St Catherine's Catholic Primary School

"Loving and Learning Together as Jesus taught us"

Complaints Procedure

Policy Reviewed January 2026

Next Review: January 2027

"Loving and Learning Together as Jesus taught us"

Complaints Procedure

Who can make a complaint?

This complaints procedure is mainly aimed at parents or carers of children who are registered at St Catherine's School, but it is not limited to them.

Any member of the public may make a complaint to St Catherine's about any provision of facilities or services that the school provides.

Children who attend St Catherine's have their own complaints procedure drawn up using the Common Principles for a Child Friendly Complaints Process outlined by the Children's Commissioner.

Unless complaints are dealt with under separate statutory procedures (such as appeals relating to exclusions or admissions), the school will use this complaints procedure.

The difference between a concern and a complaint

A concern may be defined as '*an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought'*. A complaint may be defined as '*an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action*'.

It is in everyone's interest that concerns and complaints are resolved at the earliest opportunity. Many issues can be resolved informally, without the need to use the formal stages of the complaints procedure. St Catherine's takes concerns seriously and will make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.

If you have difficulty discussing a concern with a particular member of staff, the Business Manager will refer you to another staff member. Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels unable to deal with a concern, the Business Manager will refer you to another staff member. The member of staff may be more senior but does not have to be. The ability to consider the concern objectively and impartially is more important.

We understand however, that there are occasions when people would like to raise their concerns formally. In this case, St Catherine's will attempt to resolve the issue internally, through the stages outlined within this complaints procedure.

How to raise a concern or make a complaint

A concern or complaint can be made in person, in writing or by telephone. They may also be made by a third party acting on behalf on a complainant, as long as they

have appropriate consent to do so.

Concerns should be raised with either the class teacher, the Key Stage Leaders and then the Headteacher. If the issue remains unresolved, the next step is to make a formal complaint.

Complainants should not approach individual governors to raise concerns or complaints. They have no power to act on an individual basis and it may also prevent them from considering complaints at stage 2 of the procedure.

Complaints about members of staff (other than the Headteacher) should be submitted to the Headteacher using the editable PDF Complaint Form provided at the end of this policy. The form is limited to 2,000 characters and must be emailed to office@stcatherines.barnetmail.net with the subject line "Complaint Form - Private and Confidential"**.** Additional correspondence, including separate emails or letters, will not be accepted.

Complaints concerning the Headteacher should be addressed to the Chair of Governors using the same editable PDF Complaint Form. The completed form must be emailed **to** office@stcatherines.barnetmail.net with the subject line "Complaint Form - Private and Confidential"**.** Please note that the form is limited to 2,000 characters, and additional correspondence will not be accepted.

Complaints about the Chair of Governors, any individual governor or the whole governing body should be addressed to Ms Winston (the clerk to the governing body) using the editable PDF Complaint Form provided at the end of this policy. The form is limited to 2000 characters and must be emailed to office@stcatherines.barnetmail.net with the subject line "Complaint Form – Clerk to the Governors Private and Confidential"**.** Additional correspondence, including separate emails or letters, will not be accepted.

If you require help in completing the editable PDF Complaint Form, please contact the school office. You can also ask third party organisations such as Citizens Advice to help you.

In accordance with equality law, we will consider making reasonable adjustments if required, to enable complainants to access and complete this complaints procedure. For instance, providing information in alternative formats such as handwritten letter (limited to 2000 characters), assisting complainants in raising a formal complaint or hold meetings with staff in accessible locations.

Anonymous complaints

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

Duplicate complaints

If, after closing a complaint at the end of the complaints procedure, we receive a duplicate complaint from a spouse, a partner, a grandparent or a child not attending

this school, we will remind them that we have already considered the complaint and the local process is complete. Complainants will be advised to contact the DfE if they are dissatisfied with our handling of the complaint.

Complaint campaigns

If we receive what we consider to be a large volume of complaints, all based on the same subject and possibly from complainants not connected to the school, then we will treat these complaints as being part of a campaign and respond in one of the following two ways, depending upon the nature and scale of the complaint:

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

Timescales

Complainants must raise the complaint within three months of the incident, or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within three months of the last of these incidents. We will consider complaints made outside of this time frame if exceptional circumstances apply.

Complaints received outside of term time

We will consider complaints made outside of term time to have been received on the first school day after the holiday period.

Scope of this complaints procedure

This procedure covers all complaints about any provision of community facilities or services by St Catherine's, other than complaints that are dealt with under other statutory procedures, including those listed below.

Exceptions	**Who to contact**
• Admissions to schools • Statutory assessments of special educational needs • School re-organisation proposals	Concerns about admissions, statutory assessments of special educational needs or school reorganisation proposals should be raised with Barnet Local Authority.
• Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation	Complaints about child protection matters are handled under our child protection and safeguarding policy and in accordance with relevant statutory guidance. If you have serious concerns, you may wish to contact the local authority designated officer (LADO) who has local responsibility for safeguarding or the Family Access and Support (FAS) formerly MASH LADO 0208 359 4528 FAS 0208 359 4066
• Exclusion of children from school*	Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at www.gov.uk/school-discipline-

	exclusions/exclusions.
• Whistleblowing	We have an internal whistleblowing procedure for all our employees, including temporary staff and contractors. The secretary of state for education is the prescribed person for matters relating to education for whistle-blowers in education who do not want to raise matters direct with their employer. Referrals can be made at www.education.gov.uk/contactus. Volunteer staff who have concerns about our school should complain through the school's complaints procedure. You may also be able to complain direct to the local authority or the DfE (see link above), depending on the substance of your complaint.
• Staff grievances	Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the school's internal grievance procedures.
• Staff conduct	Complaints about staff will be dealt with under the school's internal disciplinary procedures, if appropriate. Complainants will not be informed of any disciplinary action taken against a staff member as a result of a complaint. However, the complainant will be notified that the matter is being addressed.
• 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. Please contact them direct.
• National curriculum - content	Please contact the DfE at www.education.gov.uk/contactus

If other bodies are investigating aspects of the complaint, for example the police, local authority (LA) safeguarding teams or tribunals, this may impact on our ability to adhere to the timescales within this procedure or result in the procedure being suspended until those public bodies have completed their investigations.

If a complainant commences legal action against St Catherine's in relation to their complaint, we will consider whether to suspend the complaints procedure in relation to their complaint until those legal proceedings have concluded.

Resolving complaints

At each stage in the procedure, St Catherine's wants to resolve the complaint. If appropriate, we will acknowledge that the complaint is upheld in whole or in part. In addition, we may offer one or more of the following:

- an explanation;

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

Withdrawal of a complaint

If a complainant wants to withdraw their complaint, we will ask them to confirm this in writing.

Stage 1

- Formal complaints must be made to the Headteacher (unless they are about the Headteacher), via the school office. This must be done using the editable PDF Complaint Form provided at the end of this policy, or in person or in person, or by telephone. The Headteacher will record the date the complaint is received and will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 5 school days. Within this response, the Headteacher will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, ask what remains unresolved and what outcome the complainant would like to see. The Headteacher can consider whether a face to face meeting is the most appropriate way of doing this.

During the investigation, the Headteacher will:

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

At the conclusion of their investigation, the Headteacher will provide a formal written response within 7 school days of the date of receipt of the complaint. If the Headteacher is unable to meet this deadline, they will provide the complainant with an update and revised response date.

The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions St Catherine's will take to resolve the complaint.

The Headteacher will advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 1. If the complaint is about the Headteacher or a member of the governing body (including the Chair or Vice-Chair), a suitably skilled governor will be appointed to complete all the actions at Stage 1.

Complaints about the Headteacher must be made to the Chair of Governors via the school office. This must be done using the editable PDF Complaint Form provided at the end of this policy. Complaints about a member of the governing body must be made to the clerk, via the school office This must be done using the editable PDF Complaint Form provided at the end of this policy.

If the complaint is jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair, or the entire governing body, or the majority of the governing body, stage 1 will be considered by an independent investigator appointed by the governing body or Westminster Diocese.

At the conclusion of its investigation, the independent investigator will provide a formal written response.

Stage 2

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome at stage 1 and wishes to take the matter further, they can escalate the complaint to stage 2 – by writing to the Chair via the school office. This must be done using the editable PDF Complaint Form provided at the end of this policy. The Chair will pass on the complaint to members of the governing body's Complaints Committee, which will be formed of the first three, impartial, governors available. This is the final stage of the complaints procedure.

A request to escalate to stage 2 must be made to the Chair, via the school office, within 7 school days of receipt of the stage 1 response. This must be done using the editable PDF Complaint Form provided at the end of this policy.

The Chair will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 5 school days.
Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.

The Complaint Committee will aim to convene a meeting within 7 school days of receipt of the stage 2 request. If this is not possible, the Chair will keep the complainant informed.

The Complaints Committee will consist of at least three governors with no prior involvement or knowledge of the complaint. Prior to their meeting, they will decide among themselves who will act as the chair of the Complaints Committee. If there are fewer than three governors from St Catherine's available, the clerk will source any additional, independent governors through another local school to make up the committee. Alternatively, an entirely independent committee may be convened to hear the complaint at stage 2.

The Complaints Committee will deal with the complaint through written representations, and will be sensitive to the complainant's needs.

The Complaints Committee will not review any new complaints at this stage or consider evidence unrelated to the initial complaint to be included. New complaints must be dealt with from stage 1 of the procedure.

The meeting will be held in private. The Complaints Committee will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented.
The Complaints Committee can:

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

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

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

The Chair of the Complaints Committee will provide the complainant and St Catherine's with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within 5 school days.

The letter to the complainant will include details of how to contact the DfE if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled by St Catherine's.

If the complaint is jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair or the entire governing body or the majority of the governing body, stage 2 will be heard by a committee of independent governors.

The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions St Catherine's will take to resolve the complaint.

The response will also advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied.

Next steps

If the complainant believes the school did not handle their complaint in accordance with the published complaints procedure or they acted unlawfully or unreasonably in the exercise of their duties under education law, they can contact the Department for Education after they have completed Stage 2.

The DfE will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by St Catherine's. They will consider whether St Catherine's has adhered to education legislation and any statutory policies connected with the complaint.

The complainant can refer their complaint to the DfE online at www.education.gov.uk/contactus, by telephone on 0370 000 2288 or by writing to:

Department for Education
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

Managing Serial and Unreasonable Complaints

St Catherine's 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 our school. However, we do not expect our staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour and will act to protect staff from that behaviour, including that which is abusive, offensive or threatening.
St Catherine's Primary School 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. If repeated correspondence is sent (either by editable PDF Form, letter, phone, email or text), this cannot be considered and 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 Catherine's Primary School 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 Catherine's Primary School.

Complaint Form

Please complete and return to office@stcatherines.barnetmail.net for the attention of the Headteacher or Chair of Governors, who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

Your name:
Pupil's name (if relevant):
Please give details of your complaint, including whether you have spoken to anybody at the school about it. (2000 Character Limit)
Signature & date:
Official use Date acknowledgement sent: By who: Complaint referred to: Date: