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School Complaints Policy

Date: September 2024

Leading: Alix Ascough

Committee: Full Governors

Reviewed every 3 years

Note: the following complaints procedure is based on the current (2019) DfE model and earlier versions of this guidance.

As a Church of England School, Christian values are at the heart of all we do. We value our relationship with parents and all members of the school and local community. If you have a concern we want to know about it so that it can be dealt with immediately. Most issues can be dealt with easily and quickly, but to ensure all concerns are handled effectively the Governing Body has adopted a complaints policy and procedure.

The school's complaints procedure is devised with the intention that it will:

- usually be possible to resolve problems by informal means;
- be simple to use and understand;
- treat complaints confidentially;
- allow problems to be handled swiftly;
- inform future practice so that a problem is unlikely to recur;
- ensure that the school's attitude to a pupil will never be affected by a parental complaint;
- discourage anonymous complaints;
- actively encourage strong home-school links;
- ensure that any person complained against has equal rights with the person making the complaint;
- reaffirm the partnership between parents, staff and governors as we work together for the good of the pupils in the school;
- be regularly reviewed

Please read these guidance notes before raising a complaint

Guidance Notes

Who can make a complaint?

This complaints procedure is not limited to parents or carers of children that are registered at the school. Any person, including members of the public, may make a complaint to Soho Parish CE Primary about any facilities or services that we provide. Unless complaints are dealt with under separate statutory procedures (such as appeals relating to exclusions or admissions), we will use this complaints procedure.

How to raise a concern or make a complaint

A concern or complaint can be made in person, in writing or by telephone. It may also be made by a third party acting on behalf of a complainant, as long as they have appropriate consent to do so. Concerns should be raised with either the class teacher or the Head of School. If the issue remains unresolved, the next step is to make a formal complaint.

Complaints against school staff (except the Executive Headteacher) should be made in the first instance, to the Head of School via the school office. Please mark them as **Private and Confidential**.

Complaints that involve or are about the Head of School should be made to the Executive Headteacher Ms Alix Ascough. **Complaints that involve or are about the Executive Headteacher should be made to John Ong**, Chair of Governors, via the school office. Please address them to **Aquie Mbah**, Clerk to Governors, and mark them as **Private and Confidential**.

Complaints about the Chair of Governors, any individual governor or the whole governing body should be addressed to **Aquie Mbah**, Clerk to the Governors, via the school office. Please mark them as **Private and Confidential**.

Please do not approach individual governors to raise concerns or complaints. They have no power to act on an individual basis and it may prevent them from considering complaints at a later stage.

For ease of use, a template complaint form is included at the end of this Policy. 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.

Anonymous complaints

We will not normally investigate anonymous complaints. However, the Executive Headteacher or Chair of Governors, if appropriate, will determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation.

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 only in exceptional circumstances.

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

Some issues have associated statutory procedures and cannot be dealt with under our Complaints Procedure. These are listed below.

| Issue | Who to contact |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Admissions to schools• Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs• School re-organisation proposals | Concerns about admissions, statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs, or school re-organisation proposals should be raised with the local authority |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 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 the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH). |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Exclusion of children from school* | Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at: www.gov.uk/school-disciplineexclusions/exclusions . <i>*complaints about the application of the behaviour policy can</i> |

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|--|--|
| | <i>be made through the school's complaints procedure.</i> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whistleblowing | <p>We have an internal whistleblowing procedure for all our employees, including temporary staff and contractors.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>Volunteer staff who have concerns about our school should complain through the school's complaints procedure.</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff grievances | Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the school's internal grievance procedures. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff conduct | <p>Complaints about staff conduct will be dealt with under the school's internal disciplinary procedures, if appropriate.</p> <p>Complainants will not be informed of any disciplinary action taken against a staff member as a result of a complaint.</p> <p>However, the complainant will be notified that the matter is being addressed.</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complaints about organisations who use school premises or facilities | <p>Providers should have their own complaints procedure.</p> <p>Please contact them direct.</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Curriculum - content | <p>Please contact the Department for Education at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus</p> |

Legal considerations

If other bodies are investigating aspects of the complaint, for example the police, local authority (LA) safeguarding teams or Tribunals, this may affect 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 Soho Parish CE Primary School in relation to the complaint, we will consider whether to suspend the complaints procedure in relation to their complaint until those legal proceedings have concluded.

Resolving complaints

At each stage in the procedure, we want to resolve the complaint. If appropriate, we

will acknowledge that the complaint is upheld in whole or in part. In addition, we may offer one or more of the following:

- an explanation
- an admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better
- an assurance that we will try to ensure the event complained of will not recur
- an explanation of the steps that have been or will be taken to help ensure that it will not happen again and an indication of the timescales within which any changes will be made
- an undertaking to review school policies in light of the complaint
- an apology
- access to mediation.

Withdrawal of a Complaint

If you wish to withdraw your complaint, we will ask you to confirm this in writing.

Stages in the complaints procedure

Informal

If you have a concern, we would like you to tell us about it so that we can talk with you and see how best to resolve the issue. The majority of concerns can be resolved informally by speaking to a member of staff. Whatever your concern, please know that we shall treat it as strictly confidential and that our support and respect for you and your child will not be affected.

Please contact your child's class teacher either in person or via the school office office@sohoparishprimary.co.uk and make an appointment so that you can sit and talk things through. It may be possible to give a response immediately, but where any investigation or information is required, a response will be given within five school days.

Formal Stage 1

If you have not resolved your issue by informal means, or you wish to refer it directly to a formal process you should contact the Head of School via the school office office@sohoparishprimary.co.uk

If your complaint is about the Head of School you should contact the Executive Headteacher c/o the school.

If your complaint is about the Executive Head you should contact the Chair of Governors c/o the school.

It is helpful if you can give a brief outline of your concern on the school's complaints form.

Note: The Head of School may delegate the investigation to another member of the school's senior leadership team but not the decision to be taken.

During the investigation, the Head of School (or investigator) will:

- if necessary, interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of allowing them to be accompanied if they wish
- keep a written record of any meetings/interviews in relation to their investigation.

At the conclusion of the investigation, the Head of School will provide a formal written response within 10 school days of the date of receipt of the complaint.

If the Head of School is unable to meet this deadline, they will provide the complainant with an update and revised response date. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions the school will take to resolve the complaint.

The Head of School will advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint if they are dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 1.

If the complaint is about the Head of School, the Executive Headteacher will investigate the matter. If the complaint is about the Executive Headteacher or a member of the governing body (including the Chair or Vice-Chair), a suitably skilled governor will be appointed to complete all the actions at Stage 1. Complaints about the Executive Headteacher or member of the governing body must be made to the Clerk, via the school office.

If the complaint is:

- jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair or
- the entire governing body or
- the majority of the governing body

Stage 1 will be considered by an independent investigator appointed by the governing body. At the conclusion of their investigation, the independent investigator will provide a formal written response.

Formal Stage 2

If following Stage 1 you still have concerns, you may ask for your complaint to be considered by the Executive Headteacher. They will listen to you, to the

Head of School and, if appropriate, any others involved and come to a decision.

You are entitled to bring someone along to the complaints committee for support. This can be a relative or friend.

A request to escalate to Stage 2 must be made to the Executive Headteacher, via the school office, within 10 school days of receipt of the Stage 1 response. Requests received outside this time frame will only be considered in exceptional circumstances.

The Executive Headteacher will write to you (the complainant) to inform them of the date of the committee meeting. They will aim to convene a meeting within 15 school days of receipt of the Stage 2 request. If this is not possible, the Executive Headteacher will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed.

If the complainant rejects the offer of three proposed dates, without good reason, the Executive Headteacher will decide when to hold the meeting. It will then proceed in the complainant's absence on the basis of written submissions from both parties.

We do not encourage either party to bring legal representatives to the committee meeting. However, there may be occasions when legal representation is appropriate - for instance, if a school employee is called as a witness, they may be supported by union and/or legal representation. Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least 5 school days before the date of the meeting. The Executive Headteacher will not normally accept, as evidence, recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.

The Executive Headteacher will also not review any new complaints or consider evidence unrelated to the initial complaint. New complaints must be dealt with from Stage 1 of the procedure. The meeting will be held in private. Electronic recordings of meetings or conversations are not permitted unless a complainant's own disability or special needs require it. In this case the school will make appropriate arrangements and prior knowledge and consent of all parties must be sought. Consent will be recorded in any minutes taken.

The Executive Headteacher will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented. The committee can:

- uphold the complaint in whole or in part
- dismiss the complaint in whole or in part.

If the complaint is upheld in whole or in part, the Executive Headteacher will:

- decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint
- where appropriate, recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future.

The Executive Headteacher will provide the you (the complainant) and the school with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within 10 school days. The letter to the complainant will include details of how to contact the Clerk of the Governing Body if they wish to escalate the complaint to the Governing Body.

If the complaint is about the Executive Headteacher the complaint will be heard by the Governor Complaints Committee.

If the complaint is about:

- the Chair and Vice Chair jointly or
- the entire governing body or
- the majority of the governing body

Stage 2 will be heard by a committee of independent governors. The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions the school will take to resolve the complaint. The response will also advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied.

Formal Stage 3

If following Stage 2 you still have concerns you may ask for your complaint to be considered by a complaints committee of the governing body by writing to the Clerk to the Governors c/o the school. The committee will be formed of three governors with no prior involvement. They will listen to you, to the Executive Headteacher and, if appropriate, any others involved and come to a decision.

You are entitled to bring someone along to the complaints committee for support. This can be a relative or friend.

A request to escalate to Stage 3 must be made to the Clerk, via the school office, within 10 school days of receipt of the Stage 1 response. Requests received outside this time frame will only be considered in exceptional circumstances.

The Clerk will write to you (the complainant) to inform them of the date of the committee meeting. They will aim to convene a meeting within 15 school days of receipt of the Stage 2 request. If this is not possible, the Clerk will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed.

If the complainant rejects the offer of three proposed dates, without good reason, the Clerk will decide when to hold the meeting. It will then proceed in the complainant's absence on the basis of written submissions from both parties.

The complaints committee will prior to the meeting, they will decide amongst themselves who will act as the Chair of the Complaints Committee. If there are fewer than three governors from Soho Parish available, the Clerk will source any additional, independent governors through another local school or through their LA's Governor Services team, in order to make up the committee.

We do not encourage either party to bring legal representatives to the committee meeting. However, there may be occasions when legal representation is appropriate - for instance, if a school employee is called as a witness, they may be supported by union and/or legal representation. Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least 5 school days before the date of the meeting. The committee will not normally accept, as evidence, recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.

The committee will also not review any new complaints or consider evidence unrelated to the initial complaint. New complaints must be dealt with from Stage 1 of the procedure. The meeting will be held in private. Electronic recordings of meetings or conversations are not permitted unless a complainant's own disability or special needs require it. In this case the school

will make appropriate arrangements and prior knowledge and consent of all parties must be sought. Consent will be recorded in any minutes taken.

The committee will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented.

The committee can:

- uphold the complaint in whole or in part
- dismiss the complaint in whole or in part.

If the complaint is upheld in whole or in part, the committee will:

- decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint
- where appropriate, recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future.

The Chair of the Committee will provide the complainant and the school with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within 10 school days. The letter to the complainant will include details of how to contact the Department for Education if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled by the school.

If the complaint is about:

- the Chair and Vice Chair jointly or
- the entire governing body or
- the majority of the governing body

Stage 3 will be heard by a committee of independent governors. The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions the school will take to resolve the complaint. The response will also advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied.

| Parent Complaints – Timeframe summary | | | |
|---------------------------------------|---|------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Stage | Description | Timescale for receipt of complaint | Time scale for school response |
| Informal | Informal discussion with class teacher or | | As soon as possible but no |

| | | | |
|----------------|--|---|---|
| | relevant member of staff/Head of School | | later than 5 school days |
| Formal Stage 1 | Written complaint to Head of School (or Executive Headteacher if complaint is about the Head of School) | Within 3 months of the incident (or if there are a series of incidents 3 months from the last incident in the series) | Acknowledged within 2 school days. Response within 10 days |
| Formal Stage 2 | Written complaint to the Executive Headteacher (or Chair of Governors if complaint is about the Executive Headteacher) | Within 10 school days of receipt of response to stage 1 | Meeting set up within 15 school days with 10 days notice of the meeting. Agenda and papers to be set out 5 days (inc non-school days) in advance. Decision within 2 school days |
| Formal Stage 3 | Written complaint to the Clerk of the Governing Body to be heard by the Governing Body Complaints Committee | Within 10 school days of receipt of response to stage 2 | Hearing set up within 15 school days with 10 days notice of the meeting. Agenda and papers to be set out 5 days (inc non-school days) in advance. Decision within 2 school days |

Social Media

In order for complaints to be resolved as quickly and fairly as possible, the school requests the complainants do not discuss complaints publically via social media such as Facebook, WhatsApp and X. Complaints will be dealt with confidentially for those involved, and we expect complainants to observe confidentiality also.

Staff conduct complaints

If it is determined that staff disciplinary or capability proceedings are necessary in order to resolve the issue, the details of this action will remain confidential to the Executive Headteacher/Head of School and/or the individual's line manager. The complainant is entitled to be informed that action is being taken and the eventual outcome of any such action, but they are not entitled to participate in the proceeding or receive any detail about them.

Serial and unreasonable complaints

We hope that our procedures will enable complaints and concerns to be resolved amicably. Very occasionally schools experience unreasonable and unacceptable behaviour in relation to complaints or repetition of issues after the complaints procedure has run its course. The school has adopted the DfE model policy for these circumstances, which is attached to this procedure.

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, 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 the school.

They will consider whether the 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