

ST STEPHEN'S INFANT SCHOOL



PROCEDURES

Complaints Policy & Procedure

REQUIRED REVIEW FREQUENCY		ANNUALLY
NEXT REVIEW DATE		APRIL 2026
VERSION	APPROVED BY	DATE OF APPROVAL
6.0	FGB	21 May 2025
• KEY CHANGES: No Changes		

Signed

Date

Chair of the Full Governing Body

1. Introduction - Concerns and Complaints Appendix

3 is a summary of the complaints procedure.

St Stephen's Infant School aims to work in partnership with parents or carers in the best interests of the children and the school. In support of this objective the Complaints Policy & Procedure has been put in place to provide a framework for resolving any problems or concerns that parents / carers wish to raise with the school.

Concerns might include such matters as a child's work or progress, relations with staff, relations with other pupils, including bullying, or a child's personal welfare.

The complaints procedure is not intended to replace the normal informal discussions which can take place between parents/carers, staff and the Headteacher on problems and concerns as they arise. Most issues can be resolved through this informal dialogue and this will be encouraged wherever possible. If it is not possible to produce a resolution by informal discussion then the concern will be dealt with as a complaint. In general, any matter raised more than three months after the Complainant first became aware of the issue, will not be considered.

In processing complaints, the following principles will apply:

- The procedure to be followed will be accessible and publicised
- The procedure to be followed will be simple to understand and use
- The procedure will ensure all the points at issue are addressed and provide appropriate redress where necessary
- The complaint will be handled with care and sensitivity
- The complaint will be given careful consideration and will be dealt with, fully, fairly and honestly
- All stages of the complaints procedure will be investigatory rather than adversarial
- Where appropriate, confidentiality will be respected at all times
- Sufficient opportunity will be provided for any complaint to be fully discussed
- The objective will be to resolve the complaint through open dialogue and mutual understanding
- Any investigation will be thorough, fair and impartial
- Effective responses to any complaint will be within published timescales
- The Complainant will be given feedback and kept informed of progress
- The Complainant will be kept informed of the options to appeal during the process.
- If a complainant wants to withdraw their complaint at any point, we will ask them to confirm this in writing.

Reference to the Complaints Policy & Procedure will be included on the school web site so parents / carers are made aware it. The wording is contained in Appendix 3 of this document.

2. Stage 1 (Informal) – Class teacher

The first point of contact for the parent/carer regarding problems/concerns must always be the class teacher. Appointments to see the class teacher are available both before and after school and may be made via the school office. Teachers require time immediately before school to prepare for the day, and may have involvement with clubs or staff meetings after school, so may not always be available at short notice.

When meeting with the class teacher to deal with concerns, patience will be required as he/she may need time to perform an investigation or determine the effectiveness of any corrective measures which have been put in place.

This informal process may require several meetings to reach a conclusion satisfactory to all parties. During the sessions the desired actions for the school, parent/carer, timescales, and the need for further meetings will be discussed.

If a parent/carer feels that a concern has not been solved through discussions with the class teacher, and that it is of a sufficiently serious nature, then it must be referred and processed as a complaint as defined in this document.

3. Referring Complaints

The majority of complaints against the school will fall within the remit of the Headteacher or Governing Body to consider. However, there are categories of complaint for which there are separate statutory procedures.

Complaints relating to any of following these categories will be handled by the appropriate body. •

Admission to the school

- Statutory Assessment of special educational needs
- Matters likely to require a child protection investigation
- School re-organisation proposals
- Exclusion of pupils from the school
- Whistleblowing
- Staff grievances and disciplinary procedures
- Complaints about services provided by others
- National curriculum content

Complaints about individual governors, including the chair, should be sent to the clerk of the governing body via the school office.

If any governor is contacted directly by a parent/carer, regarding a complaint, then that governor will refer them to this complaints procedure. Individual governors cannot act unilaterally by investigating a complaint or making any prior judgement about it. A governor can only refer the parent/carer to the class teacher, the Headteacher or the Chair of Governors as appropriate.

If the complaint is one that may result in disciplinary or legal action against the Headteacher, or the complaint is regarding the Headteacher or a Governor, then it must be referred directly to the Chair of Governors as described later in this document in section 3.2.

If at any stage of a complaint it becomes apparent that the parent/carer is seeking some sort of financial compensation then any investigation will be halted whilst advice is sought from the Local Authority.

If an anonymous complaint is received, or the parent/carer requests anonymity, then, in the interests of fairness and of dealing effectively with the complaint, the complainant will be urged to identify themselves. However, if the complaint is of a sufficiently serious nature then the Headteacher or Chair of Governors will decide whether anonymity is appropriate.

A parent/carer must not attempt to bypass steps in this complaints procedure. Escalation to the Local Authority or Secretary of State levels before the formal school procedures have been exhausted will result in the complainant being referred back to the school's procedure by those bodies.

3.1 Stage 2 (Informal) - School Level

3.1.1. Complaint handled by the Headteacher

If a parent/carer feels that a concern has not been resolved through discussion with the class teacher, or that it is of a sufficiently serious nature, then an appointment must be made to discuss and clarify the elements of the complaint, with the Headteacher. The parent/carer must indicate that the appointment is regarding a complaint. The school aims to resolve all concerns before they become a Stage 2 complaint. If a complaint is received and there is no evidence that Stage 1 steps have been followed, except in exceptional circumstances, the complainant will be guided back to the appropriate point in the process. Any unreasonable refusal to attempt an informal resolution may result in the procedure being terminated forthwith.

If the Headteacher cannot resolve the matter at the initial complaint meeting then the school will carry out an investigation of the complaint. It will be the Headteacher's responsibility to decide who will conduct the investigation. This will be the Headteacher or a member of the Senior Leadership Team, especially if there is the likelihood of a personnel issue emerging from the investigation.

The Headteacher will ensure that the complaint is documented. A suggested format for documentation can be found at Appendix 1. The documented information will include details of the complaint, desired outcome, how it was dealt with, by whom and the outcome. In the event of the complaint proceeding to the formal stage, the document will be made available to the parties involved.

The investigation will be completed within **10 school days** and the complainant will be informed in writing of the outcome **within a further 5 school days**. If the complainant is not satisfied with the manner in which the process has been followed, or they feel the outcome is unjust, the Complainant may make a formal complaint to the Governing Body, via the Chair of Governors, **within 10 school days** of receiving notification of the outcome. An example Complaints Form can be found at Appendix 2 of this document.

3.1.2. Complaint about the Headteacher or a Governor

The above procedures will also apply if the complaint is about the Headteacher or a Governor, but the informal investigation will be undertaken by the Chair of Governors unless he/she decides it is necessary to move straight to Stage 3.

3.2 Stage 3 (Formal) – Governing Body

3.2.1.– The Complaints Panel

On receipt of a complaint, the Chair of Governors will send a letter of acknowledgement to the complainant. The letter will be sent **within 10 school days**.

Before any formal hearing takes place, the Chair of Governors should offer to meet the complainant in order to clarify the complaint, ensure it is correctly documented and to establish the resolution they are seeking.

The Chair of Governors will then appoint a Complaints Panel of two or three governors to hear the complaint and make a decision about it on behalf of the Governing Body. The governors appointed to the panel must have had no previous involvement in the complaint. The Chair of Governors will also nominate one of the panel members to act as its chair.

If members of the Governing Body are aware of the substance of a complaint before the final stage has been completed, such that a panel cannot be fully appointed, the Chair of Governors should approach the Governing Body of a local school to ask for help, or the Governor Services team at the Local Authority.

The primary function of the Complaints' Panel is to decide on the merits or otherwise of the complaint. However, the panel will also play an important role in attempting to resolve the complaint. The panel will reach a decision on whether the complaint is upheld or rejected and may call for certain action to be taken by the school or the parents/carers. The panel may also recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not recur or suggest changes to the procedure for managing complaints.

3.2.2.– Preparation for the Complaint Hearing

Each individual involved in the complaint will be sent a letter outlining the complaint and inviting written evidence. The letters will identify the governors involved in the Complaints Panel, the nominated Chair and request that he/she is sent the written evidence within a reasonable and specified time scale. The written evidence will be circulated to all parties involved prior to any hearing.

The Chair of the Complaints Panel will convene the complaint hearing as soon as is practically possible after the receipt of the written evidence. The Chair of the Complaints panel will liaise with all parties involved to agree a time mutually acceptable to all. At this point the complaint will be closed and no panel held if the complainant fails to respond to messages **within 10 school days**.

3.2.3.– The Complaint Hearing

The aim of the hearing, which needs to be held in private, will always be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant. It will seek to establish the facts and make recommendations where appropriate. The Complaints Panel will meet with all parties to the complaint, formally and separately. The Complainant may be accompanied by a friend, if they wish, to assist in a supportive capacity, but this person may not speak for them.

The panel will acknowledge that many complainants feel nervous and inhibited in a formal setting and that 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 and that the setting is appropriate and not adversarial.

Particular care will be needed if pupils are to be involved in the investigation. Parental permission and accompaniment of an adult will be required if pupils are to be interviewed as part of the panel investigation.

The Chair of the 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 parties involved are informed that they will hear from the panel within **15 school days** of the hearing
- the issues are addressed
- key findings of fact are made
- parents/carers and others who may not be used to speaking at such a hearing are put at ease
- the hearing is conducted with each party treating others with respect and courtesy
- the panel is open minded and acting independently

- 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
- written material is seen by all parties.

The process for a complaint hearing will be as follows:

- after introductions, the complainant is invited to explain their complaint, and be followed by their witnesses (if there are any).
- the complainant will then leave the meeting.
- the headteacher is then invited to explain the school's actions and be followed by the school's witnesses (if any)
- the headteacher and any school witnesses will then leave the meeting.
- the panel may ask questions at any point during the process
- witnesses will only be required to attend for the part of the meeting in which they give their evidence

The hearing will be minuted. Care will be taken in identifying a clerk. It may be appropriate for a member of staff such as the school secretary or the clerk to the Governing Body to act as clerk, although consideration will be given to the sensitivity of the particular complaint.

3.2.4.– Response to the Complaint

Following the conclusion of the complaint hearing with all involved parties, the panel will aim to provide a written response to the complainant within **15 school days**. Where this is not possible the Chair of the Complaints Panel will inform the complainant in writing of the reason for the delay and given an anticipated response date. The letter will explain the right of appeal to the Secretary of State. Written replies to complainants will aim to answer all the points of concern, be factually correct, avoid jargon, and tell the complainant what to do next if they are still not satisfied. It may be appropriate for the Chair of the Complaints Panel to telephone the complainant regarding the outcome. However, this will always be followed up with a letter to make sure there is no misunderstanding.

The decision reached by the panel Complaints Panel will also be notified in writing to the other parties involved.

It will also be reported back to the next meeting of the Full Governing Body. Only a brief summary will be provided with no detailed or named information. This will ensure that any further actions will not be jeopardised.

On occasions it may be appropriate to contact the complainant again at a later date, e.g. if the full Governing Body decides to review a school policy following a complaints investigation.

3.3 Appeal to the Secretary Of State

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:

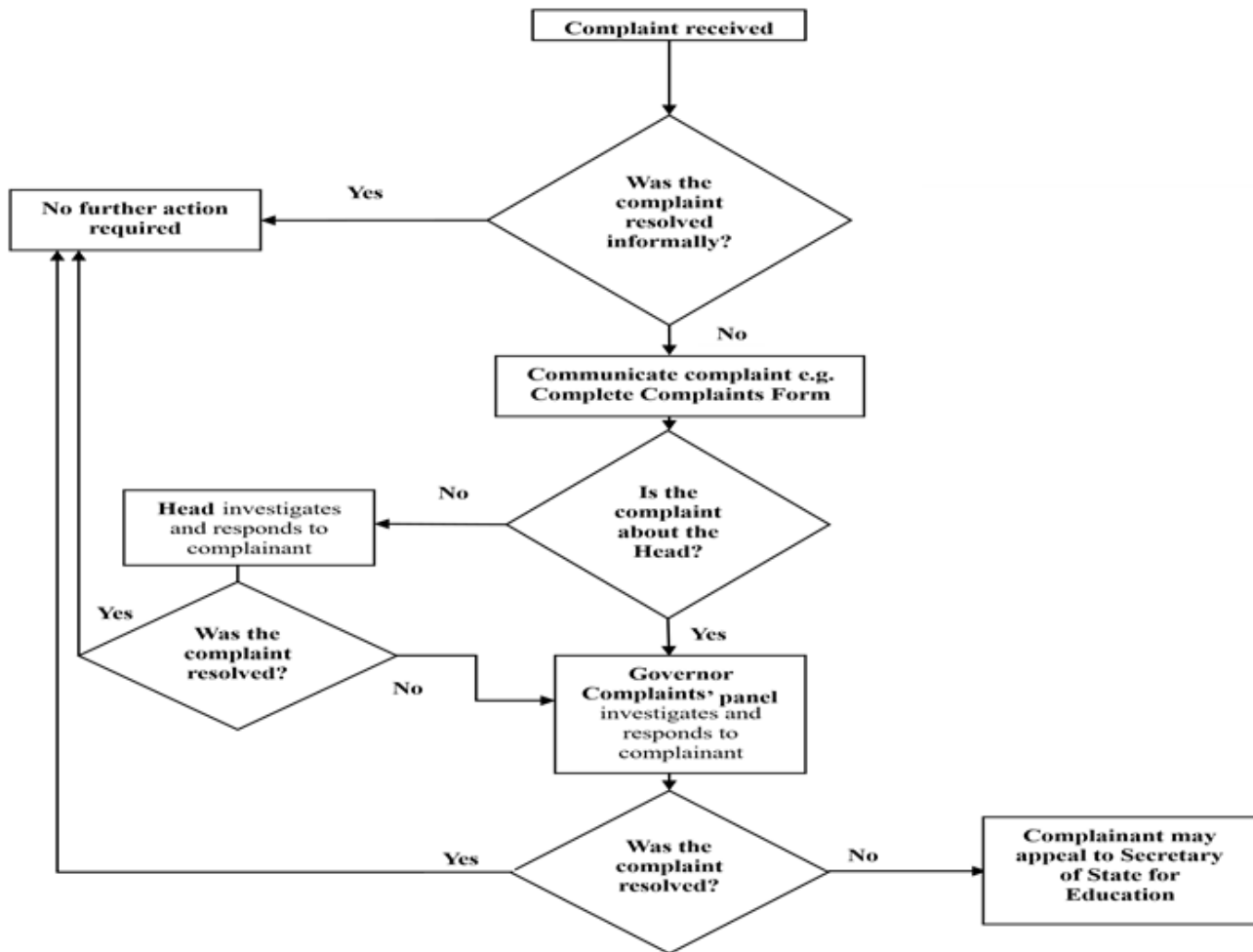
<https://www.gov.uk/complain-about-school>

3.4 Freedom of Information (FOI)

Under data protection legislation, parents and pupils have the right to request access to information about them that we hold. Please see the privacy notices on our website for further information.

If you are not happy with our response to your FOI request you have the right to request an internal review via the school office. If you remain dissatisfied with the outcome of the internal review you may apply directly to the Information Commissioner’s Office (ICO). The ICO can be contacted at: The Information Commissioner’s Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF or via their website at www.ico.org.uk

3.5 – Complaints Procedure Flowchart



4. Monitoring and Review

The Headteacher will maintain a log all formal complaints received by the school. This will include a record of the progress of the complaints and how they were resolved. The Governing Body will monitor the level and nature of complaints and review the outcomes on a regular basis (at least annually) to ensure the effectiveness of the procedure and make changes where necessary.

Complaints information shared with the whole Governing Body must not name individuals. The record of each complaint will be kept for a minimum of six years.

As well as addressing an individual's complaints, the process of listening to and resolving complaints will contribute to school improvement. When individual complaints are heard, the school will consider whether there are underlying issues that need to be addressed.

5. Complaints that may involve Staff Disciplinary Procedures

It may be necessary to suspend the complaints' procedure in respect of a complaint which indicates that there may be a need for disciplinary action to be taken against a member of staff. The decision to suspend the complaints procedure will be taken when it has been established that there may be a case to answer. In this instance the advice of the Local Authority will be sought.

The complainant will be notified that the complaints procedure has been suspended and the likely timescale for its reactivation. The resolution of the complaint will be notified to the complainant at the conclusion of any disciplinary proceedings. However the details of any disciplinary proceedings will not be released to the complainant.

6. Unacceptable Behaviour in pursuit of a Complaint

Sometimes parents/carers pursuing complaints or other issues may treat staff and others in a way that is unacceptable. Whilst it is recognised that some complaints may relate to serious and distressing incidents, the school will not accept threatening or harassing behaviour towards any members of its community. Unreasonable behaviour may include:

- Actions which are out of proportion to the nature of the complaint, persistent – even when the complaints procedure has been exhausted, personally harassing, or unjustifiably repetitious
- An insistence on pursuing unjustified complaints and/or unrealistic outcomes to justified complaints
- An insistence on pursuing justifiable complaints in an unreasonable manner (e.g. using abusive or threatening language; or making complaints in public; or refusing to attend appointments to discuss the complaint.

Harassment is the unreasonable pursuit of issues or complaints, particularly, but not limited to, 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 are pursued (as opposed to the complaint itself) causes undue distress to school staff or others
- It has a significant and disproportionately adverse effect on the school community.

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.

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 be unreasonable or unacceptable, and request a changed approach
- 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.

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 action relating to harassment or abusive behaviour. The school nevertheless reserves the right not to respond to communications from individuals subject to the policy.

7. Serial and Persistent Complaints

There will be occasions when, despite all stages of the complaint procedure having been followed, the complainant remains dissatisfied. If a complainant tries to re-open the same issue, the Chair of Governors will inform them that the procedure has been completed and that the matter is now closed. If the complainant contacts the school again on the same issue, then the correspondence may be viewed as 'serial' or 'persistent' and the school may choose not to respond.

8. Acknowledgements

The main text of Issue 1 of this policy was derived from the example 'Complaints Policy for South Gloucestershire Schools' which was based on the policy developed at Charfield Primary School with additional material from Abbotswood Primary School. The Governors and Headteacher of these schools kindly agreed to share their work with all other South Gloucestershire Schools. Following changes to legislation in August 2012 it was updated using guidance from the document

‘Model School Complaints Policy 2012’ issued by the South Gloucestershire Local Authority. The Department for Education issued “Best Practice Advice for School Complaints Procedures 2016” in January 2016 and issue 4 of this policy has been reviewed and updated based on this document, and updated guidance from Integra Schools, Governor Services, “Guidance to support the writing of your school’s complaints policy and procedure”.

See below.

Appendix 1

Number of Additional pages attached =

What actions have already been taken in relation to the concern?
[Who have they spoken or written to and what was the outcome?]

Agreed actions to address the problem at this stage?

Follow Up / Review Meeting Date:-

Signature:	
Date:	

Appendix 2

St Stephen's Infant School Complaint Form (Stage 3 – Formal – optional form)

Please complete this form and return it to the Head Teacher (or Clerk to the governing body), who will acknowledge its receipt and inform you of the next stage in the procedure.

Your name:

Relationship with school [e.g. parent /carer of a pupil on the school roll]:
.....

Pupil's name [if relevant to your complaint]:
.....

Your Address:

Daytime telephone number:
Evening telephone number: E-
Mail Address.....

Please give concise details of your complaint, [including dates, names of witnesses, desired outcome, etc...], to allow the matter to be fully investigated:

You may continue on separate paper, or attach additional documents, if you wish.

Number of Additional pages attached =

What action, if any, have you already taken to try to resolve your complaint? [i.e. who have you spoken with or written to and what was the outcome?]

What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?

Signature:

Date:

<p>School use:</p> <p>Date Form received:</p> <p>Received by:</p> <p>Date acknowledgement sent:</p> <p>Acknowledgement sent by:</p>
--

Complaint referred to:			
Date:			

Appendix 3

Summary of Complaints Procedure for Website/Prospectus/Initial Enquiry

What should you do if you have a query or aren't happy about something? If there is something you don't understand or you are not happy about, please come in and see us. (You may just want to get something off your chest.) You can discuss this with the class teacher or other appropriate member of staff, such as Ms White the Special Needs Coordinator (SENCO) or our Parent Link Worker Mrs. Stokes.

The beginning and end of the school day is a very busy time for class teachers, who usually have a class of children to welcome or dismiss, so you may need to be flexible when arranging a time to meet. In some cases you may need to make an appointment to see the Headteacher.

We know that it can feel uncomfortable to question or challenge, but if you don't tell us what is worrying you we cannot explain what we are doing or try to put it right.

If you feel you need to complain after you've discussed your query or concern there is a form you may wish to use. (The school office and Clerk to the Governing Body have copies of this form and guidance for making a complaint.)

If you make a complaint using the complaints form this is what will happen:

- You will receive a response within ten school working days, even if this is just a courtesy call to acknowledge receipt of the complaint
- Your complaint will be dealt with honestly, politely and in confidence
- Your complaint will be looked into thoroughly and fairly
- If your complaint is urgent we will deal with it more quickly
- We will keep you up to date with progress at each stage
- You will get an apology if we have made a mistake
- You will be told what we are going to do to put things right
- You will get a full and clear written reply to formal complaints within 15 school days of the complaint being heard.