



## School Complaints Policy

Policy drawn up by the Head Teacher, agreed by Staff and Governors

Version No	Date	Change/Review
V1.0	October 2004	Policy Adopted
V1.1	January 2008	Policy Reviewed
V1.2	Spring 2010	Policy Reviewed
V1.3	June 2013	Policy Reviewed
V1.4	January 2014	Policy Reviewed
V2.0	October 2015	Policy Revised
	November 2016	Reviewed
	November 2017	Policy updated and ratified
	November 2018	Reviewed
	November 2019	Review Due



## Introduction

St Francis Church of England Primary School takes seriously its accountability to parents; both staff and Governors endeavour to listen to what parents are saying. However, it is inevitable in any institution there may occasionally be a cause of dissatisfaction with some aspect of the service provided. So it is in a school. This policy sets out the procedures that the school follows in such cases.

Many worries and concerns can be handled without the need for formal procedures, so long as the concern is taken seriously and addressed at an early stage. We therefore encourage parents to raise any worries or concerns with the child's class teacher immediately. In many cases the issue can be resolved 'there and then'. However, formal procedures will be needed when initial attempts to resolve the issue are unsuccessful, if the person raising the concern remains dissatisfied and wishes to take the matter further.

We deal with all complaints in accordance with procedures laid down by the Local Authority (LA). If the school itself cannot resolve a complaint, those concerned can refer the matter to the LA.

Please note that **complaints must never be raised in public or via a social networking site such as Facebook or Twitter**, as this is not an effective channel for resolving issues and may cause damage to the school's reputation without allowing a fair right of response. Any complaints raised through such channels may be dealt with under the school's policy for persistent, harassing and abusive complaints, which can be found in the policy section of the school's website.

## Aims and objectives

Our school aims to be fair, open and honest when dealing with any complaint. We give careful consideration to all complaints, and deal with them as swiftly as possible. We aim to resolve any complaint through dialogue and mutual understanding. In all cases, we put the interests of the child above all else. We provide sufficient opportunity for any complaint to be fully discussed, then resolved.

## Organisations Letting facilities from St Francis School:

External organisations hiring/letting rooms from St Francis are responsible for having their own Complaints Policy in place. St Francis school is responsible for checking that this is the case before allowing lettings to proceed.

## The complaints process

Stage 1 If a parent is concerned about anything to do with the education that we are providing at our school, they should, in the first instance, **discuss the matter with their child's class teacher**. In our experience, most matters of concern can be resolved positively in this way. All teachers work very hard to ensure that each child is happy at school, and is making good progress; they naturally want to know if there is a problem, so that they can take action before it seriously affects the child's progress.

The class teacher will inform the Key Stage Leader of the nature of the concern and strategies discussed with the parent to resolve the concerns. If necessary, after speaking to the class teacher, the parent can also **discuss the matter with the Key Stage Leader**.

