

St Augustine's Academy



Resolving Complaints Policy

Approved by:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'G. Hegarty', is written over a white rectangular background.

Date: 13th May 2025

Next review due
by:

May 2028

'Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in Heaven.'

Matthew 5:16

Rationale

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. *Psalm 46:1*

At St Augustine's Academy, we seek to live by the Christian vision and ethos that lies at the heart of our school.

We welcome openness and honesty and value the suggestions and feedback made by all members of our school community. We actively encourage parents and carers to share their opinions with the school. Feedback is an important part of self-evaluation and helps us to continually improve, and raise standards.

From time to time, a parent or carer may need to raise issues or concerns, or make a specific complaint to the school. This may be about a matter directly affecting their child's education or welfare, about the school in general, or about its staff, organisation and educational methods.

We will endeavour to deal with all issues and concerns speedily, sensitively and objectively, and will work closely with parents to bring about a positive resolution. Our aim is to seek truth, justice and forgiveness while reducing the likelihood that concerns will develop into complaints, or that formal procedures will need to be invoked.

If a member of the public wishes to raise a concern or complaint with the school, the Headteacher will work with them to resolve the issue.

Lord Almighty,
Anger, hatred and bitterness is not of You.
You are the God of Grace,
God of Peace,
God of Mercy,
But most importantly,
You are the
God of Love.

Teach me to forgive and resolve
Any conflicts that may arise.
Help those around me to resolve their situations
And may we all execute that
Never-failing love
To one another.
Amen

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Statement of Intent

- Create an environment of open communication that seeks to engage all stakeholders
- Provide a simple and effective process for communication in order to seek resolution
- Encourage resolution of problems by informal means wherever possible but allow for formal escalation processes

- Allow confidential, swift handling of complaints with established time-limits for action and keeping people informed of the progress

Due to statutory regulations, this policy does not relate to staff grievances, allegations of abuse or SEND provision

Stages

- Communicate the 3-stage procedure to all stakeholders
- Summarise and report complaints to the Governing Board
- Annually monitor complaints to aid the school's self-evaluation

Resolving Complaints Procedure

The below procedure sets out what the school has put in place to ensure that concerns and complaints are fully and properly addressed, and treated in the strictest confidence on a need to know basis.

Throughout this policy, references to parents should be taken to include all children's carers.

Complaint Definition

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction about the school. Two different types of complaint are recognised by the school:

- a) A justified complaint - where the School is at fault because we have failed to do something we should have, or we have done something we should not have.
- b) A grievance - where the complainant is dissatisfied but we are not at fault because we are following an agreed policy or procedure. Whilst these may be understandable causes for complaint, the concerns reflect policies and budgets already agreed by the school and its Governing Body. As such the School has not failed to do something it said it would, or has agreed to do.

Investigating Complaints

At each stage the person investigating the complaint will ensure that they:

- Establish what has happened so far, and who has been involved
- Clarify the nature of the complaint and what remains unresolved
- meet with the complainant or contact them (if unsure or further information is necessary)
- Clarify what the complainant feels would put things right
- Interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained about, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish
- Conduct the interview with an open mind and be prepared to persist with questioning
- Keep notes of any interview or meeting
- Communicate with the complainant at each stage over discussions and agreements reached.

Resolving Complaints

At each stage in the procedure, successful resolution of the complaint will take priority. If appropriate one or more of the following may be offered:

- An apology
- An explanation
- An admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better
- An assurance that the event complained of will not recur
- An explanation of the steps that have been taken to ensure that it will not happen again
- An undertaking to review school policies in light of the complaint

Complainants will be encouraged to state what actions they feel might resolve the problem at any stage.

Time Limits

Complaints are expected to be made as soon as possible after an incident arises for the school to consider the issue in an appropriate timescale. In accordance with government guidance, the school upholds a three-month time limit in which a complaint can be lodged regarding an incident. Complaints made outside this time limit may be considered in exceptional circumstances only, for example if the complainant was seriously ill during the time when they should have referred the complaint. In the case of any timescales changing, all parties involved will be informed of the changes in a timely manner. Complaints received outside of term time will be treated as being received on the first school day after the holiday period.

Complaints will be considered and resolved as quickly and efficiently as possible. Realistic time limits will be set for each action within each stage. However, where further investigations are necessary, new time limits may need to be set and the complainant sent details of the new deadline and an explanation for the delay.

On occasion, the school may need to extend the time to respond to a Stage 1 or Stage 2 complaint. This may be because of resource or capacity issues, or because additional information needs to be obtained to investigate the complaint. In such cases, the school will provide a holding letter, explaining the reason for the delay, and providing a date by which a response will be supplied. Response times given refer to Monday to Friday inclusive, term time only.

Complaints Procedures Stages

The complaints procedure consists of 3 stages:

- Informal complaint or concern
- Formal complaint or concern
- Formal review (Panel hearing)

Stage 1: Informal complaint or concern

On most occasions, parental concerns can be dealt with immediately through a conversation with the child's class teacher. It may be necessary to make an appointment to meet at a time that is convenient to both parent and teacher via the school office.

It would be helpful to let the teacher know the issue and the nature of the concern when making an appointment so that if necessary he/she can investigate the matter before the meeting.

The purpose of a meeting should be to ensure that the teacher understands the issue or concern, and to agree how to address it. If the meeting fails to do this, the next step is to make an appointment to see the Headteacher. The Headteacher will normally make further investigations and meet with the parent to suggest a workable solution.

A record of the concern raised will be made and any agreed action noted.

Stage 2: Formal complaint

In the event of a satisfactory solution not being agreed, a parent should put the concern in writing and pass it to the Headteacher who will investigate the matter as a formal complaint. The complaint should include details of the nature of the complaint, including matters which might assist the investigation such as names of potential witnesses, dates and times of events and copies of relevant documents. If possible it should identify action that might be taken to address the matter which has given rise to the complaint.

The Headteacher will investigate the complaint and consider what action might be taken to resolve it. A meeting to discuss the complaint, and how to resolve it, will often be helpful. The Headteacher will normally reply to the complaint within 7 days of its receipt, or of any meeting to discuss it, with the outcome of the investigation. In the event of the complaint resulting in staff disciplinary procedures, such procedures will remain confidential to the school.

In the case of a complaint against the Headteacher, the Chair of Governors will investigate the complaint, and the written complaint, should be sent to the Chair of Governors at the school address. Under Law, where the Chair of the Governing Body is absent, the Vice Chair (or a representative nominated by the full Governing Body) will assume the responsibilities outlined in this procedure. The Headteacher will be provided with a copy of the complaint and any additional evidence.

Once the Headteacher has had time to consider the complaint and the evidence, he/she will meet with the Chair of Governors to present a response. A friend or representative may accompany the Headteacher.

The Chair of Governors may also wish to discuss the complaint with the parent before deciding the outcome.

The complainant and the Headteacher will be provided with a written copy of the outcome within 5 school days with a summary of the complaint and a response. Any disciplinary action which may ensue will remain confidential to the school.

If the complainant wishes to move to Stage 3, a request must be submitted to the Chair in writing within 5 school days. Otherwise the matter is considered closed, and will not be considered further. The letter must explain why the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 2.

Stage 3: Formal review

If a parent is not satisfied with the outcome of his/her complaint, or the manner in which it has been investigated, he/she may request a panel hearing to hold a formal review of the process.

Any such request must be made in writing to the Clerk, via the school office within 5 school days of receiving the written outcome and must state the reasons for requesting the review and why they consider the response they have received unsatisfactory.

On receiving a formal request for the complaint to be reviewed, the Clerk will write to the complainant within five working days to inform them of the composition of the panel who will hear the complaint. The panel will normally consist of 3 members, none of whom has been involved at Stage 2, consisting 2 governors, with one panel member who is independent of the management and running of the school. Staff Governors will also not be included as part of the panel. In addition, panel members must not have a conflict of interest and must not have been involved in the matters under review.

Individual complaints will not be heard by the whole governing body at any stage, as this could compromise the impartiality of any panel set up for a disciplinary hearing against a member of staff following a serious complaint. It is not appropriate for the details of complaints to be shared widely amongst the Governing Body.

The panel chair will confirm receipt of the complaint within 3 days and will write to the parent setting out the arrangements for the review, including the date and time of the formal hearing, and the expected timing of the decision following the hearing within 10 days.

The parent will be invited to attend a meeting of the review panel and to bring a friend if they wish. They will have the opportunity to inform the panel of the details of their complaint and the panel may question them to seek further clarification.

The panel will also meet with the Headteacher (and in the case of a complaint against the Headteacher, the Chair of Governors) to seek their views. The Headteacher may be accompanied by a friend or representative. Once the issues have been clarified, the Headteacher (and Chair of Governors where relevant) will be asked to leave while the panel consider their response.

The Complaints Panel can:

- 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, policies or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not recur.

The panel will consider their response and send their written findings by the date earlier notified. Any disciplinary action which may follow will remain confidential to the school. However, if the investigation leads to a change in a school policy, the complainant will be informed of this.

This ends the procedure, and the panel and the Governing Body will enter into no further correspondence.

If a complainant believes the Governing Body has acted illegally or arbitrarily in handling a complaint, he/she may make representation to the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families.

Further guidance can be found on the DCSF website detailed below.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/setting-up-an-academies-complaints-procedure/best-practice-guidance-for-academies-complaints-procedures>