St. Patrick's Catholic Primary School

COMPLAINTS POLICY 2026-27

Mission Statement

Our mission in Saint Patrick's is to develop each child's talents and potential in a caring Catholic community inspired by the teachings of JesusChrist.

INTRODUCTION

We endeavour to provide the best education possible for all of its pupils in an open and transparent environment. We welcome any feedback that we receive from parents, pupils and third parties, and we accept that not all of this will be positive. Where concerns are raised the school intends for these to be dealt with.

Fairly - Openly - Promptly - Without Prejudice

In order to do so, the Governing Body has approved the following procedure, in line with Local Authority guidelines, which explains what you should do if you have any concerns about the school. All members of staff will be familiar with the procedure and will be able to assist you.

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 possible stage. Many issues can be resolved informally, without the need to use the formal stages of the complaint's procedure. Saint Patrick's Catholic 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, we will respect your views. In these cases, Jennie Courtney or Charlotte Minty, will refer you to another staff member. Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels unable to deal with a concern, Jennie Courtney or Charlotte Minty 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, Jennie Courtney will attempt to resolve the issue internally, through the stages outlined within this complaint's procedure.

RAISING CONCERNS

Parents may raise legitimate queries or concerns about their children's education. Most parents do not regard such enquiries as "complaints" in the formal sense. Nevertheless, these concerns will be addressed promptly and thoroughly. The majority of concerns can be dealt with satisfactorily by communicating with the class teacher or member of staff at the beginning or end of the school day, by making an appointment or by telephone conversation.

Where you have an ongoing concern about any aspect of the school or your child's education or wellbeing, raise this

with Mrs. Jennie Courtney (Head Teacher) via the telephone, email or in person. Ideally, they will be able to address your concerns on the spot, or can arrange a meeting with you to discuss the issue.

If matters raised as concerns are not resolved to the satisfaction of all parties, the dissatisfied party may then wish to appeal through the formal complaint's procedure.

All concerns will be dealt with confidentially, although the staff member may need to take notes if they feel that the matter may need to be taken further or it may arise again in the future. Any such notes will be kept in accordance with the principles of the Data Protection Act 2018. However, such notes would be able to be used to as evidence if further investigation was required, or if the concern became a formal complaint.

Concerns should be raised with either the class teacher or headteacher. 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 a formal level.

Complaints against school staff (except the headteacher) should be made in the first instance to Jennie Courtney via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Complaints that involve or are about the headteacher should be addressed to Charlotte Gilbert (the Chair of Governors), via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Complaints about the Chair of Governors, any individual governor or the whole governing body should be addressed to Sharon Gilbert (the Clerk to the Governing Body) via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

For ease of use, a template complaint form is 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 like the 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.

Time scales

You 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.
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.

Scope of this Complaints Procedure

This procedure covers all complaints about any provision of community facilities or services by Saint Patrick's Catholic Primary School, other than complaints that are dealt with under other statutory procedures, including those listed below.

Exceptions	Who to contact
• Admissions to schools • Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs • School re-organisation	Concerns about admissions, statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs, or school re-organisation proposals should be raised with Wiltshire LEA.

proposals	
• Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation	Complaints about child protection matters are handled under our child protection and safeguarding policy and in accordance with relevant statutory guidance. If you have serious concerns, you may wish to contact the local authority designated officer (LADO) who has local responsibility for safeguarding or IDF- Integrated Front Door (previously known as MASH).
• Exclusion of children from school*	Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at: www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions. **complaints about the application of the behaviour policy can be made through the school's complaints procedure.*
• Whistleblowing	We have an internal whistleblowing procedure for all our employees, including temporary staff and contractors. 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. 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 LA or the Department for Education (see link above), depending on the substance of your complaint.
• Staff grievances	Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the school's internal grievance procedures.
• Staff conduct	Complaints about staff will be dealt with under the school's internal disciplinary procedures, if appropriate. 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.
• Complaints about services provided by other providers who may use school premises or facilities	Providers should have their own complaints procedure to deal with complaints about service. Please contact them direct.

• National Curriculum - content	Please contact the Department for Education at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus

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 Saint Patrick's Catholic 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.

SAFEGUARDING
Wherever a complaint indicates that a child's wellbeing or safety is at risk, the school is under a duty to report this immediately to the Local Authority IFD- Integrated Front Door (previously known as MASH) team. Any action taken will be in accordance with the school's Child Protection Policy available from the school's main office or on the school website.

SOCIAL MEDIA
In order for complaints to be resolved as quickly and fairly as possible, we request the complainants do not discuss complaints publicly via social media such as Facebook and Twitter. Complaints will be dealt with confidentially for those involved, and **we expect complainants to observe confidentiality also**. There are 3 Stages to our Complaints Procedure.
Clerk to the Governors, Anna Evans-Wylie, is the school's Formal Complaints Co-ordinator.

1. **STAGES OF THE COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE**

Stage 1 – INFORMAL COMPLAINT
Where as a result of raising an initial concern the complainant still feels that the issue has not been addressed, or where the outcome has been that the concern needs further investigation than can be resolved briefly, they may progress by making an Informal Complaint to the Headteacher or Deputy Head.
If the complainant feels that the concern has still not been satisfactorily addressed, they can move on to the next stage.

Stage 2 – FORMAL COMPLAINT: Reviewed by the Headteacher

1. The complainant may submit a formal complaint form to the Headteacher. (APPENDIX 1)

2. The Headteacher will acknowledge receipt of the complaint within 5 working days (excluding those that fall in the school holidays), and state that the complaint will be investigated promptly. A log of all correspondence in relation to the complaint will be kept in accordance with the data protection principles.

3. The Headteacher will consider all relevant evidence; this may include but is not limited to:
♣ a statement from the complainant,
♣ where relevant a statement from an individual who is the subject of the complaint
♣ any previous correspondence regarding the complaint
♣ any supporting documents in either case
♣ interview with anyone related to the complaint.

4. The Headteacher may decide to have a meeting with the complainant (and where relevant, the subject of the complaint) if they feel that it would be appropriate for the investigation.

5.After considering the available evidence, the Headteacher can:
♣ Uphold the complaint and direct that certain action be taken to resolve it
♣ Reject the complaint and provide the complainant with details of the stage three appeals process
♣ Uphold the complaint in part: in other words, the Headteacher may find one aspect of the complaint to be valid,

but not another aspect. They may direct for certain action to be taken to resolve the aspect that they find in favour of the complainant.

6.The Headteacher must inform the complainant of their decision in writing within 20 working days (excluding those that fall in the school holidays) of having issued written acknowledgement of the receipt of the complaint (APPENDIX 2). They must explain clearly why they have come to the decision that they made. They must detail any agreed actions as a result of the complaint. Finally, they must provide the complainant with details of how to progress the complaint to Stage 3: Appeal Process, if they are not satisfied, providing them with the contact details of the Clerk to the Governors.

Stage 3 – APPEAL PROCESS: Reviewed by a panel of the Governing Body

If the complainant wishes to appeal a decision by the Headteacher at Stage 2 of the procedure, or they are not satisfied with the action that the Headteacher took in relation to the complaint, the complainant is able to appeal this decision.

They must write to the Clerk to the Governors as soon as possible after receiving notice of the Headteacher's decision, briefly outlining the content of the complaint and requesting that a complaints appeal panel is convened.

The Clerk to the Governors will fulfil the role of organising the time and date of the appeal hearing, inviting all the attendees, collating all the relevant documentation and distributing this 5 working days in advance of the meeting, recording the proceedings in the form of minutes, and circulating these and the outcome of the meeting.

On receipt of the complainant's written request for an appeal, the following steps will be followed:

1. The Clerk to the Governors will write to the complainant within 5 working days (not including the school holidays) to confirm receipt of the appeal request and detail further action to be taken.

2. The Clerk to the Governors will convene a panel of three school governors. All three panel members will have no prior knowledge of the content of the complaint prior to the appeal.

3. The appeal hearing will take place within 20 working days (excluding those which fall in the school holidays) of receipt of the date of the confirmation from the clerk to the governors to the complainant, confirming the appeal.

4.In addition to the panel, the following parties will be invited, where applicable:
♣ the complainant
♣ the Headteacher who dealt with the complaint at Stage 2
♣ where the complaint regards a member of staff, the staff member who is the subject of the complaint.

The complainant is also able to bring a companion with them to the hearing if they wish. Where the subject of the complaint is a member of staff, that staff member is also able to bring a companion / union representative with them.

The companion will be a friend or a colleague. **Neither party is able to bring legal representation with them.** If after the hearing any party feels that legal action is necessary, please see the contact details at the end of the procedure.

5. If the attendance of any pupils is required at the hearing, parental permission will be sought if they are under the age of 18. Extra care will be taken to consider the vulnerability of children where they are present at any part of a complaints hearing.

6. Where the complaint is about a Governor, the complainant may request that the appeal is heard by an entirely independent panel. It is at the discretion of the Governing Body who will notify the Clerk to the Governors of their decision. Where an entirely independent panel is required, timescales may be affected while the school source

appropriate individuals for the review.

7. The panel can make the following decisions:

♣ 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.

8. All parties who attended the meeting will be informed in writing of the outcome of the appeal within 5 working days (excluding those which fall in the school holidays).

This is the final stage at which the school will consider the complaint.

The complainant must request an appeal panel within 4 weeks of receiving the Headteacher's decision or it will not be considered, except for in exceptional circumstances.

The school will not investigate anonymous complaints or allegations. If the complainant feels that the Governing Body acted 'unreasonably' in the handling of the complaint, they can communicate with the Department for Education after the complaint's procedure has been exhausted. Please note that' unreasonable' is used in a legal sense and means acting in a way that no reasonable school or authority would act in the same circumstances. https://www.gov.uk/complain-about-school.

UNREASONABLE (VEXATIOUS) COMPLAINTS

Where a complainant raises an issue that has already been dealt with via the school's complaints procedure, and that procedure has been exhausted, the school will not reinvestigate the complaint except in exceptional circumstances, for example where new evidence has come to light. If a complainant persists in raising the same issue, the Headteacher will write to them explaining that the matter has been dealt with fully in line with the school complaints procedure, and therefore the case is now closed. The complainant will be provided with the contact details of the Department for Education if they wish to take the matter further.

Unreasonable complaints include the following scenarios:

♣ The complainant refuses to co-operate with the school's relevant procedures.
♣ The complainant changes the basis of the complaint as the complaint progresses.
♣ The complainant seeks an unrealistic outcome
♣ Excessive demands are made on the time of staff and school governors and it is clearly of malicious intent.
♣ The complainant acts in a way that is abusive or offensive.

Contact details for St Patrick's Catholic Primary School:

Lacock Road, Corsham, Wiltshire, SN13 9HS
Tel: 01249 713125
Fax: 01249 701670
E-mail: admin@st-patricks.wilts.sch.uk

Mrs Jennie Courtney – Head of Teacher jennie.courtney@st-patricks.wilts.sch.uk

Anna Evans- Wylie – Complaints Co-ordinator / Clerk to Governors clerk@stpatricks.wilts.sch.uk

Next Steps

If the complainant 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 Department for Education will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by Saint Patrick's Catholic Primary School. They will consider whether Saint Patrick's Catholic Primary School has adhered to education legislation and any statutory policies connected with the complaint.

The complainant can refer their complaint to the Department for Education 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.

2. **POLICY REVIEW**
   The Governing Body will undertake an annual review of the school's Complaints Policy and remedy any deficiencies or weaknesses found without delay.
   Date of next review: September 2027

Appendix 1: Complaint Form

Please complete and return to Jennie Courtney (Head of School) or Anna Evans-Wylie (Clerk to the Governors) 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: **Postcode:** **Day time telephone number:** **Evening telephone number:**
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:

APPENDIX 2

OUTCOME OF FORMAL COMPLAINT INVESTIGATION

SAINT PATRICK'S CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL	
Name of Complainant	
Name of pupil, year group	
Summary of Complaint	
Outcome of investigation	The school will - * Uphold the complaint and direct that certain action be taken to resolve it * Reject the complaint and provide the complainant with details of the stage three appeals process * Uphold the complaint in part: in other words, the Headteacher may find one aspect of the complaint to be valid, but not another aspect. They may direct for certain action to be taken to resolve the aspect that they find in favour of the complainant.
Reason for Decision	
Agreed actions as a result of the complaint (if appropriate)	
If you are not satisfied and wish to appeal	
You must write to the **Complaints Co-ordinator** (admin@st-patricks.wilts.sch.uk) as soon as possible after receiving notice of the Headteacher's decision, briefly outlining the content of the complaint and requesting that a complaints appeal panel is convened.	

Signed: **Headteacher**

Date:

Roles and Responsibilities

Complainant

The complainant will receive a more effective response to the complaint if they:

- explain the complaint in full as early as possible
- co-operate with the school in seeking a solution to the complaint
- respond promptly to requests for information or meetings or in agreeing the details of the complaint
- ask for assistance as needed
- treat all those involved in the complaint with respect
- refrain from publicising the details of their complaint on social media and respect confidentiality.

Investigator

The investigator's role is to establish the facts relevant to the complaint by:

- providing a comprehensive, open, transparent and fair consideration of the complaint through:
  - sensitive and thorough interviewing of the complainant to establish what has happened and who has been involved
  - interviewing staff and children/young people and other people relevant to the complaint
  - consideration of records and other relevant information
  - analysing information
- liaising with the complainant and the complaints co-ordinator as appropriate to clarify what the complainant feels would put things right.

The investigator should:

- conduct interviews with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning
- keep notes of interviews or arrange for an independent note taker to record minutes of the meeting
- ensure that any papers produced during the investigation are kept securely pending any appeal
- be mindful of the timescales to respond
- prepare a comprehensive report for the headteacher or complaints committee that sets out the facts, identifies solutions and recommends courses of action to resolve problems.

The headteacher or complaints committee will then determine whether to uphold or dismiss the complaint and communicate that decision to the complainant, providing the appropriate escalation details.

Complaints Co-ordinator (this could be the headteacher / designated complaints governor or other staff member providing administrative support)

The complaints co-ordinator should:

- ensure that the complainant is fully updated at each stage of the procedure
- liaise with staff members, headteacher, Chair of Governors, Clerk and LAs (if appropriate) to ensure the smooth running of the complaints procedure
- be aware of issues regarding:
  - sharing third party information
  - additional support. This may be needed by complainants when making a complaint including interpretation support or where the complainant is a child or young person
- keep records.

Clerk to the Governing Body

The Clerk is the contact point for the complainant and the committee and should:

- ensure that all people involved in the complaint procedure are aware of their legal rights and duties, including any under legislation relating to school complaints, education law, the Equality Act 2010, the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act (DPA) 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)
- set the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that the dates are convenient to all parties (if they are invited to attend) and that the venue and proceedings are accessible
- collate any written material relevant to the complaint (for example; stage 1 paperwork, school and complainant submissions) and send it to the parties in advance of the meeting within an agreed timescale
- record the proceedings
- circulate the minutes of the meeting
- notify all parties of the committee's decision.

Committee Chair

The committee's chair, who is nominated in advance of the complaint meeting, should ensure that:

- both parties are asked (via the Clerk) to provide any additional information relating to the complaint by a specified date in advance of the meeting
- the meeting is conducted in an informal manner, is not adversarial, and that, if all parties are invited to attend, everyone is

treated with respect and courtesy

- complainants who may not be used to speaking at such a meeting are put at ease. This is particularly important if the complainant is a child/young person
- the remit of the committee is explained to the complainant
- written material is seen by everyone in attendance, provided it does not breach confidentiality or any individual's rights to privacy under the DPA 2018 or GDPR.

If a new issue arises it would be useful to give everyone the opportunity to consider and comment upon it; this may require a short adjournment of the meeting

- both the complainant and the school are given the opportunity to make their case and seek clarity, either through written submissions ahead of the meeting or verbally in the meeting itself
- the issues are addressed
- key findings of fact are made
- the committee is open-minded and acts independently
- no member of the committee has an external interest in the outcome of the proceedings or any involvement in an earlier stage of the procedure
- the meeting is minuted
- they liaise with the Clerk (and complaints co-ordinator, if the school has one).

Committee Member

Committee members should be aware that:

- the meeting must be independent and impartial, and should be seen to be so

No governor may sit on the committee if they have had a prior involvement in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it.

- the aim of the meeting should be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant

We recognise that the complainant might not be satisfied with the outcome if the meeting does not find in their favour. It may only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations.

- many complainants will feel nervous and inhibited in a formal setting

Parents/carers often feel emotional when discussing an issue that affects their child.

- extra care needs to be taken when the complainant is a child/young person and present during all or part of the meeting

Careful consideration of the atmosphere and proceedings should ensure that the child/young person does not feel intimidated.
The committee should respect the views of the child/young person and give them equal consideration to those of adults.
If the child/young person is the complainant, the committee should ask in advance if any support is needed to help them present their complaint. Where the child/young person's parent is the complainant, the committee should give the parent the opportunity to say which parts of the meeting, if any, the child/young person needs to attend.
However, the parent should be advised that agreement might not always be possible if the parent wishes the child/young person to attend a part of the meeting that the committee considers is not in the child/young person's best interests.

- the welfare of the child/young person is paramount.