

St Mark's RC Primary School

PROCEDURE FOR HANDLING COMPLAINTS ABOUT THE SCHOOL

SUMMARY

If you become concerned in any way about your child's education, it is important that you tell us about this. As a first step you should discuss your concerns with your child's teacher. If you are still concerned you should arrange to meet the Head Teacher. As a staff we will do all we can to resolve your concerns and to ensure you are happy with your child's education.

If, after discussions at school, parents are still unhappy, they will need to put their complaint in writing to the Chair of Governors – Mrs Monica Lowes.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

The school's priority is to serve the needs of pupils and parents. We try to serve as efficiently and as courteously as possible but things can go wrong. We welcome complaints and comments as an opportunity to improve the quality of the services we offer.

The following general principles will apply:

- The desirability of settling differences informally
- The need for more formal mechanisms for dealing fairly and effectively with complaints which have proved impossible to settle informally
- Ensuring that parents, staff and governors are informed of the procedures.

All parties dealing with complaints should seek to deal with each stage within 15 school days of receiving notification of the complaint or of the continuing dissatisfaction of the complainant.

DEFINITIONS

Definitions are provided in Appendix 1.

Special procedures are available for complaints regarding the curriculum of a school, collective worship and for considering complaints about the way in which pupils' special needs are met.

Wellbeing, Care and Learning (Local Authority directorate dealing with schools) has a complaints policy and procedures in respect of its services. Details are available from the Civic Centre.

COMPLAINTS ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Complaints about school issues should be raised, in the first instance, with school staff.

Who can complain?

Anyone can complain if they receive a service, seek a service or are affected by the school.

How a complaint can be made?

Complaints may be made in person, by telephone or made in writing (letter or email). A person with a complaint will normally seek to contact the member of staff responsible for the relevant issue. All staff will seek to help a complainant even where the issue is not that individual's area of responsibility.

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INFORMAL COMPLAINT

An informal complaint is an initial approach by an individual to the school expressing dissatisfaction with some aspect of the service, its action or inaction. Informal complaints, however made, are complaints which are resolved quickly and simply, usually at the point of service delivery, and do not involve detailed or lengthy investigation.

A person with a complaint will normally seek to contact the member of staff responsible for the relevant issue.

Should the complaint not be resolved the complainant will be referred to the Head teacher or the Deputy Head teacher. The Head or Deputy will seek to deal with the issue informally.

Should an initial informal discussion not resolve the situation, and the complainant indicates their continuing dissatisfaction, then the Head teacher will convene an interview to review the issue in detail.

Anyone making an informal complaint will be given information regarding follow up procedures in the event that they are dissatisfied with the outcome of their initial complaint and wish to take the matter further.

FORMAL COMPLAINT

A complaint becomes formal when the user remains dissatisfied after making an informal complaint or, alternatively, when, from the outset, and the complaint cannot be dealt with simply and quickly and requires investigation. In this case, the complainant should contact, in writing, the Chair of the Governing Body who will decide how the complaint is to be progressed.

When a complaint becomes formal, care will be taken to:

- Clarify the complaint
- Clarify the outcome sought
- Check whether the complainant needs support of any kind (for example, if they have poor sight or hearing, or a language difficulty) to explain the investigation procedure.

Once a complaint has become formal:

- The progress of the complaint will be monitored by the Head teacher;
- A full written response will be made within 15 working days or, where this is not possible, a reply should be sent indicating – progress to date and an estimate of time to make a full response.
- The complainant will be advised how to proceed if not satisfied.

A complaint of serious maladministration should be progressed immediately as a formal complaint. The Chair of the Governing Body should be the first person to approach where the matter could involve disciplinary or legal action against the Head Teacher.

The papers relating to the complaint will be passed to the Chair of Governors who will decide how the complaint is to be progressed.

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The Chair will ensure:

- The complaint is quickly referred to the relevant committee (or to the Head if the complaints procedure at that level has not been exhausted);
- The complaint is not reported to the whole governing body until it is resolved, and then not in detail;
- All parties to the complaint are given a fair hearing;
- The decision of the committee is given in writing to the complainant;
- The complainant is told of any right of appeal if the decision is given against him or her.

EXTERNAL REVIEW

If the complainant remains unhappy after the matter has been considered by the Governing Body, then the complainant may be advised to contact a senior manager in Wellbeing, Care and Learning at the Civic Centre. Complainants may also contact the Department for Education if they remain dissatisfied.

REMEDY

Where a complaint is found to be justified a remedy should be provided. A remedy needs to be appropriate to the complaint. In virtually all cases the remedy will be an apology. In some cases the remedy will be the provision of a service desired by the complainant. In other cases, a change of procedure to prevent future difficulties for the complainant, or for customers in general, may be the appropriate remedy.

REVIEW

At regular intervals the Head teacher will provide a brief report to the Governing Body, which will detail:

- The number of complaints;
- The subjects concerned;
- The time taken to resolve complaints;
- The assessment of complainant satisfaction
- Changes brought about as a result of reviewing complaints.

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APPENDIX 1 DEFINITIONS COMPLAINTS

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, action or lack of action by the school or their staff affecting an individual or group.

A complaint is not:

- A request for a service;
- A request for information or explanation of school policy or practice;
- A matter for which there is a right of appeal within the LA or to an independent body or a legal remedy.

It should be noted that even where an appeal procedure is in place a complaint could still arise regarding the way that procedure is operated.

INFORMAL COMPLAINTS

An informal complaint is one which can be resolved locally and quickly, which does not require an in-depth investigation, and which generally does not require to be put in writing.

FORMAL COMPLAINTS

A formal complaint is one which cannot be immediately resolved to parents' / carers' satisfaction, and, therefore, requires an investigation and which is generally put in writing.

ANONYMOUS COMPLAINTS

The school does not wish to receive anonymous complaints and may not be able to undertake to act on information received in this way.

CURRICULUM/COLLECTIVE WORSHIP – SPECIAL PROCEDURES

Complaints about the curriculum of a school, collective worship or other related matters are dealt with by a special procedure in accordance with Section 23 of the Education Reform Act 1988. Special procedures are available for considering complaints about the way in which pupils' special needs are met.

A copy of the procedures will be made available to anyone wishing to make such a complaint. The Local Authority (LA) can provide a copy of the procedures in languages other than English.

LA: NO POWER TO DIRECT A SCHOOL

Under the Local Management of Schools arrangements, introduced by the Education Reform Act 1988, the LA has no power to direct a school in relation to a complaint from a parent or pupil, unless there is a statutory basis for doing so. However, it may act as arbiter and advise a school where a complaint has not been resolved by the staff or governors. Any parent who is unsure of the procedures, or who feels that their complaint has not been considered properly by the school, may contact officers of Wellbeing, Care and Learning for further advice.