

St Paul's Catholic Primary School
School Complaints Procedure and Policy

Information for Parents: Procedure for dealing with concerns and complaints about your child's education

The staff and governors at St. Paul's Catholic Primary School are committed to providing a high quality education for your child in a secure and supportive environment. Whilst all concerns strive to achieve their best for the welfare of the pupils at the school, it is appreciated that there may be occasions when you have concerns about your child's education or about particular incidents which have occurred at school. If such a situation arises, we would ask you to follow the procedure outlined below.

General Principles:

- This procedure is intended to allow you to raise a concern or complaint relating to the school, or the services that it provides.
- An anonymous concern or complaint will not be investigated under this procedure, unless there are exceptional circumstances.
- To enable a proper investigation, concerns or complaints should be brought to the attention of the school as soon as possible. In general, any matter raised more than 3 months after the event, being complained of, will not be considered.

General Procedure for Concerns and Complaint

The procedure is presented as a series of stages, in a question and answer format. **It is important that you follow through the various stages in the order in which they are given.**

Raising a concern or complaint

I am concerned about some aspects of my child's school life. Who should I speak to first?

In the first instance you should always address your concerns to the members of staff who has direct responsibility for your child's welfare. At St. Paul's Catholic Primary School this is your child's class teacher. This may be by letter, by telephone or in person by appointment, requested via the school office. It is always best to make contact at an early stage so that any problems can be dealt with before they become major issues, and parents and school can work together to find a satisfactory solution to the problem. Many concerns can be resolved by simple clarification or the provision of information and it is anticipated that most complaints will be resolved by this informal stage.

I've spoken to the class teacher but the situation hasn't improved. What should I do next?

If you are not satisfied with the response you have received from the class teacher, you need to make an appointment to see the headteacher, who has overall responsibility for the day-to-day management of the school. You can contact the headteacher for an appointment either by telephone or in writing. You may choose to put the complaint in writing and pass it to the head teacher, who will be responsible for ensuring that it is investigated appropriately. You should include details which might assist the investigation, such as names of potential witnesses, dates and times of events, and copies of relevant documents. It is very important that you include a clear statement of the actions that you would like the school to take to resolve your concern. Without this, it is much more difficult to proceed. He/she will listen to your concerns, investigate the matter, and then report back to you. Do bear in mind that the headteacher will have many other responsibilities to attend to, and you may have to wait a few days before receiving a response. Obviously, if the matter is urgent, it will be attended to as soon as possible. If the complaint is about the head teacher, your complaint should be passed to the chair of the governing body.

I've been in to see the headteacher, but I'm not satisfied with the response I've received. Is there anyone else I can talk to about this problem?

It is possible that your complaint will be resolved through a meeting with the head teacher (or chair). If you feel that your approach to the headteacher has not resolved the issue as far as you are concerned, the next person you can discuss matters with is the Chair of Governors of the school. If you are not sure who this is, you can obtain the name and telephone number of the Chair either directly from the school or by contacting Governors and Management Support at Tameside Council (Tel: 0161 342 3206). At this stage of the procedure, you will be asked to put your concerns in writing if you have not already done so. The Chair of Governors will not interfere with the headteacher's day to day management of the school, but will investigate whether your problem has been dealt with in an appropriate manner and report back to you as soon as possible.

I've spoken to the Chair of Governors, but I'm still not happy. Is there anything more I can do?

You are now reaching the stage where your original concern is turning into a complaint about the way matters have been dealt with by the school. If you wish to pursue this complaint, you have the opportunity of a formal hearing before a Complaints Panel of the Governing Body. Neither the headteacher nor the Chair of Governors will be on this panel, which will normally consist of three governors appointed by the Governing Body as a whole. There are guidelines available about how such a hearing will be conducted, and what you can expect to happen as a result.

The Governing Body Complaints Panel have not upheld my complaint. Is there anyone else I can refer the matter to?

The Local Government Ombudsman investigates complaints about "maladministration" i.e. cases where the recognised complaints procedure has not been properly used. However the Ombudsman cannot investigate complaints about internal school matters and is not empowered to overturn the decision of a Governing Body Complaints Panel which has correctly followed procedures. If the Ombudsman decides to investigate your complaint, you could wait up to 6 months to hear the results of the investigation. A complaint form can be obtained from your local library or Citizen's Advice Bureau.

If you believe a governing body or LA is acting unreasonably or is failing to carry out its statutory duties properly a complaint may be made to the Secretary of State for Education. If you feel this to be necessary you should set out fully the concerns and reasons why the complaint is being submitted, enclosing all previous correspondence relevant to the complaint. The complaint should be mailed to the Department.

Reference to the Local Government Ombudsman or the Secretary of State will only occur under very extreme circumstances.

The vast majority of concerns and complaints will be dealt with by the staff and governors of the school. Please remember that they, like yourself, only want to achieve the best they can for the children in their care.

Other Complaints Procedures

In addition to this general complaints procedure, there are a number of other statutory procedures which relate to specific aspects of the education system. These may need to be followed if you have concerns about the following:

- (a) *The school curriculum and related matters.*
- (b) *Admission of your child to school.*
- (c) *Exclusion of your child from school.*
- (d) *The assessment of your child's special educational needs.*

If you require more information about any of these procedures, you should contact either the headteacher of your child's school or Education Services at Tameside Council.

Most concerns that parents have on a day-to-day basis do not necessarily fit into one of these categories and the general procedure outlined above should therefore be followed. In any case, the general procedure can still be used to deal with concerns which fall within the categories (a)-(d) until it becomes clear the recourse to the statutory procedure becomes necessary.

Unreasonably Persistent, Harassing or Abusive Complainants

The head teacher and governing body are fully committed to the improvement of our school. We welcome feedback from parents/carers and will always try to resolve any concerns as quickly as possible. There is a procedure for parents to use if they wish to make a formal complaint. Sometimes, however, parents or carers pursuing complaints or other issues treat staff and others in a way that is unacceptable. Whilst we recognise that some complaints may relate to serious and distressing incidents, we will not accept threatening or harassing behaviour towards any members of the school community.

What do we mean by ‘an unreasonably persistent complainant?’

An unreasonably persistent complainant may be anyone who engages in unreasonable behaviour when making a complaint. This will include persons who pursue complaints in an unreasonable manner.

Unreasonable behaviour may include:

Actions which are

- out of proportion to the nature of the complaint, or
- persistent – even when the complaints procedure has been exhausted, or
- personally harassing, or
- unjustifiably repetitious

An insistence on

- pursuing unjustified complaints and/or
- unrealistic outcomes to justified complaints
- pursuing justifiable complaints in an unreasonable manner (eg using abusive or threatening language)
- making complaints in public or via a social networking site such as Facebook
- refusing to attend appointments to discuss the complaint.

What is ‘harassment’?

We regard harassment as the unreasonable pursuit of issues or complaints, particularly 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 disproportionate adverse effect on the school community.

What does the school expect of any person wishing to raise a concern?

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.

Schools' responses to unreasonably persistent complaints or harassment

This policy is intended to be used in conjunction with the school's complaints procedure. Taken together, these documents set out how we will always seek to work with parents, carers and others with a legitimate complaint to resolve a difficulty. However, 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 fall under the terms of the Unreasonably Persistent Complaints/ Harassment;
- 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.

Physical or verbal aggression

The governing body will not tolerate any form of physical or verbal aggression against members of the school community. If there is evidence of any such aggression the school may:

- ban the individual from entering the school site, with immediate effect;
- request an Anti-Social Behaviour Order (ASBO);
- prosecute under Anti-Harassment legislation.
- call the police to remove the individual from the premises, under powers provided by the Education Act 1996.

Legitimate new complaints will always be considered, even if the person making them is (or has been) subject to the Unreasonably Persistent Complaints/ Harassment Policy. The school nevertheless reserves the right not to respond to communications from individuals subject to the policy.