



Christ Church CE VC Primary School

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## 1. Aims

Our school aims to meet its statutory obligations when responding to complaints from parents of pupils at the school, and others.

When responding to complaints, we aim to:

- Encourage resolution of the problems by informal means wherever possible
- Be impartial and non-adversarial
- Facilitate a full and fair investigation by an independent person or panel, where necessary
- Address all the points at issue and provide an effective and prompt response
- Respect complainants' desire for confidentiality
- Treat complainants with respect
- Ensure swift handling of complaints with established time limits for actions
- Keep complainants informed of the progress of the complaints process
- Consider how the complaint can feed into school improvement evaluation processes

To support this, we will ensure we publicise the existence of this policy and make it available on the school website.

## 2. Legislation and guidance

This document meets the requirements of section 29 of the [Education Act 2002](#), which states that schools must have and make available a procedure to deal with all complaints relating to their school and to any community facilities or services that the school provides.

It is also based on [guidance for schools on complaints procedures](#) from the Department for Education (DfE).

In addition, it addresses duties set out in the [Early Years Foundation Stage statutory framework](#) with regards to dealing with complaints about the school's fulfilment of Early Years Foundation Stage requirements.

## 3. Definitions and scope

The DfE guidance explains the difference between a concern and a complaint.

A **concern** is defined as "an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought".

The school will resolve concerns through day-to-day communication as far as possible.

A **complaint** is defined as "an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action".

The school intends to resolve complaints informally where possible, at the earliest possible stage.

There may be occasions when complainants would like to raise their concerns formally. This policy outlines the procedure relating to handling such complaints.

This policy does not cover complaints procedures relating to:

- Admissions
- Statutory assessments of special educational needs (SEN)
- Safeguarding matters
- Exclusion
- Whistle-blowing
- Staff grievances
- Staff discipline

Please see our separate policies for procedures relating to these types of complaint.

Arrangements for handling complaints from parents of children with SEN about the school's support are within the scope of this policy. Such complaints should first be made to the class teacher or the special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO); they will then be referred to this complaints policy. Our Special Educational Needs and Disability Information Report includes information about the rights of parents of pupils with disabilities who believe that our school has discriminated against their child.

Complaints about services provided by other providers who use school premises or facilities should be directed to the provider concerned.

## 4. Principles for investigation

When investigating a complaint, we will try to clarify:

- What has happened
- Who was involved
- What the complainant feels would put things right

We also intend to address complaints as quickly as possible. To achieve this, realistic and reasonable time limits will be set for each action within each stage.

Where further investigations are necessary, new time limits will be set, and the complainant will be sent details of the new deadline with an explanation for the delay.

The school expects that complaints will be made as soon as possible after an incident arises and no later than 3 months afterwards. We will consider exceptions to this time frame in circumstances where there were valid reasons for not making a complaint at that time and the complaint can still be investigated in a fair manner for all involved.

### Complaints about our fulfilment of early years requirements

We will investigate all written complaints relating to the school's fulfilment of the Early Years Foundation Stage requirements, and notify the complainant of the outcome within 28 days of receiving the complaint. The school will keep a record of the complaint (see section 9) and make this available to Ofsted on request.

Parents and carers can notify Ofsted if they believe that the school is not meeting Early Years Foundation Stage requirements, by calling 0300 123 4234 or 0300 123 4666, or by emailing [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk). An online contact form is also available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted#org-contacts>.

We will notify parents and carers if we become aware that the school is to be inspected by Ofsted. We will also supply a copy of the inspection report to parents and carers of children attending the setting on a regular basis.

## 5. Stages of complaint (not complaints against the head teacher or a governor)

### Stage 1: informal

The school will take informal concerns seriously and make every effort to resolve the matter quickly. It may be the case that the provision or clarification of information will resolve the issue.

The complainant should raise the complaint as soon as possible with the relevant member of staff or the head teacher as appropriate, either in person or by letter, telephone or email. If the complainant is unclear who to contact or how to contact them, they should contact the school office.

The school will acknowledge informal complaints within 3 working days, and investigate and provide a response within 5 working days.

The informal stage will involve a meeting between the complainant and the relevant member of staff and / or the Headteacher or the Deputy Headteacher, as appropriate.

Where the first approach is made to a governor, the next step would be to refer the complainant to the appropriate person and advise them about procedure. Governors should not act unilaterally on an individual complaint outside the formal procedure or be involved in the early stages, in case they need to sit on a panel at a later stage.

If the complaint is not resolved informally, the complainant may consider making a formal complaint.

## **Stage 2: Making a formal complaint**

### **Inform the Headteacher in writing**

The complainant should fill in a Complaints Form (Appendix 1) providing details such as relevant dates, times, and the names of witnesses of events, alongside copies of any relevant documents. The complainant should also state what they feel would resolve the complaint.

The Headteacher (or designated member of the senior leadership team) will call a meeting to clarify concerns, and seek a resolution. The complainant may be accompanied to this meeting, and should inform the school of the identity of their companion in advance.

In certain circumstances, the school may need to refuse a request for a particular individual to attend any such meeting – for example, if there is a conflict of interest. If this is the case, the school will notify the complainant as soon as they are aware, so that the complainant has the opportunity to arrange alternative accompaniment.

The Headteacher (or other person appointed by the Headteacher for this purpose) will then conduct their own investigation. The written conclusion of this investigation will be sent to the complainant within 10 working days.

## **Stage 3: Making a formal complaint to the Chair of Governors**

### **Inform the chair of governors in writing**

If the complainant wishes to proceed to the next stage of the procedure, they should inform the Chair of Governors in writing within 5 working days.

This letter should set out the details of the complaint including evidence as set out above. The complainant should also specify what they feel would resolve the complaint, and how they feel the previous stage of the procedure has not addressed their complaint sufficiently.

The Chair of Governors or a nominated governor if the Chair has been involved at any previous stage in the process will convene a Governing Body Complaints Appeal panel within 10 working days of receiving the complaint.

The review panel consists of members of the governing board. These individuals will have access to the existing record of the complaint's progress (see section 9).

The complainant must have reasonable notice of the date of the review panel; however, the review panel reserves the right to convene at their convenience rather than that of the complainant. Where further investigations are necessary, new time limits can be set and the complainant will be sent details of the new deadline and an explanation for the delay.

At the review panel meeting, the complainant and representatives from the school, as appropriate, will be present. Each will have an opportunity to set out written or oral submissions collected prior to the meeting.

The complainant must be allowed to attend the panel hearing and be accompanied by a suitable companion if they wish. The complainant should inform the school of the identity of their companion in advance.

In certain circumstances, the school may need to refuse a request for a particular individual to attend any such meeting – for example, if there is a conflict of interest. If this is the case, the school will notify the complainant as soon as they are aware, so that the complainant has the opportunity to arrange alternative accompaniment.

At the meeting, each individual will have opportunity to give statements and present their evidence, and witnesses will be called as appropriate to present their evidence.

The panel, the complainant and the school representative will be given the chance to ask and reply to questions. Once the complainant and school representatives have completed presenting their cases, they will be asked to leave and evidence will then be considered.

The panel must then put together its findings and recommendations from the case. The panel will also provide a copy of the findings and recommendations to the complainant and, where relevant, the subject of the complaint, and make a copy of the findings and recommendations available for inspection by the Headteacher.

The written conclusion of this investigation will be sent to the complainant within 5 working days.

This concludes the investigation within the school. If the complainant is still not satisfied there is an opportunity for independent review.

#### **Stage 4: Complaining to an independent reviewer**

An independent reviewer is appointed by or on behalf of the proprietor. This person must not, at any time, have been a governor of the school, or a member of staff or supply staff at the school, and must not have been the parent of a registered or former registered pupil at the school. They must also not have been directly involved in any matter detailed in the complaint.

The independent reviewer will convene a review meeting with the complainant and representatives from the school, as appropriate. Each will have an opportunity to set out written or oral submissions prior to the meeting.

At the meeting, each individual will have the opportunity to give statements and present their evidence, and witnesses will be called as appropriate to present their evidence.

The independent reviewer, the complainant and the school representative(s) will be given the chance to ask and reply to questions.

The complainant, proprietor and Headteacher, and where relevant, the subject of the complaint, will be given a copy of the findings and recommendations made by the independent person.

The school will inform those involved of the decision in writing within 5 working days.

The complainant may also write a letter of complaint to the School Complaints Unit (SCU).

## **6. Complaints against the Headteacher or a Governor**

**Complaints made against the Headteacher should be directed to the Chair of Governors.**

Stage 1: Raising a Concern informally:

The Chair of Governors will first try to resolve the matter informally, for example by arranging a meeting between the Headteacher and complainant in the presence of a nominated governor to discuss the matter in depth with a view to resolving it.

Stage 2: Formal complaint

The complainant should write a letter to the Chair of Governors and provide details such as relevant dates, times, and the names of witnesses of events, alongside copies of any relevant documents. The complainant should also state what they feel would resolve the complaint. The Chair of Governors will convene a Complaints Appeal Panel within 10 working days. The outcome of the meeting will be recorded and sent to the complainant and the Headteacher.

Stage 3: Complaint to external review body

An independent reviewer is appointed by or on behalf of the proprietor. This person must not, at any time, have been a governor of the school, or a member of staff or supply staff at the school, and must not have been the parent of a registered or former registered pupil at the school. They must also not have been directly involved in any matter detailed in the complaint.

The independent reviewer will convene a review meeting with the complainant and representatives from the school, as appropriate. Each will have an opportunity to set out written or oral submissions prior to the meeting.

At the meeting, each individual will have the opportunity to give statements and present their evidence, and witnesses will be called as appropriate to present their evidence.

The independent reviewer, the complainant and the school representative(s) will be given the chance to ask and reply to questions.

The complainant, proprietor and Headteacher, and where relevant, the subject of the complaint, will be given a copy of the findings and recommendations made by the independent person.

The school will inform those involved of the decision in writing within 5 working days.

The complainant may also write a letter of complaint to the School Complaints Unit (SCU).

**Where a complaint is against the Chair of Governors or any member of the governing board, it should be made in writing to the clerk to the governing board in the first instance.**

Stage 1: Raising a Concern informally:

The Clerk of Governors will seek advice from the Board of Governors. If appropriate a meeting between the complainant and the Chair of Governors or the governor concerned will be arranged. Where appropriate, the complaint can be resolved at this initial meeting.

Stage 2: Formal complaint

The complainant should write a letter to the Clerk of Governors and supply evidence to substantiate their complaint. The complainant should also state what they feel would resolve the complaint. A Complaints Appeal Panel will be convened or, if appropriate, an External Reviewer appointed within 10 working days. The outcome of the meeting will be recorded and sent to the complainant and the head teacher.

Stage 3: Complaint to external review body

The complainant should write a letter to the Local Authority. The complainant and governors will be given a copy of the findings and recommendations made.

## **7. Referring complaints on completion of the school's procedure**

If the complainant is unsatisfied with the outcome of the school's complaints procedure, they can refer their complaint to the School Complaints Unit (SCU), which investigates complaints relating to maintained schools on behalf of the secretary of state.

The SCU will not re-investigate the matter of the complaint. It will look at whether the school's complaints policy and any other relevant statutory policies that the school holds were adhered to. The SCU also looks at whether the school's statutory policies adhere to education legislation. It may direct the school to re-investigate the complaint where it is clear the school has acted unlawfully or unreasonably.

For more information or to refer a complaint, see the following webpage:

<https://www.gov.uk/complain-about-school>

## **8. Persistent complaints**

Where a complainant tries to re-open the issue with the school after the complaints procedure has been fully exhausted and the school has done everything it reasonably can in response to the complaint, the chair of governors (or other appropriate person in the case of a complaint about the chair) will inform the complainant that the matter is closed.

If the complainant subsequently contacts the school again about the same issue, the school can choose not to respond. The normal circumstance in which we will not respond is if:

- The school has taken every reasonable step to address the complainant's needs, *and*
- The complainant has been given a clear statement of the school's position and their options (if any), *and*
- The complainant is contacting the school repeatedly but making substantially the same points each time

However, this list is not intended to be exhaustive.

The school will be most likely to choose not to respond if:

- We have reason to believe the individual is contacting the school with the intention of causing disruption or inconvenience, *and/or*
- The individual's letters/emails/telephone calls are often or always abusive or aggressive, *and/or*
- The individual makes insulting personal comments about, or threats towards, school staff

Unreasonable behaviour which is abusive, offensive or threatening may constitute an unreasonably persistent complaint.

Once the school has decided that it is appropriate to stop responding, the complainant will be informed in writing, either by letter or email.

The school will ensure when making this decision that complainants making any new complaint are heard, and that the school acts reasonably.

### **Unreasonably persistent complaints**

If a complainant persists to the point where the school considers it to constitute harassment, legal advice will be sought.

## **9. Record-keeping**

The school will record the progress of all complaints, including information about actions taken at all stages, the stage at which the complaint was resolved, and the final outcome. The records will also include copies of letters and emails, and notes relating to meetings and phone calls.

This material will be treated as confidential and held centrally, and will be viewed only by those involved in investigating the complaint or on the review panel.

This is except where the secretary of state (or someone acting on their behalf) or the complainant requests access to records of a complaint through a freedom of information (FOI) request or under the terms of the Data Protection Act, or where the material must be made available during a school inspection.

Records of complaints will be kept for 5 years after closing, reviewed for further retention in the case of contentious disputes, and then destroyed.

**The details of the complaint, including the names of individuals involved, will not be shared with the whole governing board in case a review panel needs to be organised at a later point.**

Where the governing board is aware of the substance of the complaint before the review panel stage, the school will (where reasonably practicable) arrange for an independent panel to hear the complaint.

Complainants also have the right to request an independent panel if they believe there is likely to be bias in the proceedings. The decision to approve this request is made by the governing board, who will not unreasonably withhold consent.

## **10. Learning lessons**

The Chair / Governing Body will review any underlying issues raised by complaints with the Headteacher, where appropriate, and respecting confidentiality, to determine whether there are any improvements that the school can make to its procedures or practice to help prevent similar events in the future.

## **11. Monitoring arrangements**

The Governing Body will monitor the effectiveness of the complaints procedure in ensuring that complaints are handled properly. The Governing Body will track the number and nature of complaints, and review underlying issues as stated in section 10.

The complaints records are logged and managed by the Headteacher.

This policy will be reviewed by the appropriate governor and the Headteacher every 2 years.

At each review, the policy will be approved by the Governing Body.

## **12. Links with other policies**

Policies dealing with other forms of complaints include:

- Child protection and safeguarding policy and procedures
- Admissions policy
- Exclusions policy
- Staff grievance procedures
- Staff disciplinary procedures
- SEND policy and information report