure.
- The meeting will be held in private. Electronic recordings of meetings or conversations are not normally permitted unless a complainant's own disability or special needs require it. Prior knowledge and consent of all parties attending must be sought before meetings or conversations take place. Consent will be recorded in any minutes taken.

The committee will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented.

The committee can:

- uphold the complaint in whole or in part;
- dismiss the complaint in whole or in part.

If the complaint is upheld in whole or in part, the committee will:

- decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint;
- where appropriate, recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future.

The chair of the committee will provide the complainant and St. John Fisher RC Primary School with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within 20 school days. If the deadline cannot be met the complainant will be provided with an updated and revised response date.

The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions St. John Fisher RC Primary School will take to resolve the complaint.

Next steps

If the complainant remains dissatisfied, believes the school did not handle their complaint in accordance with the published complaints procedure or they acted unlawfully or unreasonably in the exercise of their duties under education law, they

can contact the Department for Education after they have completed Stage 2.

The DfE will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by St. John Fisher RC Primary School. They will consider whether St. John Fisher RC Primary School has adhered to education legislation and any statutory policies connected with the complaint.

The complainant can refer their complaint to the DfE online at www.education.gov.uk/contactus, by telephone on 0370 000 2288 or by writing to:

Department for Education
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

Policy for managing serial and unreasonable complaints

St John Fisher RC Primary School is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, and to providing a high-quality service to those who complain. We will not normally limit the contact complainants have with our school.

However, we do not expect our staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour and will take action to protect staff from that behaviour, including that which is abusive, offensive or threatening.

St John Fisher RC Primary School defines unreasonable behaviour as that which hinders our consideration of complaints because of the frequency or nature of the complainant's contact with the school, such as, if the complainant:

- refuses to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcomes sought by raising the complaint, despite offers of assistance;
- refuses to cooperate with the complaints investigation process;
- refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of the complaints procedure;
- insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways that are incompatible with the complaints procedure or with good practice;
- introduces additional details which are deemed not be relevant to the original complaint they expect to be taken into account and commented on;
- raises large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions, and insists they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales;
- makes unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues, and seeks to have them replaced;
- changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds;
- repeatedly makes the same complaint (despite previous investigations or responses

concluding that the complaint is groundless or has been addressed);

- refuses to accept the findings of the investigation into that complaint where the school's complaint procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed including referral to the DfE;
- seeks an unrealistic outcome;
- makes excessive demands on school time by frequent, lengthy and complicated contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with;
- uses threats to intimidate;
- uses abusive, offensive or discriminatory language or violence;
- knowingly provides falsified information; and/or
- publishes unacceptable information on social media or other public forums.

Complainants should try to limit their communication with the school that relates to their complaint, while the complaint is being progressed. It is not helpful if repeated correspondence is sent (either by letter, phone, email or text), as it could delay the outcome being reached.

Whenever possible, the head teacher or chair of governors will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying an '*unreasonable*' marking.

If the behaviour continues, the head teacher will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and ask them to change it. For complainants who excessively contact St John Fisher RC Primary School causing a significant level of disruption, we may specify methods of communication and limit the number of contacts in a communication plan. This will be reviewed after six months.

In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, we will immediately inform the police and communicate our actions in writing. This may include barring an individual from St John Fisher RC Primary School.

Persistent correspondence

If complainants frequently contact the school, causing a significant level of disruption, but refuse to engage with the complaints procedure, St John Fisher RC Primary School can:

- restrict the complainant to a single point of contact via an email address; and/or
- limit the number of times the complainant can make contact.

This restriction will be limited to the complainant's capacity to complain. For all other issues the complainant can contact the school as normal.

Complaint form

Please complete and return to the school who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

Your name:
Pupil's name (if relevant):
Your relationship to the pupil (if relevant):
Address: Daytime telephone number: Evening telephone number: Email address:
Please give details of your complaint, including whether you have spoken to anybody at the school about it.

What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?

Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details.

Signature:

Date:

Official use

Date acknowledgement sent:

By who:

Complaint referred to:

Date: