

# **ST MONICA'S CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL**

## **Complaints Procedure**

**Adopted by the Governing Body  
on 12 November 2010  
Reviewed March 2013  
Reviewed June 2014**

## **Introduction**

No-one likes criticism but an open organisation will always be willing to listen to concerns and anxieties and be ready to learn from them if appropriate. In a school, most concerns are likely to be expressed by parents of its pupils, though some may come from pupils themselves, parishioners, or from other interested parties such as neighbours or users of the premises.

In a Catholic school, parental concerns are of particular importance. As the first educators of their children, parents have a duty to take an active interest in their school. "Since parents have given children their life, they are bound by the most serious obligation to educate their offspring." (*Gravissimum Educationis*). To this end, "there must be the closest co-operation between parents and the teachers to whom they entrust their children to be educated. In fulfilling their task, teachers are to collaborate closely with the parents and willingly listen to them." (Can.796) In a Catholic School, therefore, dealing with parental concerns will be an intrinsic part of the school's ethos and mission. In addition, terms of reference for governing bodies now include the legal obligation to "be open about the decisions they make and the actions they take and in particular ..... to explain their decisions and actions to interested parties". (The Education (School Government) (Terms of Reference) (England) Regulations 2000). Thus a climate of openness and partnership is essential.

### **1. Purpose of the Complaints Procedure**

This procedure aims to reassure parents and others with an interest in the school that:

- any complaint against the school will be dealt with in a fair, open and responsive way, with the aim of achieving a speedy and satisfactory resolution; and
- the school recognises that a willingness to listen to questions and criticism and to respond positively, can lead to improvements in school practices and provision for pupils.

### **2. Scope of the Procedure**

- 2.1 A complaint is defined as a clear statement of dissatisfaction about any specified aspect of the school's work.
- 2.2 This procedure deals with specified day-to-day complaints against the management and/or operation of the school which fall outside the scope of the following procedures:
  - Complaints which have an alternative statutory avenue of appeal or complaint, i.e. admissions, exclusions, SEN assessments, Section 409 Curriculum Complaints and those covered by the Education (School Records) Regulations 1989.
  - Serious complaints that must be dealt with by specific employment procedures
  - Allegations relating to abuse of children or vulnerable adults.

- 2.3 Complainants may be anyone e.g. parents, guardians, grandparents, neighbours of the school or anyone with an interest in the work of the school. However, it is expected that it will be mainly parents or guardians who will make use of this procedure. The term 'parent' is therefore used throughout the procedure as a generic term but the procedure also applies in relation to any other type of complainant.
- 2.4 Complaints may be made by telephone, e-mail, in person or be written.

### **3. General**

- 3.1 The school and/or parent may request advice or guidance from Enfield Council's Education, Children's Services and Leisure department at any stage in the procedure. In particular, the Council offers advice on the application of the procedure in practice at each stage and ensuring the matter is being dealt with appropriately. The Council is not responsible, however, for investigating the complaint or for making decisions on the outcomes.
- 3.2 Records of all conversations and meetings with parents to resolve complaints will be kept. To help prevent recurring complaints, copies of correspondence and notes will be kept on file in the school's records, separately from individual pupil records.
- 3.3 If at any stage in the procedure it becomes apparent that for any reason the complaint falls outside of this general complaints procedure, parents will be informed.
- 3.4 There may be rare occasions when, despite all the stages of the procedure having been followed, a parent remains dissatisfied. If the parent seeks to re-open the same issue, the school reserves the right to inform him/her in writing that the procedure has been exhausted and the matter is closed.

### **4. Stage 1: Informal Stage**

- 4.1 On occasion, a parent may raise a concern directly with school staff informally. At this stage, it may be unclear whether the parent is making a complaint or seeking information or clarification. In any event, the school aims to resolve the concern at this point in a speedy and effective way.
- 4.2 If the concern is not resolved immediately and the parent confirms a complaint, the opportunity to discuss the matter with a member of the Senior Management Team will be given. In the case of complaint about a decision or action by the Head Teacher, this stage will always be heard directly by the Head Teacher her/himself.
- 4.3 The member of staff will discuss the issue with the parent and those involved in school, with the aim of resolving the complaint as soon as possible. The parent will be informed, **within 10 school days of the discussion**, of the outcome of the investigation and what action, if any, the school proposes to take.
- 4.4 The parent will be advised of their right to request that the complaint is considered formally at stage two of this procedure if they are dissatisfied with the response and resolution offered at Stage 1.

- 4.5 If wishing to proceed with the complaint, the parent will be invited to put the complaint in writing to the Head Teacher using the form attached at Appendix 1. The form should be sent to the Head Teacher **within ten school days of receipt of the Stage 1 response.**

## 5. Stage 2: Referral to the Chair of Governors or Head Teacher for further investigation

- 5.1 Where the complaint has been addressed by the Head Teacher at Stage 1, this stage will be heard by the Chair of Governors. Where another staff member has addressed the complaint at Stage 1, this stage will be heard by the Head Teacher.
- 5.2 The Chair of Governors or Head Teacher will acknowledge the written complaint **within five school days of receipt** and provide an opportunity for the parent to meet with them to discuss the complaint.
- 5.3 The Chair of Governors or Head Teacher will investigate the complaint and a written response will normally be made **within ten school days of receipt of the complaint.** If this is not possible, a letter will be sent explaining the reason for the delay and providing a revised target date.
- 5.4 The written response will include full reasons for the conclusions reached by the Chair of Governors or Head Teacher and what action, if any, the school proposes to take to resolve the matter.
- 5.5 If the parent still remains dissatisfied, (s)he will be advised that, in order to progress the complaint further at Stage 3, (s)he must notify the Clerk to the Governing Body in writing **within ten school days of receipt of the Stage 2 response**, setting out what issues are outstanding and what outcome (s)he is hoping for.
- 5.6 The Clerk will then ensure that the parent is offered the opportunity of taking the complaint to the Governors' Complaints Panel at Stage 3 of this Procedure.

## 6. Stage 3: Review by the Governors' Complaints Panel

- 6.1 Complaints only rarely reach this level. However, when the need arises, the Governors' Complaints Panel (GCP), established according to the suggested composition detailed in Appendix 2 attached, will consider complaints at this stage.
- 6.2 A written acknowledgement of the complaint and the request for it to be heard at Stage 3 of the Procedure will be sent to the parent by the Clerk to the Governors within **five school days of receipt.**

The letter will inform the parent that the complaint will be heard by the GCP **within twenty school days of receiving the complaint.** It will also inform the parent of the right to submit any further documents other than the complaint form and that these must be made available to the Clerk to the Governors within **five school days of receipt of the acknowledgement letter.** The right to call witnesses to the meeting, subject to the approval of the Chair of the GCP, and the right of the parent to be accompanied by a companion of her/his choice, will also be explained in the letter.

- 6.3 The Clerk to the Governors will send a copy of the letter of acknowledgement of the complaint to the Chair of Governors and/or Head Teacher and request a written report in response to the complaint to the GCP **within five school days of receipt of the letter**. The right to call witnesses, subject to the approval of the Chair, will also be explained.
- 6.4 The Clerk to the Governors will then convene a GCP meeting, having consulted with all parties on convenient times. The date, time and venue for the meeting will then be confirmed at least **five school days in advance of the meeting**.
- 6.5 The names of all parties and witnesses (if any) to attend the meeting and all relevant documents to be referred to at the meeting will also be provided by the Chair of the GCP to:
- The parent;
  - The Chair of Governors and/or Head Teacher;
  - Each panel member.
- This will be provided as soon as possible and, in any event, **at least five school days prior to the meeting**.
- 6.6 The meeting will be held following the procedures for hearing a complaint detailed in Appendix 3.
- 6.7 A written decision will be sent to both the parent and the Chair of Governors and/or Head Teacher by the Chair of the GCP **within ten school days of the hearing**.
- 6.8 The letter will explain that the decision of the Governors' Complaints Panel represents the end of the school's complaint procedure and what options remain open to the parent if they remain dissatisfied.

**Appendix 1**  
**Complaint Form (Stage 2 and/or Stage 3)**

Child's Name (to whom issue relates)

Class/ Form/ Tutor Group

Parent/Guardian

Contact details (including mobile telephone no. if appropriate)

**Details of Complaint:**

*(Please be as specific as possible e.g. giving dates, who was involved and where etc.)  
Please attach a continuation sheet/additional information if you wish*

What would you like to see done to resolve your complaint and bring the matter to an acceptable close for yourself and the school?

Signed

Date -----

Please return the completed form to the **Chair of Governors or Head Teacher** at the school.

## **Appendix 2**

### **Composition of the Governors' Complaints Panel**

The Governors' Complaints Panel (GCP) should consist of three members of the Governing Body. A Chair of the GCP should also be appointed.

The Governing Body may decide to appoint the three members annually, together with three reserves, designated in the order in which they would be called upon to stand in order to ensure that three governors will be available to meet within the timescales. The Governing Body may wish to consider the advantages of having a parent governor as a member of the panel.

No member of the GCP should have had prior involvement with the complaint. As the Chair of the Governing Body may be involved at an earlier stage in the procedure (particularly where the complaint is about the Head Teacher) it may be wise not to include the Chair as a member of the GCP to avoid any possible reference to the Chair being "tainted".

It is not considered appropriate for the Head Teacher to be a member of the GCP. The role of the Head Teacher would be to attend the panel hearing to give evidence and s/he may choose to invite staff directly involved in matters raised by the complainant (subject to the approval of the Chair of the GCP).

### **Appendix 3**

## **Governors' Complaints Panel**

### **Procedures for Hearing the Complaint**

#### **Introduction**

The aim of the meeting is to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the parent.

The Chair of the Governors' Complaints Panel (GCP) will ensure that the meeting is properly minuted.

Although the meeting will follow the structured order below, given potential sensitivities and anxieties, the Chair will endeavour to ensure that the proceedings are as informal as possible and that all parties are put at their ease.

The introduction of new information or witnesses, previously not notified to all parties, would be reason to adjourn the meeting so that everyone has time to consider and respond to the new information.

#### **Order of the meeting**

1. The Chair welcomes the parent and his/her companion and the Head Teacher and the Chair of Governors (where the complaint has been addressed by the Chair of Governors at stage 2) and introduces the GCP.
2. The Chair explains the purpose of the meeting, the procedure, and that all written evidence has been made available to all parties.
3. The parent/companion explains the complaint, calling in witnesses if appropriate.
4. The GCP may question the parent/companion and witnesses.
5. The Head Teacher/Chair of Governors present a response to the complaint, including action taken to address the complaint at stage 1 and 2 of the procedure and calling witnesses, if appropriate.
6. The GCP may question the Head Teacher/Chair of Governors.
1. The Head Teacher, together with the Chair of Governors, where applicable, is invited make a final statement.
2. The parent/companion is invited make a final statement.
3. The parent/companion, Head Teacher and Chair of Governors retire.
10. The GCP considers the complaint and reaches a unanimous or majority decision. The GCP also decides what action (if any) to take to resolve the complaint and, if appropriate, recommends changes to ensure similar complaints are not made in future. The GCP has the authority to reinvestigate the complaint should they feel this is appropriate.
11. The outcomes are confirmed in writing to both parties in accordance with paragraphs 6.8 and 6.9 of the Complaints Procedure.