



St Francis Catholic Primary School
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Complaints policy

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'Together in truth and faith we learn and grow as God's family'

Mission Statement

Together in truth and faith we learn and grow as God's family

At St Francis, we show the joy of being the children of God:

TRUTH

Truth and love are at the heart of our school

FAITH

By following in Jesus' footsteps, our faith is strengthened

LEARN

We promote and nurture the uniqueness of every child while striving for excellence in God's presence

GROW

As part of the family of St Francis we grow closer to God through our daily words and actions



COMPLAINTS POLICY

1. Our Approach: A Listening School

St Francis Catholic Primary School, Morley is a **listening school**. We value strong partnerships with families and welcome concerns, questions and constructive feedback. When issues arise, our commitment is to:

- **Listen carefully**, seek to understand the facts, and explain our decisions.
- **Resolve issues promptly and proportionately**, usually at the informal stage.
- Treat all parties with **dignity and respect**.
- **Learn from valid complaints** and, where appropriate, improve our systems.

We know that mistakes sometimes happen, or decisions may disappoint. When this occurs, we will always aim to **put things right fairly and respectfully**.

We strongly encourage parents and carers to **raise issues early and calmly** so they can be addressed without escalation.

2. Working Together and the Impact of Complaints

St Francis Catholic Primary School, Morley is a one form entry Catholic Primary School with a Nursery. **Formal complaints consume significant time and resources** - gathering evidence, holding meetings, writing reports, preparing panel hearings. This diverts staff from their primary duty: **teaching, safeguarding and supporting pupils**.

We therefore ask parents and carers to think carefully before escalating a matter to formal complaint. Please consider:

- **Is the issue proportionate and significant?**
- **Is the outcome you are seeking realistic, reasonable and within the school's remit?**
- **Have you already spoken informally** to the most appropriate member of staff?

Important: Formal complaints should only be used where **informal approaches have not resolved the matter** and the issue is **substantial and within the school's power to change**.

3. What is Not Considered a Complaint

Not every disagreement or disappointment is a complaint. The following are **not suitable** for the complaints process:

- Disagreement with lawful **operational/strategic decisions** (see Appendix 1) such as class groupings, exam tiers/organisation, curriculum design, uniform or behaviour policies.
- **Requests for outcomes the school cannot lawfully provide**, such as staff dismissal, financial compensation, reversal of lawful sanctions, demands for apologies, or policy changes.
- Expressions of dissatisfaction **without specific facts, dates or outcomes sought**.

- **Anonymous complaints** (not normally investigated).
- Complaints raised **more than 3 months** after the event (unless exceptional).
- Attempts to use the process to **pressure, harass or overturn decisions** through petitions, social media campaigns or repeated demands.

Where another statutory or HR route is more appropriate (e.g., **SEND Tribunal, Admissions, HR procedures, safeguarding referrals, ICO**) the school will signpost families to the correct process.

Safeguarding concerns should be raised immediately with the Designated Safeguarding Lead, not through the complaints process.

3a. Concerns and Complaints: DfE Definitions

In line with Department for Education guidance:

- A **concern** is an expression of worry or doubt over an issue for which a parent, carer or other stakeholder is seeking reassurance, clarification or an early resolution.
- A **complaint** is an expression of dissatisfaction about an action (or lack of action) taken by the school, which requires a formal investigation and written outcome.

3b. When a Concern Becomes a Formal Complaint

The school is committed to resolving concerns **promptly, fairly, and in line with Department for Education (DfE) guidance**. The DfE expects schools to seek **early and informal resolution** wherever possible, ensuring that issues are addressed **constructively and proportionately** without unnecessary escalation.

In most cases, concerns should be **raised and resolved informally in the first instance**, enabling swift, practical outcomes while maintaining positive relationships across the school community.

A concern will normally be considered a **formal complaint** only when:

- **Reasonable attempts** to resolve it informally have been made and were unsuccessful.
- The **issue is clearly defined**, within the **scope of this procedure**, and within the **school's remit** to address; **and**
- The **complainant can state a specific outcome or remedy** that is **reasonable and achievable** by the school.

These criteria ensure that the **formal process is used only when necessary and proportionate**, in line with **Department for Education best practice**.

If these conditions are not met, the school will explain its decision to the complainant and may direct the concern to **informal resolution** or another **appropriate process**.

The school will not normally pursue complaints that are **repetitious, malicious, or intended to cause disruption**, and may close such cases under its **vexatious or serial complaints provisions**, in line with DfE guidance.

Where a complaint lacks **clarity or sufficient detail**, the complainant will be invited to provide clarification. If, after reasonable opportunity, the matter remains **unclear or unfocused**, or if **further correspondence no longer serves a reasonable purpose**, the school may **close the case** in accordance with **DfE expectations**.

This approach helps the school to **maintain and strengthen positive partnerships** with parents and carers, built on mutual respect, trust, and a shared commitment to supporting every pupil's success.

4. Complaints Procedure

Informal Stage

- Raise your concern with your child's **class teacher, Key Stage Lead or Senior Leader**.
- Staff aim to resolve concerns promptly and will normally update you **within 10 (working) school days**.
- If unresolved, you may request escalation to **Stage 1 (formal)**.

Please work with us so that we can find a resolution together and avoid having to follow a lengthy complaints procedure.

Stage 1 – Formal Consideration (Headteacher or Delegate)

- Submit your complaint **in writing** (preferably using Appendix 2 form) to the Headteacher via the school office or published email (office@stfrancismorley.org.uk).
- The school will acknowledge **within 5 school (working) days**, summarising the complaint and outcome sought.
- The Headteacher (or delegate) will investigate **fairly and proportionately**; meetings may be offered.
- A written response will normally be provided **within 20 school (working) days**. If delayed, reasons and revised timescales will be shared.
- **Possible outcomes:** not upheld; insufficient evidence; upheld in whole/part with actions; apology/process review; confirmation that the issue is a disagreement rather than a breach ("agree to disagree").
- **Unreasonable requests** (dismissal of staff, compensation, policy reversal) will be explained and declined.

Stage 2 – Governors' Appeal Panel

- If dissatisfied, you may **appeal in writing within 10 school (working) days** of the Stage 1 outcome.
- The Chair of Governors will convene a **panel of three governors** with no prior involvement (an independent member may be added).
- A hearing will normally take place **within 25 school (working) days**; you will receive **5 school (working) days' notice**.
- You may submit **written evidence** and may be accompanied for support (**not legal representation**).
- **Covert or non-consensual recordings will not normally be accepted** (except safeguarding).
- If you do not attend after reasonable attempts to agree a date, the panel may proceed in your absence.
- **Decision:** the panel considers whether procedure was followed and whether the Stage 1 decision was reasonable. It may uphold, dismiss or recommend changes.
- A written decision will be sent **within 5 school days**. **This is final within the school.**

If you remain dissatisfied after Stage 2, you may refer your complaint to the Department for Education. Details are provided in Appendix 4.

A simplified **Quick Parent Guide to Complaints** (Appendix 5) is also available for reference.

5. Complaints Relating to Early Years Foundation Stage

- EYFS complaints acknowledged **within 5 school days**.
- Written response **within 28 school days**.
- May proceed to Stage 2 if unresolved.
- **Records/outcomes are logged and available to Ofsted.**

6. Complaints About Staff or Governors

Complaints about the **conduct, capability, or employment** of staff (including the Headteacher) fall under the school's **HR and disciplinary procedures**, not this Complaints Policy. These processes are conducted in line with **employment law, DfE guidance and ACAS codes**.

To protect confidentiality and comply with **UK GDPR**, the school will only confirm that the **relevant procedures have been properly followed**, not the details or outcomes of internal HR matters.

- Complaints about the **Headteacher** must be addressed in writing to the **Chair of Governors** via the school office (office@stfrancismorley.org.uk).
- Complaints about the **Chair, Vice Chair, or an individual governor** should be submitted via the school office for the attention of the governing board (office@stfrancismorley.org.uk).
- Where the complaint is about the **entire governing board or the majority**, a suitably independent investigator will be appointed at Stage 1.

The complaints procedure **cannot be used** to:

- overturn staff HR/disciplinary outcomes,
- secure staff dismissal,
- obtain financial compensation, or
- reverse lawful policy decisions.

7. Managing Unreasonable, Vexatious or Harassing Complaints

The school has a duty of care to protect staff, pupils and the wider community from harassment or abuse. Where behaviour constitutes harassment, threats, defamation or misuse of data, the school may refer the matter to the Local Authority, Department for Education, police, or relevant regulatory body.

St Francis Catholic Primary School, Morley School will handle all complaints fairly, but it will **not tolerate behaviour that undermines staff wellbeing, obstructs pupils' education or misuses school resources**.

Unreasonable complaints include:

- Refusal to co-operate with the process while insisting on resolution.
- Repeated or excessive demands on staff time.
- Pursuit of issues already properly addressed.
- **Aggressive, abusive, discriminatory, defamatory or threatening communications.**
- **Knowingly false or malicious allegations.**
- Attempts to harass or coerce through **petitions, social media or coordinated complaints**.

Automated or Artificially Generated Complaints

The school also reserves the right to restrict, delay, or decline to process complaints that appear to be **automated, generated by artificial intelligence, or submitted for purposes other than a genuine concern or enquiry**. Such correspondence may be **logged but not investigated**, in line with the school's provisions for **vexatious or serial complaints** and **Department for Education guidance** on reasonable use of the complaints procedure.

The school will always consider whether any part of the correspondence raises a **legitimate issue** before deciding to take no further action.

Authority to Restrict or Terminate Contact

The Headteacher (or Chair of Governors if the Head is the subject) in line with DfE Guidance may impose restrictions, including:

- **Single point of contact** or designated mailbox.
- Communication limited to **email, telephone or written only**.
- **Specified times/frequencies**.
- **Suspension of all non-statutory communication**.
- **Barring access to school site** (Education Act 1996, s.547).

8. Closure of Complaints

A complaint may be closed where:

- It has been **fully investigated and a final decision reached at Stage 2**.
- The desired outcome is **unrealistic, unlawful, disproportionate, or outside the school's remit**.
- The complaint has been **properly considered and there is no realistic remedy available**.
- The complainant and the school have reached a point of **"agree to disagree."**
- The complaint is **vexatious, persistent, repetitive, harassing, abusive, or based on knowingly false/fabricated information**.
- The complainant **refuses to co-operate** with the process or provide sufficient clarity.

Effect of Closure:

Closure will be **confirmed in writing**.

- **No further investigation** will take place.
- Any further correspondence will be **logged but not responded to**.
- **Restrictions on contact** may be applied.

9. Legal and Regulatory Compliance

This policy complies with:

- **Education and Equality:** Education Acts 2002 & 1996, Equality Act 2010 (complaints relating to potential discrimination will always be investigated seriously in line with our duties), Children Act 2004
- **Data and Rights:** Data Protection Act 2018 / UK GDPR, Human Rights Act 1998
- **Conduct and Communications:** Defamation Act 2013, Malicious Communications Act 1988, Protection from Harassment Act 1997
- **Employment and Process:** ACAS Codes, UK Employment Law

10. Additional Compliance and Good Practice Statements

- The school will make reasonable adjustments to ensure all complainants can access the complaints procedure, including support with communication, translation, or accessibility needs, in line with the Equality Act 2010 and DfE guidance.
- While complaints are normally submitted in writing, the school will accept alternative formats where a complainant is unable to do so due to disability, language, or other valid reasons.
- All complaint-related records are treated as confidential, stored securely, and accessed only by those involved in the process, unless disclosure is required by law or a regulatory body.
- Complaint records will be retained securely for at least three years after resolution, in accordance with the UK GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018.
- Any recordings made solely to assist in producing minutes or transcripts will be securely deleted once the final written record is approved, in line with data minimisation principles under UK GDPR.
- Unauthorised recording of meetings is not permitted. All parties must give informed consent before any recording takes place.

11. Appendices

- **Appendix 1** – Operational & Strategic Decisions Protocol (non-negotiable areas)
- **Appendix 2** – St Francis Catholic Primary School, Morley School Complaint Recording Form (Stage 1)
- **Appendix 3** – Complaints which are subject to statutory procedures
- **Appendix 4** – External Referral (DfE Guidance)
- **Appendix 5** – Quick Parent Guide to Complaints Process

APPENDIX ONE

Operational & Strategic Decisions Protocol

At St Francis Catholic Primary School, Morley School, we are committed to building strong, respectful relationships with parents, carers, and visitors. This partnership helps to create a safe, stimulating, and supportive learning environment, extending from school to home and the wider community. We believe every child deserves the opportunity to achieve their personal best. The trust and cooperation of parents and carers are essential to the continued success of our school.

We always aim to work in a positive, open, and transparent manner with families. We value the home–school relationship and will, where appropriate, explain the rationale behind decisions. However, due to the complexity of school life, it is neither possible nor appropriate to seek consensus or consultation on all matters. Many decisions made by the school are professional, operational, or strategic in nature and are not subject to negotiation, approval, or parental consent.

By choosing to send your child to St Francis Catholic Primary School, Morley School, parents and carers acknowledge that the school’s leaders and governing body have the legal authority and professional responsibility to make such decisions in the best interests of pupils and the effective operation of the school. This position is supported by education law and Department for Education (DfE) guidance.

Examples of Non-Negotiable Operational and Strategic Decisions

The following list is illustrative but not exhaustive:

- Class grouping, setting, and teacher or staff allocation.
- Behaviour management decisions, including sanctions and enforcement of uniform policy (for example, missed break/lunchtime or internal exclusions).
- Design and implementation of the rewards system.
- Curriculum structure, subject combinations, teaching methods, and learning resources.
- Assessment, homework, marking, feedback, and quality assurance procedures.
- Extra-curricular provision, including clubs, trips, and enrichment opportunities.
- Timing of INSET or staff training days, and the scheduling of school events.
- Timetable and curriculum structures.
- Internal policies and protocols, including their interpretation and implementation.
- Allocation and deployment of staff and resources to meet the needs of pupils.
- Educational visits, including decisions about venues, supervision, scheduling, and cost.
- Health and safety protocols and safeguarding procedures that protect pupils and staff.

Uniform

The school’s uniform policy is set and enforced as an operational decision. Parental disagreement does not provide grounds to alter the policy or its enforcement.

Reasonable Adjustments

The school complies with the Equality Act 2010 and will consider reasonable adjustments for pupils with disabilities or protected characteristics. The school retains discretion to decide what adjustments are reasonable, based on individual circumstances and the overall needs of the school community.

Boundaries and Expectations

The school will always listen respectfully to concerns raised through the appropriate channels, in line with our published Communications Policy. However, listening does not imply that decisions will be changed, nor that the school is obliged to enter into prolonged dialogue once a matter has been resolved.

Decisions will not be revisited simply because a parent or group disagrees, or because concerns are raised via petitions, social media, or coordinated communications. No stakeholder has the right to veto, overturn, or direct professional decisions made by the school.

Disagreement with a lawful and policy-compliant decision or action, without evidence of maladministration, illegality, or failure to follow published procedures, does not constitute reasonable grounds for a complaint. The school has no legal, moral, or professional obligation to alter a decision that has been made in good faith within the boundaries of professional judgement. The complaints procedure may not be used as a vehicle to challenge decisions that fall properly within the school's operational discretion.

The Complaints Procedure exists to address concerns where there is credible evidence that the school has acted unlawfully, unfairly, or outside the scope of agreed policy. It will not result in the reversal of a decision purely on the basis of parental disagreement.

Communication and Professional Conduct

We will keep parents and carers informed of key developments where appropriate. However, it is neither practical nor necessary to consult or communicate on every operational matter.

To ensure staff time remains focused on teaching and supporting pupils, we will not engage in repetitive, speculative, or adversarial correspondence on matters that have already been settled. All members of our school community are expected to communicate with courtesy and mutual respect.

We recognise that plans and arrangements may occasionally need to change due to unforeseen circumstances. Where this happens, the school will provide timely updates. We ask for patience, understanding, and continued partnership in such instances.

Final Statement

The school makes thousands of decisions each year, all guided by professional expertise, experience, and statutory frameworks. While we acknowledge that we may not get everything right, every decision is made in good faith, with integrity, and in the best interests of our pupils.

We ask all parents and carers to **respect** this process and to **engage constructively** with staff and leaders. A **strong and united home-school relationship** helps ensure the best possible outcomes for every St Francis child.

Please note: Our published Communications Policy sets clear expectations for respectful engagement and outlines how the school will respond to unreasonable or abusive behaviour, including the legal protections in place for staff.

APPENDIX TWO

St Francis Catholic Primary School, Morley School Complaint Recording Form (Stage 1)

COMPLAINANT'S DETAILS	
Full Name	
Relationship to pupil <i>(eg parent, carer, guardian)</i>	
Email	
Telephone Number	
Address	
Pupil's Details <i>(if relevant)</i>	
Full Name	
Year Group/Class	
Details of Complaint	
Date(s) when the issue occurred	
Full description of the concern or complaint <i>(facts, specific events, what happened)</i>	

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Steps Taken So Far

Who have you already spoken to informally?

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What was the outcome of those discussions?

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Preliminary Confirmation Questions

1. Have you read the St Francis Catholic Primary School, Morley School Complaints Policy in full?	(Yes / No)
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<p>2. Have you reviewed the Operational & Strategic Decisions Protocol (Appendix 1) to confirm your complaint is not about a non-negotiable area?</p>	<p>(Yes / No)</p>
<p>3. Have you made reasonable attempts to resolve this concern informally with the relevant staff?</p>	<p>(Yes / No)</p>
<p>4. Is the issue you are raising substantial, specific, and within the school's authority to investigate or change?</p>	<p>(Yes / No)</p>
<p>5. What outcome are you looking for from this process?</p>	
<p>6. Do you believe, having read the policy, that the school has a moral or legal duty to comply with your wishes? Please explain why.</p>	

7. Are you aware that complaints about staff conduct or HR matters are handled through separate procedures, not this complaints process?	(Yes / No)
8. Do you understand that unreasonable, vexatious, or repeated complaints may be closed without further action?	(Yes / No)
Consent and Declaration	
I consent to the school handling personal data in line with GDPR.	(Yes / No)
I declare that information provided is true to the best of their knowledge.	(Yes / No)
Signature and Date	
Signature of Complainant	
Date of Submission	

Official Use:

Date complaint received	
By whom	
Date of acknowledgment	
By whom	
Complaint referred to	
Date of referral	

APPENDIX THREE

Complaints which are subject to statutory procedures

A complaints procedure should cover all complaints about any provision of facilities or services that a school provides with the **exceptions** listed below, for which there are separate (statutory) procedures.

Exceptions	Who to contact
Admissions to schools	Concerns should be raised directly with local authorities. For school admissions, it will depend on who is the admission authority (either the school or the local authority). Complaints about admission appeals for maintained schools are dealt with by the Local Government Ombudsman.
Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs (SEN)	Contact Leeds City Council Complex needs service telephone 0113 395 1030.
Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation	If you have a concern about a child, please contact the DSL (Designated Safeguarding Lead). If you have a concern as a practitioner, please call the Social Care Duty & Advice team on 0113 376 0336 (9am to 5pm) or the Emergency Duty team on 0113 240 9536 (out of office hours).
Exclusion of children from school	Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at: www.gov.uk/school-disciplineexclusions/exclusions
Staff grievances and disciplinary procedures	These matters will invoke the school's internal grievance procedures. Complainants will not be informed of the outcome of any investigation.
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.

In most cases the headteacher will determine which, if any, of these statutory procedures apply. If one of these statutory procedures needs to be invoked at some point during the investigation of a more general complaint, the complaints procedure should be suspended until the statutory procedure has been concluded.

APPENDIX FOUR

External Referral (DfE Guidance)

Where you have been through the school's internal complaints procedures and consider that the school has behaved illegally or not followed its published procedures, you can contact the Secretary of State for Education via the DfE website www.education.gov.uk, by telephoning 0370 000 2288 or by writing to the address below:

The School Complaints Unit (SCU)
Department for Education
Piccadilly Gate Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD 37

Please enclose with your letter to the DfE a copy of the complaint outcome. This will save time in that the DfE will not need to ask for our view of what has happened.

The DfE 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 DfE also looks at whether the school's statutory policies adhere to education legislation.

Parents are advised that, unless the school is shown to have behaved illegally or not to have followed their own procedures, there is likely to be very little further action that can be taken, as governing bodies are empowered to deal with many issues without reference to either the local authority or the secretary of state.

If the complaints procedure is found to not meet regulations, the school will be asked to correct its procedure accordingly.

If your concern is about an aspect of **special educational needs provision**, which might include information about relevant voluntary organisations and support groups in Leeds, you might like to talk to Leeds SEND Information Advice Service (Leeds Special Educational Needs and Disability Advice Support Service) on their helpline: 0113 3951222.

APPENDIX FIVE

Quick Parent Guide to Complaints Process

Step 1 – Informal Concern (Most issues end here)

- Speak to your child's **class teacher, Key Stage Lead or senior leader**.
 - We aim to respond **within 10 school (working) days**.
 - Many concerns are resolved at this stage.
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Step 2 – Stage 1 (Formal Complaint to Headteacher)

- Put your complaint **in writing** (use the school form if possible).
 - Send it to the **Headteacher via the school office published email** (office@stfrancismorley.org.uk).
 - You will get an **acknowledgement within 5 school (working) days**.
 - A full response is normally given **within 20 school (working) days**.
 - Outcomes may include:
 - **Upheld** (fully or partly) with actions taken.
 - **Not upheld** (no breach found).
 - **Agree to disagree** (difference of opinion).
-

Step 3 – Stage 2 (Governors' Appeal Panel)

- If unhappy with the Stage 1 decision, you can appeal **within 10 school (working) days**.
 - A panel of **3 governors (with no prior involvement)** will hear the case.
 - A hearing will usually happen **within 25 school (working) days**.
 - You will get at least **5 school (working) days' notice** of the meeting.
 - A **written decision** will follow **within 5 school (working) days**.
 - This is the **final stage within the school**.
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After Stage 2

If you are still dissatisfied, you may contact the **Department for Education**. Guidance is in **Appendix 4**.

Important to Know

- **Safeguarding concerns** must go straight to the **Designated Safeguarding Lead**, not through this process.
 - The complaints procedure **cannot**:
 - Overturn staff disciplinary/HR outcomes.
 - Dismiss staff.
 - Award financial compensation.
 - Reverse lawful school policies.
 - **Complaints raised more than 3 months after the event** will not normally be investigated.
 - **Aggressive, abusive or vexatious complaints** may lead to restrictions or closure.
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Timescales at a Glance

- **Informal response:** within 10 school days
- **Stage 1 acknowledgement:** 5 school days
- **Stage 1 outcome:** 20 school days
- **Appeal window:** 10 school days
- **Stage 2 hearing:** 25 school days (with 5 days' notice)
- **Stage 2 outcome:** 5 school days