

St Mary's Church of England Primary School



Learn. Grow. Achieve. Flourish.

School Complaints Policy and Procedure

POLICY: School Complaints Policy and Procedure

APPROVED BY: Full Governing Body

APPROVED DATE: September 2025

REVIEW DATE: September 2026

This policy is statutory and reviewed annually

Our School Vision

St Mary's school vision is to embrace a Christian like way of living, learning and teaching.

As a Church of England primary school, we value and are ambitious for all children and are committed to providing a positive, happy, safe and stimulating environment for them to enjoy and excel in their learning; grow in confidence, resilience and independence; achieve their full potential and flourish as individuals.

I instruct you in the way of wisdom and lead you along straight paths'

(Proverbs 4:11)

Equality Statement

St Mary's CE Primary School is committed to ensuring that this policy is implemented in a way that promotes equality of opportunity, values diversity and fosters an inclusive environment for all members of the school community. We will not discriminate unlawfully against any individual based on age, disability, gender

reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, or sexual orientation, in accordance with the Equality Act 2010.

1. Introduction

The Governors of St Mary's CE Primary School are committed to ensuring that the highest standards are maintained at the school both in the provision of education to pupils and in every other aspect of the running of the school.

A complaints procedure is an important part of the management of a well-run school allowing parents and others the opportunity to voice any concerns they may have through appropriate channels. This policy explains the procedure which has been adopted by the governing body to ensure a timely, systematic and fair approach to the resolution of such concerns.

We recognise the need to be clear about the difference between a concern and a complaint. Taking informal concerns seriously at the earliest stage can reduce the number that develop into formal complaints.

We aim to ensure that concerns are handled, if possible, without the need for formal procedures. Our formal complaints procedure is only necessary if efforts to resolve the concern informally are unsuccessful. In most cases, a class teacher or an individual delivering the service will be the first approach. Our staff development process includes training to help staff resolve issues on the spot, including apologising where necessary.

Our formal procedures are invoked when initial attempts to resolve the issue are unsuccessful and the person raising the concern remains dissatisfied and wishes to take the matter further. (See appendix A.)

This policy does not cover certain types of complaints, which are dealt with under separate procedures. These include:

- Any complaint relating to child protection. (These will immediately be raised with the local authority (LA) for them to handle.)
- Complaints arising through conflict between estranged parents over the application of parental responsibility. (These will be dealt with having the best interest of the child in mind and with reference to the DFE guidance 'Understanding and Dealing with Issues Relating to Parental Responsibility January 2016' and with further legal advice if necessary.)
- Pupil Exclusions.
- Curriculum complaints.
- Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) complaints and appeals – addressed under the SEN procedures.
- Complaints by staff – addressed under the school's grievance procedure or other personnel policies.
- Internal disciplinary matters relating to staff or pupils.
- Appeals to the staff dismissal committee.
- Admissions – addressed under the admissions and admissions appeals procedure.
- Whistle blowing – (matters of impropriety e.g. a breach of law, school procedures or ethics) – addressed under the whistle blowing procedure.
- Discrimination.
- Complaints about school re-organisation.
- Complaints against services provided by third party hirers of the school premises.

A complaint may result in disciplinary action by the school against a member of staff and this would be confidential between that member of staff and the school, but otherwise complainants will be kept fully informed of the handling of any complaint.

Any complaint will be kept confidential, unless it is necessary to involve other parties, and will be dealt with as quickly as possible.

Members of staff recognise that complainants may sometimes act out of character in times of stress, anxiety or distress and will make reasonable allowances for this. However, all instances of unacceptable behaviour such as harassment, aggressive verbal or physical abuse at any time will be documented and this may result in the complaint being dealt with only through written communication thereafter - see **Managing Serial & Unreasonable Complaints Policy**.

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2. Objectives and targets

To be effective our complaints procedure will:

- Encourage a resolution of problems by informal means wherever possible.
- Be easily accessible and publicised, including to third parties who hire school premises.
- Be simple to understand and use.
- Be impartial.
- Be compliant with the school's obligations under the Equality Act 2010.
- Be non-adversarial/confrontational.
- Allow swift handling with established time-limits for action and keeping people informed of the progress.
- Ensure a full and fair investigation by an independent person where necessary.
- Respect people's desire for confidentiality.
- Address all the points at issue and provide an effective response and appropriate redress, where necessary.
- Provide information to the school's senior management team so that services can be improved.

3. Action plan

At St Mary's CE Primary School, the Headteacher has overall responsibility for the operation and management of the school complaints procedure. In practical terms, the Headteacher, or Assistant Headteacher (s), or Behaviour Lead will deal with matters on a day-by-day basis and hold records relating to any complaints received.

Complaints from anyone who is not a parent of a pupil currently attending the school should be addressed to the Headteacher in the first instance.

It is expected that attempts will be made to resolve difficulties informally with the class teacher/year manager/Assistant Headteacher (s) before being referred to the Headteacher. The informal stage of the procedure will be exhausted before the matter is referred to the formal stages and a complaint form issued (see appendix A).

If any substantial complaint is made to a member of staff by a parent it will be referred to the line manager and chain until it reaches the Headteacher, as appropriate, if it cannot be resolved immediately by the member of staff or senior leaders to the satisfaction of the parent.

4. Stages in the procedure

There are three stages in the school's complaints procedure. Roles and responsibilities of the participants in the investigation of a complaint are described in section 5.

At each stage in the procedure, we will remain mindful of ways in which a complaint can be resolved. It might be sufficient to acknowledge that the complaint is valid in whole or in part. In addition, it may be appropriate to offer one or more of the following:

- 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 considering the complaint.

We encourage complainants to state what actions they feel might resolve the problem at any stage. An admission that the school could have handled the situation better is not the same as an admission of negligence.

At all times we will seek to identify areas of agreement between the parties and clarify any misunderstandings that might have occurred because this can create a positive atmosphere in which to discuss any outstanding issues.

St Mary's CE Primary School expects any complaints to be made as soon as possible after an incident arises (although up to three months is acceptable in certain circumstances). Once a formal complaint has been

received, the school's cut-off timeframe will apply to both parties. However, the school will consider exceptions to this time-frame from both parties if necessary.

4.1. Stage 1 – informal – complaint heard by staff member

A complaint may be made in person, by telephone, or in writing. In this stage, the investigator, i.e. the class teacher/year lead (but not the subject of the complaint or a Governor), will deal with the complaint.

Most parents' concerns can be adequately resolved by discussion with the class teacher/year lead or with other members of staff. There may be no need for the complaint to be put in writing, which would formalise matters and may lead parents to feel less prepared to articulate concerns, perhaps because of a fear that such action may prejudice the interests of their child.

At the end of a meeting or telephone call, the member of staff will ensure that the complainant and the school have the same understanding of what was discussed and agreed. A brief note of meetings and telephone calls will be kept and a copy of any written response added to the record.

- Where possible, the complaint should be resolved within **five school working days**.
- School holiday periods fall outside the school's designated working days and are therefore not considered school days for the purposes of this policy.

However, if the complainant wishes to take the matter further, they are requested to complete the complaints form (appendix A) and return it to the school within five school working days. The Headteacher is informed and stage 2 is implemented.

4.2. Stage 2 – formal– complaint heard by Headteacher or senior staff member

If the concern is not met to the complainant's satisfaction by discussion, then:

- The complainant puts the complaint in writing using the complaints form (appendix A).
- The initial recipient of the complaint will refer the matter to the investigator e.g. the designated member of the senior leadership team.
- The investigator will carry out an enquiry into the circumstances of the complaint and may find it appropriate to ask for written statements from staff or pupils and to call for any relevant documentation. If the complaint is against a member of staff, that member of staff has a right to be given details of the complaint and the opportunity to make representation about it. The person investigating the incident will take these details into account.
- The investigator will consider the complaint, but it will be the Headteacher who will decide what action is required and will direct a member of the senior leadership team/Inclusion and Safeguarding Officer to respond to the complainant with the outcome of the investigation, normally within **15 school working days** of receipt of the substance of the complaint.
- The outcome of a complaint may be communicated in writing or discussed at a meeting with the complainant, with written confirmation of the outcome provided thereafter.
- School holiday periods fall outside the school's designated working days and are therefore not considered school days for the purposes of this policy.
- Where it is appropriate, the school reserves the right to refer the matter to an external body.

HR Support

- The school reserves the right to obtain guidance from its external Human Resources provider from the commencement of, and throughout, the grievance process where deemed necessary. External HR advice may be used to support the fair and lawful management of the grievance, including matters relating to procedure, investigation, hearings, decision-making and appeals.
- External HR advisers may attend meetings and hearings in an advisory capacity where appropriate but will not be responsible for determining the outcome, which remains the responsibility of the relevant manager, Headteacher or Governor Panel.

Official Records of Meetings Held Under This Policy

- The school will maintain a written record of formal meetings held under this policy. Notes are intended to provide a fair and accurate summary of the matters discussed and are not intended to be a verbatim transcript of every word spoken. The notes will record the key issues raised, evidence

considered, responses provided, decisions reached and any actions agreed. Employers are expected to maintain written records of formal disciplinary and grievance matters, but there is no requirement for those records to be verbatim transcripts. [\[acas.org.uk\]](https://www.acas.org.uk), [\[acas.org.uk\]](https://www.acas.org.uk)

- Where a participant believes that the meeting notes do not accurately reflect a material point they made, they may submit proposed amendments in writing. The school will consider those representations and may append them to the record where appropriate.
- A written record will be maintained of all formal meetings. The written record is intended to provide a fair and accurate summary of the matters discussed and is not intended to be a verbatim transcript. Where considered appropriate, the school may use audio recording or transcription technology to assist with the preparation of meeting notes. Any recording or transcript will be used solely for administrative purposes and will not constitute the official record of the meeting.

Note:

- Complaints against the Headteacher will usually first be dealt with by the Chair of Governors and must be directed to the Chair of Governors.
- Complaints against the Chair of Governors or any individual Governor should be made by writing to the Clerk to the Governing Body.
- The complainant will be informed of his or her right to have the matter referred to the Governors' complaints appeal panel if the outcome of stage 2 is not considered satisfactory.
- The time frame in which any appeal must be lodged in writing is five school working days. School holiday periods fall outside the school's designated working days and are therefore not considered school days for the purposes of this policy.
- Any such request by a complainant should be addressed to the Clerk to the Governors for the attention of the Chair of Governors and the Governors' complaints appeal panel will be convened.

4.3. Stage 3 – formal – Governors' complaints appeal panel meeting

HR Support

- The school reserves the right to obtain guidance from its external Human Resources provider from the commencement of, and throughout, the grievance process where deemed necessary. External HR advice may be used to support the fair and lawful management of the grievance, including matters relating to procedure, investigation, hearings, decision-making and appeals.
- External HR advisers may attend meetings and hearings in an advisory capacity where appropriate but will not be responsible for determining the outcome, which remains the responsibility of the relevant manager, Headteacher or Governor Panel.

When the Clerk to the Governors receives the request for the Governors' complaints appeal panel to meet:

- The complainant/parent will be informed by the Clerk of the new timescale for the investigation and written report to be provided within **15 school working days**. (However, the length of the investigation will depend on the nature of the complaint and other variable factors. If the investigation is likely to exceed 15 school working days, the school will set realistic time limits for each action within the stage. Where such further investigations are necessary, new time limits may need to be set and the complainant will be sent details of the new deadline and an explanation for the delay.) School holiday periods fall outside the school's designated working days and are therefore not considered school days for the purposes of this policy.

Governors' Complaints Appeal Panel

- A Governors' complaints appeal panel will be assembled comprising three or five members, with all effort made to ensure that none have any previous connection to the complaint.
- Governors appointed to a complaints panel must have had no prior involvement in the complaint under consideration and must be able to demonstrate impartiality. The governing body will consider any previous involvement with the complainant or related matters and, where appropriate, appoint alternative panel members to avoid any actual or perceived conflict of interest.
- Prior involvement with the same complainant does not automatically disqualify a governor, but eligibility must be assessed against the facts of the new case.

- Any objection should identify the circumstances said to affect impartiality and provide relevant supporting information. The party raising the objection does not have a right to select or veto panel members.
- Information about an active case will be shared only with those who require it to perform their role. It will not ordinarily be circulated to the full governing board while the matter remains ongoing.
- Governors should be appropriately trained or briefed for the relevant procedure and able to understand and apply the governing policy.
- The meeting will additionally have a panel Clerk in attendance.
- If the complainant requests an independent panel, the school will consider the request but ultimately the decision is made by the Governors.
- The Clerk will write to the complainant, the Headteacher, the Chair of Governors and appeal panel members giving details of the meeting, requesting copies of any documents to be put before the meeting. ~~and the names of any witnesses that either party may wish to attend.~~

Complaints Appeal Hearing

The hearing will be on reasonable notice and be held as soon as practicable after receipt of the referral, taking into consideration school working days and school holidays. The procedure at the hearing (see appendix B) will be sensitive and appropriate for the circumstances and is at the discretion of the chair of the Governors' complaints appeal panel.

After the hearing, the Clerk will offer copies of the minutes of the meeting to all parties involved in the panel hearing and provide an opportunity for the minutes to be agreed and, if necessary, challenged within **five school working days** so that no additional complaints will arise because of the record of the meeting.

The 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 procedures to ensure that similar problems do not recur.

The Governors' appeal panel's decision is final.

A copy of the findings and recommendations of the panel will be sent by letter to the complainant and, where relevant, to the person complained about, and will be available for inspection on the school premises by the Headteacher.

Witness

- The Complaints Panel will normally consider written evidence submitted by the complainant, the school and any relevant witnesses. Witnesses will not ordinarily be invited to attend the hearing in person. Where the Panel considers that oral evidence from a witness is necessary to assist its deliberations, it may, at its discretion, invite that person to attend part of the hearing.
- ~~• Any request for a witness to attend must be made in advance of the hearing and will be considered by the Chair of the Panel. The decision of the Chair regarding the attendance of witnesses shall be final.~~

Companion to the Complainant

- Should the complainant be invited to attend the Hearing Panel, the complainant may be accompanied to a Stage 3 Complaints panel hearing by a friend, relative, advocate, interpreter or other supporter. The complainant must notify the school in advance of the name of the accompanying person and the capacity in which they will be attending.
- The panel Clerk will inform the complainant of the right to be accompanied.
- The role of the accompanying person is to provide support to the complainant, including taking notes, offering advice, providing interpretation where necessary and assisting the complainant during the hearing. The accompanying person may confer with the complainant, provide support and, with the agreement of the Chair of the Panel, address the Panel or speak on the complainant's behalf. The accompanying person is not entitled to answer questions directed to the complainant unless expressly permitted to do so by the Chair.

- The Chair of the Panel reserves the right to regulate the conduct of the hearing and the extent of any participation by the accompanying person in order to ensure that the proceedings remain fair, orderly and focused on the matters under consideration.
- The accompanying person must not act in a disruptive, obstructive or confrontational manner, answer questions directed to the complainant unless authorised to do so by the Chair, or seek to interrogate panel members, witnesses or school representatives.
- Where the conduct of an accompanying person unreasonably impedes the proceedings, the Chair may adjourn the hearing and, following an appropriate warning, require the accompanying person to leave the meeting. The Panel may then determine whether to continue the hearing, adjourn it to a later date, or permit the complainant to appoint an alternative accompanying person. Such action will only be taken in exceptional circumstances and where necessary to ensure the fair and orderly conduct of the proceedings.

4.4. If the complainant is still not satisfied

If the complainant is still not satisfied after all the processes of the school's complaints procedure have been undertaken or tries to re-open the same issue, the Chair of Governors will inform them in writing that the procedure has been exhausted and any further contact from the complainant on the same issue is likely to be ignored by the school.

5. Roles and responsibilities of the participants in the investigation of a complaint

5.1. The complainant

The person who makes the complaint will receive the most effective response to the complaint if he/she:

- Expresses the complaint in full as early as possible.
- Asks for assistance if needed throughout the handling of the complaint.
Co-operates with the school in its procedures of seeking a solution to the complaint.
- Responds promptly to requests for information or meetings or in agreeing the details of the complaint.
- Treats all those involved in the complaint with respect.

5.2. The complaints co-ordinator (or Headteacher)

Whenever a formal complaint is received it will be investigated. At each stage, the person initiating the investigation of the complaint (the Headteacher or the complaints co-ordinator), must:

- Ensure that everyone involved in the complaint procedure is aware of the legislation around complaints including:
 - The Equality Act 2010.
 - Data Protection Act 2018/GDPR.
 - Freedom of Information Act 2000.
- Be aware of issues regarding:
 - Sharing third party information.
 - Additional support for the complainant when making a complaint including interpretation support.
- Liaise with staff members, Headteacher, Chair of Governors and Clerk to ensure the smooth running of the complaints procedure.
- Ensure that the complainant is fully updated at each stage of the procedure.
- Keep records.

5.3. The investigator

The investigator is involved in stages 1 and 2 of the procedure. They investigate the complaint and will ensure that they:

- Conduct interviews with an open mind and are prepared to persist in the questioning.
- Keep notes of the interviews or arrange for an independent note taker to record minutes of all meetings.

The investigator's role will include:

- Providing a comprehensive, open, transparent and fair consideration of the complaint through:
 - Interviewing the complainant sensitively and thoroughly to establish what has happened and who has been involved.
 - Interviewing staff, pupils and other people relevant to the complaint.
 - Consideration of records and other relevant information.
 - Analysing information.
- Effectively liaising with the complainant and the complaints co-ordinator to clarify what the complainant feels would put things right.
- Identifying solutions and recommending courses of action to resolve problems.
Being mindful of the timescales to respond.
- Responding to the complainant in plain and clear language.

5.4. The panel Clerk (this could be Clerk to the Governors or the complaints co-ordinator)

The panel Clerk is involved from stage 3 of the complaint procedure. The panel Clerk is the contact point for the complainant for the panel meeting and will:

Ensure that all people involved in the complaint procedure are aware of their legal rights and duties, including any under legislation relating to school complaints, education law, the Equality Act 2010, the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR).

- Set the date, time and venue of the hearing, ensuring that the dates are convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible.
- Collate any written material and send it to the parties in advance of the hearing.
- Meet and welcome the parties as they arrive at the hearing.
- Record the proceedings.
- Circulate the minutes of the panel hearing.
- Notify all parties of the panel's decision.
- Liaise with the complaints co-ordinator.

5.5. The panel chair

The panel chair will ensure that:

- He/she liaises with the panel Clerk and complaints co-ordinator.
- No member of the panel has an external interest in the outcome of the proceedings or any involvement in an earlier stage of the procedure.
- The panel is open-minded and acts independently.
- The layout of the room is informal and not adversarial.
- Parents/carers and others who may not be used to speaking at such a hearing are put at ease (particularly important if the complainant is a youngster).
- The hearing is conducted in an informal manner with everyone treated with respect and courtesy.
- While the hearing is conducted in an informal manner, all matters brought up will be considered seriously.
- The role of the panel is explained to the complainant and both they and the school have the opportunity of putting their case without undue interruption.
- The meeting is minuted.
- The issues are addressed.
- Both the complainant and the school are given the opportunity to state their case and seek clarity where necessary.
- Key findings of fact are made.

- If a new issue arises, a short adjournment of the hearing will take place so that everyone will have the opportunity to consider and comment upon it.
- Written material is seen by everyone in attendance, provided it does not breach confidentiality or any individual's rights to privacy under the DPA 2018 or GDPR.

5.6. Panel members

Panel members become involved at stage 3 in the complaint procedure. They need to be aware that:

- The aim of the hearing, which will be held in private, is to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant.
- The panel hearing is independent and impartial and must be seen to be so.
- Many complainants will feel nervous and inhibited in the setting.
- Extra care must be taken when the complainant is a youngster and present during all or part of the hearing and the welfare of the youngster is most important.

6. Taking the complaint to other bodies

If a complainant wishes to take the complaint further, they may approach:

- The School Complaints procedure of the DfE. [Complain about a school: Types of complaints - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/complain-about-a-school-types-of-complaints). The DfE will not re-open the complaint but will check that the procedures in the school's policy and other relevant policies were followed correctly and that the policy meets all legal requirements. Further information and the complaints form is available at: [Complaints procedure - Department for Education - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/complaints-procedure-department-for-education)

Complaints may also be sent to:

The School Complaints Unit (SCU)
Department for Education
2nd Floor, Piccadilly Gate
Manchester
M1 2WD
Telephone helpline: 0370 000 2288.

7. Recording complaints

Initially a complaint may be made in person or by telephone and if unresolved should be put in writing (see appendix B). At the end of a meeting or telephone call, the member of staff will ensure that the complainant and the school have the same understanding of what was discussed and agreed.

The progress of any complaint and the final outcome will be recorded by the complaints co-ordinator. These findings will be made available to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about, and will be available for inspection by the Head teacher.

A brief note of meetings and telephone calls will be kept electronically or in writing in the Head teacher's confidential drive or locked drawer in the Head teacher office and a copy of any written response added to the record. The meeting will be held in private. Electronic recordings of meetings or conversations are not permitted unless a complainant's own disability or special need require it or if permission is granted.

Prior knowledge and consent of all parties attending formal meetings must be sought before meetings or conversations take place. Consent will be recorded in any minutes taken.

8. Publicising the policy and procedure

Details of St Mary's CE Primary School's complaints policy and procedures are included, as appropriate, in:

- The school website.

9. Unreasonable complaints

A complaint may be regarded as unreasonable when the person making the complaint:

- Refuses to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcomes sought by raising the complaint, despite offers of assistance.
- Refuses to co-operate with the complaints investigation process while still wishing their complaint to be resolved.
- Refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of a complaint's procedure.
- Insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the adopted complaints procedure or with good practice.
- Introduces trivial or irrelevant information which the complainant expects to be considered and commented on, or raises large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions, and insists they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales.
- Makes unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues and seeks to have them replaced.
- Changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds.
- Makes excessive demands on school time by frequent, lengthy, complicated and stressful contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and/or by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with.
- Repeatedly makes the same complaint (despite previous investigations or responses concluding that the complaint is groundless or has been addressed).
- Refuses to accept the findings of the investigation into that complaint where the school's complaint procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed including referral to the Department for Education.
- Seeks an unrealistic outcome.

A complaint may also be considered unreasonable if the person making the complaint does so face-to-face, by telephone, in writing or electronically:

- Maliciously.
- Aggressively, using threats, intimidation or violence.
- Using abusive, offensive or discriminatory language.
- Knowing it to be false.
- Using falsified information.
- Publishing unacceptable information in a variety of media such as in social media websites and newspapers.

Where aggression or abusive behaviour has been used, the school may have to:

- Ask them to leave the school premises.
- Inform the police.
- If necessary, bar them from being on school premises. The complainant will be notified in writing how long the bar will be in place and a review date will be set, the review will be carried out by the Chair of Governors and the Governors committee.

10. Duplicate complaints

After closing a complaint at the end of the complaint's procedure, we may receive a duplicate complaint from:

- a spouse
- a partner
- a grandparent
- a child
- a friend
- another person known to the claimant

If the complaint is about the same subject, we can inform the new complainant that the school has already considered that complaint and the local process is complete. We will advise the new complainant to contact the department if they are dissatisfied with the school's handling of the original complaint.

The school will consider any new aspects to the complaint that may not have previously been considered. In doing so, the school ensure these are investigated and dealt with to the full extent of the complaint's procedure.

11. Complaint campaigns

Where our school becomes the focus of a campaign and receive large volumes of complaints:

- all based on the same subject
- from complainants unconnected with the school

We will:

- send a template response to all complainants or
- publish a single response on the school's website

12. Managing Serial and persistent complaints

At St Mary's we will always do our best to be helpful to people who contact us with

- A complaint or concern
- A request for information

However, 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, we will inform them that the procedure has been completed and that the matter is now closed.

If the complainant contacts us again on the same issue, the correspondence may then be viewed as 'serial' or 'persistent' and we may choose not to respond. However, we will not mark a complaint as 'serial' before the complainant has completed the procedure.

We may receive complaints we consider to be vexatious. The [Office of the Independent Adjudicator](#) defines the characteristics of a 'frivolous' or 'vexatious' complaint as:

- complaints which are obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific, repetitious
- insistence upon pursuing unmeritorious complaints and/or unrealistic outcomes beyond all reason
- insistence upon pursuing meritorious complaints in an unreasonable manner
- complaints which are designed to cause disruption or annoyance
- demands for redress that lack any serious purpose or value

St Mary's will not refuse to accept further correspondence or complaints from an individual we have had repeat or excessive contact with. The application of a 'serial or persistent' is against the subject or complaint itself rather than the complainant.

Please refer to our schools policy for managing serial and unreasonable complaints (Appendix E).

13. Monitoring and evaluation

The Governing Body will monitor the level and nature of complaints using the records kept by the complaints co-ordinator. Wherever possible, complaints information shared with the whole Governing Body will not name individuals. The policy will be evaluated in the light of complaints made and their resolution in order to contribute to school improvement.

Should the DFE advise the school that the policy or procedures need to be amended, these will be actioned as soon as possible. Where changes in legislation require changes to the policy, these will also be introduced as soon as possible.

14. Ofsted's role in complaints

If at any time a complaint about a school is made by a parent to Ofsted, and Ofsted considers it appropriate for the purpose of investigating a complaint, the board of Governors or the LA must co-operate in arranging the meeting. There may not be an inspection due, in which case Ofsted may choose to write a report upholding or dismissing the complaint which will be sent to the body of Governors. A copy of this must be passed on by the Governors to all registered parents.

In preparation for an inspection, an Ofsted inspector will look at any upheld complaints against the school. During the course of an inspection, emerging findings must be discussed at regular intervals as the inspection progresses with the headteacher and other senior staff. The headteacher will be given every opportunity to provide further evidence should he/she wish to do so. The headteacher can and must convey to the lead inspector any complaints or concerns about the inspection process.

15. Use of AI

The school recognises that complainants may use artificial intelligence (AI) or other digital tools to help them structure, draft or articulate a concern or complaint. The use of such a tool will not affect whether a complaint is accepted, investigated or upheld.

The person submitting the complaint remains responsible for the accuracy, relevance and authenticity of the information provided. Where necessary, the school may ask a complainant to clarify the substantive issues being raised, identify the source of information relied upon, or provide supporting evidence.

The school will respond to the substantive issues within its remit and is not required to provide a separate response to every legal reference, quotation, repeated argument or other material included in correspondence where this does not materially relate to the complaint.

16. Knowingly providing false or fabricated information, repeatedly submitting substantially the same material, or using automated tools to generate correspondence of a volume or nature that unreasonably hinders the school's ability to consider the complaint, may be dealt with under the school's provisions for managing unreasonable or persistent communications. These provisions apply regardless of whether AI or another tool has been used. Review

The governing body will review the outcomes of the monitoring exercise and make changes where necessary.

Reviewed and updated: October 2026

Next review: October 2027

APPENDIX A: COMPLAINTS FORM

Please complete and return for the attention of the **Inclusion and Safeguarding Officer/HR Manager (complaints co-ordinator)** who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

Email: HR@stmarys.slough.sch.uk

Email: officestaff@stmarys.slough.sch.uk

Your name:

Pupil's name:

Your relationship to the pupil:

Address:

Postcode:

Daytime telephone number: Evening telephone number:

Please give details of your complaint:

What action, if any, have you already taken to try and resolve your complaint?

(Who did you speak to and what was the response)?

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

Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details.

Signature:

Date:

Official use

Date acknowledgement sent:

By whom:

Complaint referred to:

Date:

APPENDIX B: CHECKLIST FOR A PANEL HEARING

The Governors' complaints appeal panel needs to take the following points into account:

- The hearing is as informal as possible.
- A Governors' complaints appeal panel will be assembled comprising three or five members, with all effort made to ensure that none have any previous connection to the complaint.
- Governors appointed to a complaints panel must have had no prior involvement in the complaint under consideration and must be able to demonstrate impartiality. The governing body will consider any previous involvement with the complainant or related matters and, where appropriate, appoint alternative panel members to avoid any actual or perceived conflict of interest.
- Any Governor who has participated on a panel for a staffing decision, cannot sit on the appeal panel of the same case.
- Prior involvement with the same employee does not automatically disqualify a governor, but eligibility must be assessed against the facts of the new case.
- Any objection should identify the circumstances said to affect impartiality and provide relevant supporting information. The party raising the objection does not have a right to select or veto panel members.
- Information about an active case will be shared only with those who require it to perform their role. It will not ordinarily be circulated to the full governing board while the matter remains ongoing.
- Governors should be appropriately trained or briefed for the relevant procedure and able to understand and apply the governing policy.
- The Complaints Panel will normally consider written evidence submitted by the complainant, the school and any relevant witnesses. Witnesses will not ordinarily be invited to attend the hearing in person. Where the Panel considers that oral evidence from a witness is necessary to assist its deliberations, it may, at its discretion, invite that person to attend part of the hearing.
- Any request for a witness to attend must be made in advance of the hearing and will be considered by the Chair of the Panel. The decision of the Chair regarding the attendance of witnesses shall be final.
- Witnesses are only required to attend for the part of the hearing in which they give their evidence.
- After introductions, the complainant is invited to explain their complaint ~~and be followed by their witnesses.~~
- The Headteacher may question both the complainant and the witnesses after each has spoken.
- The Headteacher is then invited to explain the school's actions and be followed by the school's witnesses.
- The complainant may question both the Headteacher and the witnesses after each has spoken.
- The panel may ask questions at any point.
- The complainant is then invited to sum up their complaint.
- The Headteacher is then invited to sum up the school's actions and response to the complaint.
- Both parties leave together while the panel decides on the issues.
- The chair explains that both parties will hear from the panel within a set time scale.
- The chair explains that the complainant may be accompanied to a Stage 3 Complaints panel hearing by a friend, relative, advocate, interpreter or other supporter. The complainant must notify the school in advance of the name of the accompanying person and the capacity in which they will be attending.
- The role of the accompanying person is to provide support to the complainant, including taking notes, offering advice, providing interpretation where necessary and assisting the complainant during the hearing. The accompanying person may confer with the complainant, provide support and, with the agreement of the Chair of the Panel, address the Panel or speak on the complainant's behalf. The accompanying person is not entitled to answer questions directed to the complainant unless expressly permitted to do so by the Chair.
- The Chair of the Panel reserves the right to regulate the conduct of the hearing and the extent of any participation by the accompanying person in order to ensure that the proceedings remain fair, orderly and focused on the matters under consideration.

- The accompanying person must not act in a disruptive, obstructive or confrontational manner, answer questions directed to the complainant unless authorised to do so by the Chair, or seek to interrogate panel members, witnesses or school representatives.
 - Where the conduct of an accompanying person unreasonably impedes the proceedings, the Chair may adjourn the hearing and, following an appropriate warning, require the accompanying person to leave the meeting. The Panel may then determine whether to continue the hearing, adjourn it to a later date, or permit the complainant to appoint an alternative accompanying person. Such action will only be taken in exceptional circumstances and where necessary to ensure the fair and orderly conduct of the proceedings.
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APPENDIX C:

UNREASONABLE COMPLAINTS– ONGOING PROCEDURE

(School address)

(Date)

Dear Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms,

[Nature of complaint]

Further to your recent contact with the school in connection with your on-going complaint about I ask for your co-operation while the complaints procedure is in process.

St Mary's CE Primary School is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, and to providing a high-quality service to those who complain. We will not normally limit the contact complainants have with the school. However, we do not expect our staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour and will take action to protect them from such behaviour, including that which is abusive, offensive or threatening.

St Mary's CE Primary School defines unreasonable complainants as 'those who, because of the frequency or nature of their contacts with the school, hinder our consideration of their or other people's complaints'.

A complaint may be regarded as unreasonable when the person making the complaint:

(Choose from the list of bullet points below according to nature of the problem)

- Refuses to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcomes sought by raising the complaint, despite offers of assistance.
- Refuses to co-operate with the complaints investigation process while still wishing their complaint to be resolved.
- Refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of a complaint's procedure.
- Insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the adopted complaints procedure or with good practice.
- Introduces trivial or irrelevant information which the complainant expects to be taken into account and commented on, or raises large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions, and insists they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales.
- Makes unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues and seeks to have them replaced.
- Changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds.
- Makes excessive demands on school time by frequent, lengthy, complicated and stressful contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and/or by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with.

I ask you to please limit the numbers of communications with the school while your complaint is being progressed. It is not helpful if repeated correspondence is sent (by letter, phone, email or text) because it could delay the outcome being reached. If you continue to contact the school excessively, causing a significant level of disruption to staff, I may have to specify the mode and number of communications that will be considered acceptable.

A complaint may also be considered unreasonable if the person making the complaint does so face-to-face, by telephone, in writing or electronically:

- Maliciously.
- Aggressively, using threats, intimidation or violence.

- Using abusive, offensive or discriminatory language.
- Knowing it to be false.
- Using falsified information.
- Publishing unacceptable information in a variety of media such as in social media websites and newspapers.

Where aggression has been used add:

Please desist from using aggressive, abusive behaviour against the school staff or I may have to

- Ask you to leave the school premises.
- Inform the police.
- If necessary, bar you from being on school premises, which I have the right to do.

We do want to resolve your complaint but please let us do so by working to the schedule of the procedure and peacefully.

Yours faithfully,

Headteacher

APPENDIX D: UNREASONABLE COMPLAINTS– PROCEDURE COMPLETED

(School address)

(Date)

Dear Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms,

[Nature of complaint]

Further to your recent contact with the school after the decision of the complaints appeal panel, and having advised you of the steps you could take if you were still unsatisfied with that decision, I write a final letter to you to ask that you refrain from contacting the school on substantially the same matter which, having been dealt with thoroughly and reasonably through all the school's complaints procedure, I now consider to be an unreasonable complaint.

St Mary's CE Primary School is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, and to providing a high-quality service to those who complain. We will not normally limit the contact complainants have with the school. However, we do not expect our staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour and will take action to protect them from such behaviour, including that which is abusive, offensive or threatening.

St Mary's CE Primary School defines unreasonable complainants as 'those who, because of the frequency or nature of their contacts with the school, hinder our consideration of their or other people's complaints'.

A complaint may be regarded as unreasonable when the person making the complaint:

(Choose from the list of bullet points below according to nature of the problem)

- Repeatedly makes the same complaint (despite previous investigations or responses concluding that the complaint is groundless or has been addressed).
- Refuses to accept the findings of the investigation into that complaint where the school's complaint procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed including referral to the Department for Education.
- Seeks an unrealistic outcome.
- Refuses to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcomes sought by raising the complaint, despite offers of assistance.
- Refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of a complaint's procedure.
- Insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the adopted complaints procedure or with good practice.
- Makes excessive demands on school time by frequent, lengthy, complicated and stressful contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and/or by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with.

A complaint may also be considered unreasonable if the person making the complaint does so face-to-face, by telephone, in writing or electronically:

- Maliciously.
- Aggressively, using threats, intimidation or violence.
- Using abusive, offensive or discriminatory language.
- Knowing it to be false.
- Using falsified information.
- Publishing unacceptable information in a variety of media such as in social media websites and newspapers.

Where aggression has been used add:

Please desist from using aggressive, abusive behaviour against the school staff or I may have to

- Ask you to leave the school premises.
- Inform the police.
- If necessary, bar you from being on school premises, which I have the right to do.

Once again, I now ask you to desist from contacting the school in connection with this complaint.

Yours sincerely, Headteacher

Appendix E. Policy for managing serial and unreasonable complaints

St Mary's is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, and to providing a high-quality service to those who complain. We will not normally limit the contact complainants have with our school. However, we do not expect our staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour and will take action to protect staff from that behaviour, including that which is abusive, offensive or threatening.

St Mary's defines unreasonable behaviour as that which hinders our consideration of complaints because of the frequency or nature of the complainant's contact with the school, such as, if the complainant:

- refuses to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcomes sought by raising the complaint, despite offers of assistance
- refuses to co-operate with the complaints investigation process
- refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of the complaints procedure
- insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the complaints procedure or with good practice
- introduces trivial or irrelevant information which they expect to be considered and commented on
- raises large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions, and insists they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales
- makes unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues, and seeks to have them replaced
- changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds
- repeatedly makes the same complaint (despite previous investigations or responses concluding that the complaint is groundless or has been addressed)
- refuses to accept the findings of the investigation into that complaint where the school's complaint procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed including referral to the Department for Education
- seeks an unrealistic outcome
- makes excessive demands on school time by frequent, lengthy and complicated contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with
- uses threats to intimidate

- uses abusive, offensive or discriminatory language or violence
- knowingly provides falsified information
- Publishes unacceptable information on social media or other public forums.

Complainants should try to limit their communication with the school that relates to their complaint, while the complaint is being progressed. It is not helpful if repeated correspondence is sent (either by letter, phone, email or text), as it could delay the outcome being reached.

Whenever possible, the Headteacher or Chair of Governors will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying an '*unreasonable*' marking.

If the behaviour continues, the Headteacher will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and ask them to change it. For complainants who excessively contact St Mary's causing a significant level of disruption, we may specify methods of communication and limit the number of contacts in a communication plan. This will be reviewed after six months. **In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, we will immediately inform the police and communicate our actions in writing. This may include barring an individual from St Mary's.**