

Complaints Policy

We believe that at St Gabriel's provides a good education for all our pupils, and that all our staff work very hard to build positive relationships with all parents and carers. At St Gabriel's we welcome suggestions and comments from parents for improving our work. We issue a questionnaire to canvas parents' opinions. We encourage parents to discuss any queries about their child's work, progress or welfare with teachers, and have established means for doing this.

Aims and Ethos

If parents have a concern we would like to hear about it, so that we can try to resolve it quickly. If parents wish to make a complaint, they should use the procedure outlined below.

We will endeavour to deal with your concerns promptly and fairly. All concerns will be dealt with seriously. We aim to resolve any complaint through dialogue and mutual understanding and, in all cases, we put the interests of the child first.

Our relationship with parents and their child(ren) will not be affected if parents express dissatisfaction.

Parents' expectations of the School

Parents who raise an informal or formal concern or complaint can expect the School to:

- respect confidentiality at all times
- respond with courtesy and respect
- respond within a reasonable time
- be available for consultation within reasonable time limits
- attempt to resolve problems using reasonable means in line with the School's policies
- regularly communicate to parents
- keep parents informed of progress towards a resolution of the issues raised
- communicate the existence of this policy

The School's expectations of parents

The School can expect parents who wish to raise problems with the School to:

- respect confidentiality at all times
- treat all School staff with courtesy and respect
- respect the needs and well-being of pupils and staff within the School
- avoid any aggression, verbal abuse or threats
- recognise the time constraints under which members of staff in Schools work and allow the School a reasonable time to respond
- understand that the School has a complaints procedure which it must follow

Step 1

It is natural that parents may, occasionally, be concerned about an aspect of their child's education or welfare at School. This could include issues concerning the School's approach to aspects of the curriculum, homework, behavioural problems or any other issue.

Most concerns and complaints are resolved quickly and informally by parents speaking with their child's teacher. Staff are happy to explain our School practices, policies, and how they affect the pupils. If in doubt, please keep asking until you are completely satisfied as all staff are eager to help. The teacher will make sure that s/he understands what the parent feels went wrong and they will also explain their actions.

Where a parent feels a concern relates to a child who is or may be in danger of harm, they have a duty to report this immediately to a member of staff who will ensure that proper child protection procedures are followed. Please refer to the School's Child Protection Policy

Step 2

If parents are dissatisfied with the teacher's response they can raise their concerns with the Headteacher (or designate) in writing or by making an appointment to discuss the issue.

The Headteacher will investigate the complaint and may interview any staff or pupils involved. The parent will then receive a response to your complaint.

We encourage any parent who has a concern that they feel unable to discuss with their class teacher to informally speak or write to the Headteacher to resolve the matter.

The School would expect that most complaints be resolved at this stage.

Step 3

Should a parent be unhappy with the Headteacher's response to the complaint, or have a complaint about the Headteacher, s/he should contact the Chair of Governors, who is obliged to investigate the complaint. The Chair of Governors will do all s/he can to resolve the issue informally through a dialogue with all parties, but if a parent is unhappy with the outcome, s/he can make a formal complaint, as outlined below. Of course, this does not mean that in every case they will come around to parent's points of view, but it will help parents and the School to understand all sides of the question; it may also help to prevent a similar thing arising again.

- A formal complaint must be made in writing to the Chair of Governors, stating the nature of the complaint and why they are unhappy with the way the School has handled it so far.
- The Chair of Governors (or designate) should normally acknowledge the complaint within 5 School days, clarify where necessary and give a target date for providing a response. This would normally be within 15 School days.
- The Chair (or designate) will undertake an investigation of the matter, normally involving:
 - inviting the complainant to a meeting to discuss the issue. The complainant should be given reasonable notice of the meeting and be entitled to be accompanied by a friend.

- gathering information in relation to the complaint, by interviewing members of staff, witnesses, taking and/or reviewing statements etc.
- keeping appropriate written notes of all of the above.
- The purpose of the Chair's investigation will normally be to assess whether or not the initial complaint was handled appropriately and/or whether appropriate procedures were followed and actions were taken.
- The Chair (or designate) will communicate the conclusion of their investigation in writing to the complainant and provide the complainant with the option of a review by the Complaints Panel of the Governing Body (see next stage)

Stage 4 – Review by the Complaints Panel of the Governing Body

If the complainant is not happy with response of the Chair of Governors, they may write to the Clerk of the Governing Body explaining clearly on what grounds they are unhappy and request that the complaint be considered by the Complaints Panel of the Governing Body.

Review will normally be conducted through a consideration of written submissions, but reasonable requests to make oral representations should be considered sympathetically.

Complaints Panel

Any review of the process followed by the School will be conducted by a panel of 3 members of the Governing Body, chosen from a pool of governors appointed by the Governing Body. Panel members should not include:

- the Headteacher
- the Governor who dealt with the complaint in Stage 3 (normally the Chair of Governors)
- staff or parent governors except in exceptional circumstances

Time scales

- The complainant's letter should normally be acknowledged and Governing Body Panel informed within 5 School days of receipt.
- The Panel sets a date to meet as soon as reasonably practical and usually within 15 School days of the acknowledgement date of the letter.
- Governors Panel obtains reports from the Headteacher, complainants, Chair of Governors and any further information/documentation required within 5 School days before the meeting
- If the Panel cannot meet because the end of term is less than 15 days from the date of acknowledgement of the letter of complaint, it should usually meet within 10 days of the start of the new term.
- The Governing Body Panel will communicate their findings to all parties concerned within 10 School days.

The decision of the Panel is **final** and the matter will then be closed as far as the School is concerned.

Beyond the School

- The local authority has no formal authority to investigate School complaints or impose remedies, nor can it overturn the decisions of the Governing Body. However they may provide advice to both complainants and the School.
- A complaint may be made to the Secretary of State for Education if a person believes that the Governing Body or local authority is acting “unreasonably” or is failing to carry out its statutory duties properly. Such a complaint is unlikely to be successful where a School can show that it has acted reasonably in seeking to resolve a complaint and has used a “fair” procedure.

Vexatious complaints

We will do all we can to help to resolve a complaint against the School but sometimes it is simply not possible to meet all of the complainant’s wishes. Sometimes it is simply a case of “agreeing to disagree”.

If a complainant persists in making representations to the School – to the Headteacher, Designated Governor, Chair of Governors or anyone else - this can be extremely time-consuming and can detract from our responsibility to look after the interests of all the children in our care.

For this reason, we are entitled to close correspondence (including personal approaches, as well as letters and telephone calls) on persistent complainants where we feel that we have taken all reasonable action to resolve the complaint, or where we feel that there is harassment.

Who is a persistent complainant?

A persistent complainant is a parent/carer or member of the public who complains about issues, either formally or informally, or frequently raises issues that the complainant considers to be within the remit of the School and whose behaviour is unreasonable. Such behaviour may be characterised by:

- actions which are obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific, repetitious and/or
- prolific correspondence or excessive e-mail or telephone contact about a concern or complaint
- an insistence upon pursuing unmeritorious complaints and/or unreasonable outcomes
- an insistence upon pursuing meritorious complaints in an unreasonable manner

Harassment

The Chair of Governors will also close correspondence where there is the unreasonable pursuit of such actions that:

- appear to be targeted over a significant period of time on one or more members of School staff
- cause ongoing distress to individual member(s) of School staff
- have a significant adverse effect on the whole/parts of the School community

Anonymous complaints

Complaints that are made anonymously will be handled at the discretion of the School and may be considered using other procedures, depending on the nature of the complaint. For example, anonymous complaints relating to (or appearing to relate to) a child protection matter or alleged criminal activity may be referred immediately to the relevant authorities.

General time limits

Except in exceptional circumstances, or where it raises a child protection or other legal issue, we will not normally consider concerns or complaints more than 2 months after the event being complained of. The decision of the School as to whether or not to proceed will be final.

The Governing Body approved this policy in Autumn 2014

Reviewed by the Staffing and Community Committee Spring 2016

Next review Spring 2017