- Stage 2 Where parents feel that a situation has not been resolved through contact with the class teacher and Key Stage Leader, or that their concern is of a sufficiently serious nature, they should **make an appointment to discuss it with the Head Teacher**. The Head Teacher will consider any such complaint very seriously, in discussion with the parents, class teacher, and/or other members of staff involved. Most complaints are normally resolved by this stage.
- Stage 3 Only if an informal complaint fails to resolve the matter should a **formal complaint be made to the Governing Body**. This complaint must be made in writing, stating the nature of the complaint, and how the school has handled it so far. The complainant is also encouraged to state what actions s/he believe might resolve the issue. S/he should send this written complaint to the Chair of Governors and the Clerk to the Governors.
- The Governing Body will acknowledge the complaint within 5 working days<sup>1</sup>. It will then convene a complaints panel of 3 or 5 Governors. The complaints panel will **arrange a meeting to discuss the complaint**, and if appropriate will invite the complainant to attend the meeting, so that s/he can explain the complaint in more detail. The school gives the complainant at least three days' notice of the meeting and s/he has the right to be accompanied by a friend or family member at the meeting. Appendix A gives further information about the complaints panel process.
- After reviewing all the evidence, the Governors will consider their decision and inform the complainant about it, in writing, within 10 working days of the complaint panel hearing. The Governors do all they can at this stage to resolve the complaint to the parent's satisfaction.
- Stage 4 If the complaint is unresolved, the complainant may, within one month of receiving the decision of the complaints panel, request that the way in which the complaint has been handled is **considered by an appeals panel**. The request should be made in writing to the Chair of Governors and the Clerk to the Governors.
- The appeals panel will consist of 3 Governors who were not members of the complaints panel. It will consider all the evidence and determine whether the complaint has been appropriately considered. It may ask to speak with the complainant and/or other parties involved. It will inform the complainant of its decision, in writing, within 10 working days.
- Stage 5 If the complaint is still not resolved, a parent may **make representation to the LA**. A further meeting is chaired by an independent person, who considers all the evidence and makes a further judgement in an attempt to resolve the complaint. The LA does not have the power to instruct a Governing Body to reverse its decision but will want to satisfy itself that the Governing Body has conducted the investigation fairly.
- Further information about this process is available from the school or from the LA. Please note that the LA can only act when each stage of the school's complaints procedure has been followed.
- Stage 6 If any parent is still not content that the complaint has been dealt with properly, then s/he is entitled to **appeal to the Secretary of State for Education**. Complaints to the Secretary of State are handled by the government's Department for Education ([www.education.gov.uk](http://www.education.gov.uk)).

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<sup>1</sup> A working day is defined as Monday – Friday during the school term. If a formal complaint is received during the school holidays, governors will endeavour to consider it as quickly as possible, but this is likely to take longer than during term-time.

There will be occasions when, despite relevant stages of the procedures having been followed, the complainant remains dissatisfied. If the complainant tries to reopen the same issue, the Chair of Governors is able to inform them in writing that the procedure has been exhausted and that the matter is now closed.

### **Closure of complaints**

If no appeal has been made one month after the decision of the complaints panel has been communicated to the complainant, the complaint will be considered to be closed.

### **Complaints about the Head Teacher**

Should any parents have a complaint about the Head Teacher, they should write to the Chair of Governors and the Clerk to the Governors. The Chair of Governors will investigate and respond to the complainant in writing, addressing the concerns that have been raised.

If the complainant is unhappy with the response, or if the Chair of Governors is personally involved in the complaint, the matter will be treated as a formal complaint, as outlined in Stage 3 above.

### **Monitoring and review**

The Governors monitor the complaints procedure, in order to ensure that all complaints are handled properly. A record of formal complaints is kept in the school office and this is monitored by the Governing Body.

Governors take into account any local or national decisions that affect the complaints process, and make any modifications necessary to this policy. This policy is made available to all parents, so that they can be properly informed about the complaints process.

This policy will be reviewed every year, or more frequently if necessary.

## **Appendix A – Further information about the Complaints Panel**

### **Who will sit on the complaints panel?**

The complaints panel will consist of either 3 or 5 Governors. It is important that the appeal 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. When selecting Governors for the complaints panel, a representation of the various categories of Governor will be selected; all of whom must be sensitive to race, gender and religious affiliation.

### **What is the aim of the complaints panel hearing?**

The aim of the hearing will always be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant. However, it has to be recognised the complainant might not be satisfied with the outcome. 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.

### **Who will attend the hearing?**

The hearing will always be held in private. It will be attended by the Governors on the complaint panel. Depending on the nature of the complaint, it may also be attended by the Clerk to the Governors, the Head Teacher, the complainant and any witnesses. Witnesses are only required to attend for the part of the hearing in which they give their evidence. (Where the complaint is against the Head Teacher, their role at the hearing may be taken by another senior member of staff or the Chair of Governors.)

The complainant has the right to be accompanied by a friend or family member, should they choose to do so. Similarly, any staff required to attend the hearing, including the Head Teacher, may choose to be accompanied by a representative from their union.

If the complainant has difficulty discussing a complaint with a particular member of staff, or the member of staff directly involved feels too compromised to deal with a complaint, the Head Teacher may consider referring the complainant to another staff member.

### **Will the hearing take place in a formal setting?**

The hearing will be kept as informal as possible. An effective panel will acknowledge that many complainants feel nervous and inhibited in a formal setting. Parents often feel emotional when discussing an issue that affects their child. The panel chair will ensure that the proceedings are as welcoming as possible. The layout of the room will set the tone and care is needed to ensure the setting is informal and not adversarial.

Extra care needs to be taken when the complainant is a child. Careful consideration of the atmosphere and proceedings will ensure that the child does not feel intimidated. The panel needs to be aware of the views of the child and give them equal consideration to those of adults. Where the child's parent is the complainant, it would be helpful to give the parent the opportunity to say which parts of the hearing, if any, the child needs to attend.

### **What will happen at the hearing?**

- After introductions, the complainant is invited to explain their complaint followed by their witnesses.
- The Head Teacher may question both the complainant & the witnesses after each has spoken.
- The Head Teacher is then invited to explain the school's actions and be followed by the school's witnesses.
- The complainant may question both the Head Teacher and the witnesses after each has spoken.
- The Complaints Panel may ask questions at any point.
- The complainant is then invited to sum up their complaint.
- The Head teacher is then invited to sum up the school's actions and response to the complaint.
- Both parties leave together while the panel decides on the issues.

- The Chair of the Complaints Panel explains that both parties will hear from the panel within 10 working days of the hearing.

In some cases, it may be appropriate for the Complaints Panel to meet with only the complainant (and a friend or family member if required) at the hearing to fully understand their concerns. In such instances, the panel will speak to staff and witnesses separately, as part of their investigation.

### **What decisions can the complaints panel take?**

The panel can:

- Dismiss the complaint in whole or in part;
- Uphold the complaint in whole or in part;
- Decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint;
- Recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not recur.

### **Roles and Responsibilities**

The Clerk to the Governors will:

- Act as the main point of contact for the complainant;
- 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;
- Ensure that the complainant is aware of their right to be accompanied by a friend or family member at the hearing, and that staff are aware of their right to union representation;
- Meet and welcome the parties as they arrive at the hearing;
- Record the proceedings;
- Notify all parties of the panel's decision.

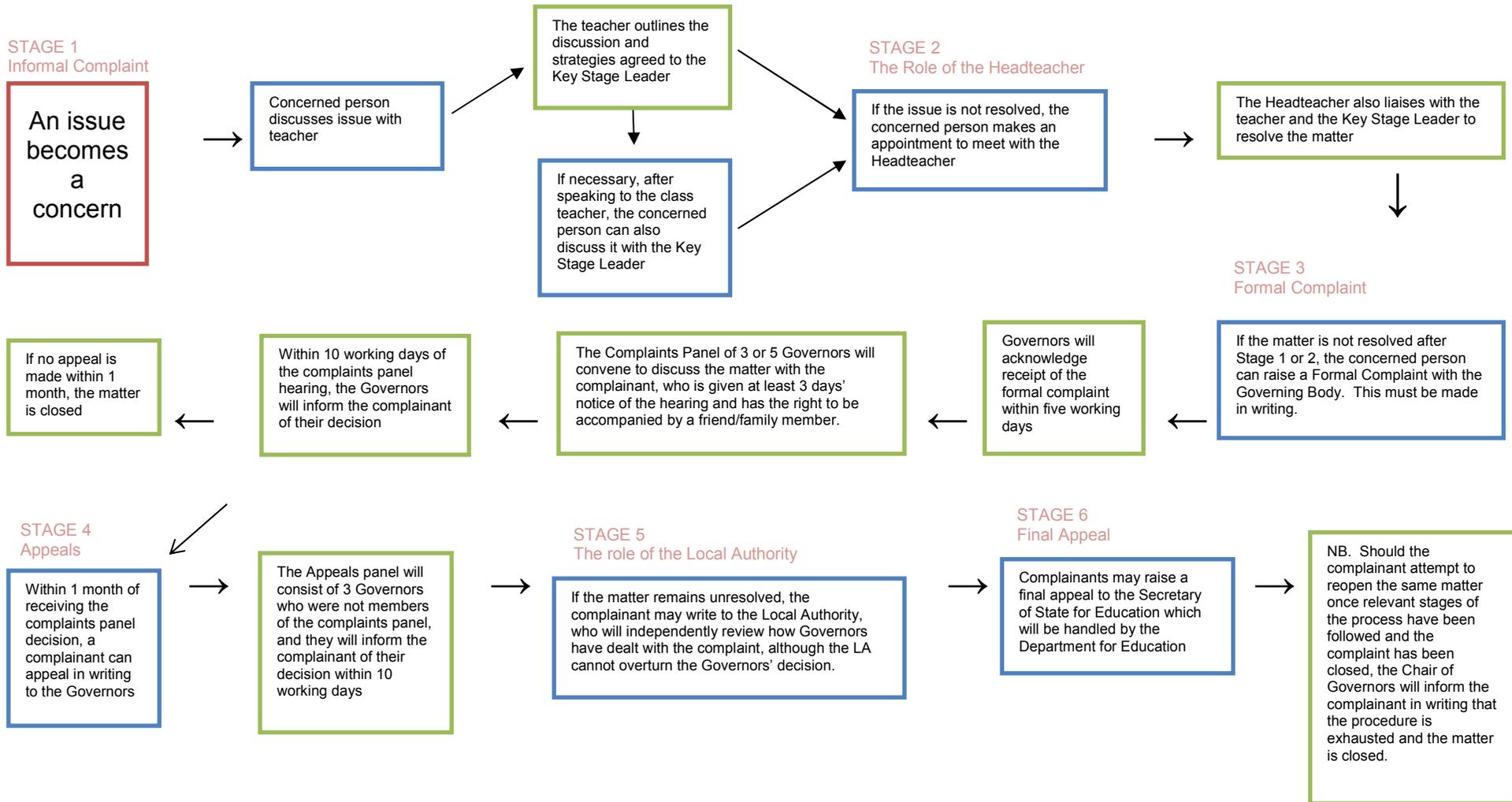
The Chair of the Complaints Panel will ensure that:

- The remit of the panel is explained to the parties and each party has the opportunity of putting their case without undue interruption;
- The issues are addressed and key findings of fact are made;
- Parents and others who may not be used to speaking at such a hearing are put at ease;
- The hearing is conducted in an informal manner with each party treating the other with respect and courtesy;
- No member of the panel has a vested interest in the outcome of the proceedings or any involvement in an earlier stage of the procedure;
- Each side is given the opportunity to state their case and ask questions;
- Written material is seen by all parties. Where possible, if a new issue arises all parties will be given the opportunity to consider and comment on it.

# Flow Chart outlining St Francis Primary School Complaints Procedure

NB. A concerned person/complainant can be a parent, carer, or child

Parental action  
 School/Governor action



Any complaint about the Headteacher should be raised in writing to the Chair of Governors and to the Clerk to the Governors in the first instance. Governors will respond in writing. If the concerned person is still unhappy the issue will be treated as a formal complaint (see Stage 3 onwards).

**Key Stage Leaders**

Foundation/EYFS

Liz Thring

KS1

Clare Dancer

KS2

Hester Millsop

### Annex 3 - Complaints Form

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

<b>Your name:</b>
<b>Pupil's name:</b>
<b>Your relationship to the pupil:</b>
<b>Address:</b>  <b>Postcode:</b> <b>Day time telephone number:</b> <b>Evening telephone number:</b>
<b>Please give details of your complaint.</b>
<b>What action, if any, have you already taken to try and resolve your complaint. (Who did you speak to and what was the response)?</b>
<b>What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?</b>
<b>Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details.</b>
<b>Signature:</b> <b>Date:</b>

**Date acknowledgement sent:**

**By who:**

**Complaint referred to:**

**Date:**