

COMPLAINTS POLICY AND PROCEDURE

St Bartholomew's Primary School

Date agreed by Governing Board	November 2025
Signature of Chair of Governors	*Bettina Carlyon*
Signature of Headteacher	*Daniel Meyer*
Date to be reviewed by Governing Board	November 2026

This version supersedes all previous versions of this policy.

COMPLAINTS POLICY AND PROCEDURE 2025-26

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. As a Church of England School, Christian values are at the heart of all we do. We value our relationship with parents and all members of the school and local community. If you have a concern, we want to know about it so that it can be dealt with swiftly. Most concerns can be dealt with easily and quickly, but to ensure all concerns are handled effectively the Governing Body has adopted a complaints policy and procedure.

1.2. The School's Complaints Procedure is devised with the intention that it will:

- usually be possible to resolve problems by informal means;
- be simple to use and understand;
- treat complaints confidentially;
- allow problems to be handled swiftly;
- inform future practice so that a problem is unlikely to recur;
- reaffirm the partnership between parents, staff and governors as we work together for the good of the pupils in the school;
- ensure that the school's attitude to a pupil will never be affected by a parental complaint;
- discourage anonymous complaints;
- actively encourage strong home-school links;
- ensure that any person complained against has equal rights with the person making the complaint;
- be subject to a regular review cycle.

2. WHO CAN MAKE A COMPLAINT?

2.1. This complaints procedure is not limited to parents or carers of children that are registered at the school. Any person, including members of the public or volunteers at the school, may make a complaint to St Bartholomew's Primary about any provision of facilities or services that we provide. Unless the subject of a complaint should instead be dealt with under separate statutory procedures (detailed at the end of this document), we will use this complaints procedure.

3. THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A CONCERN AND A FORMAL COMPLAINT

3.1. 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 formal complaint may be defined as '*an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action*'.

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

3.3. If you have difficulty discussing a concern with a particular member of staff, we will respect your views. In these cases, the headteacher will refer you to another staff member. Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels unable to deal with a concern, the headteacher 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.

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

3.5. Those with a concern or a complaint should not approach individual governors with them. 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.

4. HOW DO I RAISE A CONCERN?

4.1. Concerns should be raised with either the class teacher, a member of the leadership team or the headteacher. If the concern remains unresolved, the next step is to make a formal complaint.

4.2. We would like you to tell us about your concern so that we can discuss with you how best to resolve it. The majority of concerns can be resolved informally by speaking to a member of staff. We welcome suggestions for improving our work in the school. Whatever your concern, please know that we shall treat it as strictly confidential.

4.3. Be assured that our support and respect for you and your child in the school will not be affected in any way; please do not delay telling us of your concern. It is difficult for us to properly investigate an incident which is more than a day or two old.

4.4. After hearing your concern, we will act as quickly as we can; we will let you know the timescale within which you may expect a response. Please allow time for any action we may take to be effective.

4.5. Please contact your child's class teacher or another appropriate member of staff and arrange a time when you can discuss your concern. It may be possible for you to see the member of staff straight away but normally it is better to make an appointment so that you can sit and talk things through. It may be possible to give a response immediately, but where any investigation or information is required, a response will be given within five days.

5. HOW DO I RAISE A FORMAL COMPLAINT?

5.1. If you have not been able to resolve your concern informally, or the circumstances justify it, you may raise a formal complaint. Complaints against school staff (except the headteacher) should be made, in the first instance, to the headteacher via the school office using the school complaints form**.**

5.2. Complaints against the headteacher should be addressed to the Chair of Governors, via the school office using the school complaints form. Complaints about the Chair of Governors, any individual governor or the whole governing body should be addressed to the Clerk to the Governing Body, via the school office using the school complaints form. Any other complaints should be addressed to the headteacher via the school office using the school complaints form.

5.3. All such complaints should be marked as 'urgent and confidential'. If you require help in completing the school complaints form, please contact the school office, and assistance will be provided to you. You can also ask third-party organisations like Citizens Advice to help you.

5.4. 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, assisting complainants in raising a formal complaint or holding meetings in accessible locations.

6. ANONYMOUS COMPLAINTS

6.1. The school will not normally investigate anonymous complaints. Either the headteacher or Chair of Governors (depending on who is the subject of the complaint) will determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation.

7. TIMESCALES FOR COMPLAINTS

7.1. You 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. The school will only consider complaints made outside of this time frame if exceptional circumstances apply.

8. COMPLAINTS RECEIVED OUTSIDE OF TERM TIME

8.1. The school will consider complaints made outside of term time to have been received on the first school day after the holiday period (when the school is open for educational sessions).

9. RESOLVING COMPLAINTS

9.1. At each stage in the procedure, St Bartholomew's Primary 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.

Please note that in certain circumstances, for example, if the outcome of an investigation is related to safeguarding or employment law, full details of the outcome of an investigation may not be shared with the complainant.

10. WITHDRAWAL OF A COMPLAINT

10.1. If a complainant wishes to withdraw their complaint, we will ask them to confirm this in writing to the school office.

11. STAGE 1

11.1. Formal complaints must be made to the headteacher, via the school office. This must be submitted in writing using the school complaints form. If you require help in completing the school complaints form, please contact the school office, and assistance will be provided to you.

11.2. 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 3 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. Note: The headteacher may delegate the investigation to another member of the school's senior leadership team but not the decision to be taken.

11.3. During the investigation, the headteacher (or investigator) will:

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

11.4. At the conclusion of their investigation, the headteacher will provide a formal written response within 15 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.

11.5. 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 Bartholomew's Primary will take to resolve the complaint.

11.6. The headteacher will advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 1.

11.7. 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 detailed above at Stage 1. Complaints about the headteacher or member of the governing body must be made directly to the Clerk, via the school office. The complaint should be marked as 'urgent and confidential'.

11.8. If the complaint is jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair; the entire governing body; the majority of the governing body; or other circumstances justify it, Stage 1 will be considered by an independent investigator appointed by the governing body. At the conclusion of their investigation, the independent investigator will provide a formal written response.

12. STAGE 2

12.1. 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 – involvement of members of the governing body's complaints panel, which will be formed of three impartial governors.

12.2. A request to escalate to Stage 2 must be made to the Clerk, via the school office marked 'urgent and confidential', within 10 school days of receipt of the Stage 1 response.

12.3. The Clerk will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 3 school days. Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.

12.4. The Clerk will write to the complainant to inform them of the date of the meeting. They will aim to convene a meeting within 20 school days of receipt of the Stage 2 request. If this is not possible, the Clerk will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed. If the complainant rejects the offer of three proposed dates without good reason, the Clerk will decide when to hold the meeting. It will then proceed in the complainant's absence on the basis of written submissions from both parties.

12.5. The complaints panel will consist of at least three governors with no prior involvement or knowledge of the complaint. Prior to the meeting, they will decide amongst themselves who will act as the chair of the complaints panel. If there are fewer than three governors from St Bartholomew's Primary available, the Clerk will source any additional, independent governors through another local school or through their LA's Governor Services team, in order to make up the panel.

12.6. The panel will decide whether to deal with the complaint by inviting parties to a meeting or through written representations, but in making their decision they will be sensitive to the complainant's needs.

12.7. If the complainant is invited to attend the meeting, they may bring someone along to provide support. This can be a relative or friend. Generally, we do not encourage either party to bring legal representatives to the panel meeting. However, there may be occasions when legal representation is appropriate, with the consent of the chair of the panel. If a school employee is called as a witness in a complaint meeting, they may wish to be supported by a union representative or friend.
Note: Complaints about staff conduct will not generally be handled under this complaints procedure. Complainants will be advised that any staff conduct complaints will be considered under staff disciplinary procedures, if appropriate, but outcomes will not be shared with them. Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

12.8. At least <10 school days before the meeting, the Clerk will:

- confirm and notify the complainant of the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that, if the complainant is invited, the dates are convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible
- request copies of any further written material to be submitted to the panel at least 10 school days before the meeting.

12.9. Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least 5 school days before the date of the meeting. The panel will not normally accept, as evidence, recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly

and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.

12.10. The panel will also 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.

12.11. The meeting will be held in private. Electronic recordings of meetings or conversations are not normally permitted unless a complainant's own disability or special needs require it, in which case all parties must be told about it beforehand and consent of all parties attending must be sought before recordings of meetings or conversations take place. Consent will be recorded in any minutes taken.

12.12. The panel will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented. The panel can:

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

12.13. If the complaint is upheld in whole or in part, the panel 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.

12.14. The Chair of the panel will provide the complainant and St Bartholomew's Primary with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within 3 school days. The letter to the complainant will include details of how to contact the Department for Education if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled by St Bartholomew's Primary.

12.15. If the complaint is: jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair; the entire governing body; the majority of the governing body; or other circumstances justify it, Stage 2 will be heard by a panel 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 Bartholomew's Primary will take to resolve the complaint. The response will also advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied.

13. STAGE 3

13.1. If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome at Stage 2 and wishes to take the matter further, they can escalate the complaint to Stage 3 – convening an external complaints panel, which will be formed of three impartial participants.

13.2. A request to escalate to Stage 3 must be made to the Clerk, via the school office marked 'urgent and confidential', within 10 school days of receipt of the Stage 2 response.

13.3. Arrangements and timelines for Stage 3 complaints will follow those established for Stage 2 complaints in section 12.

14. NEXT STEPS

14.1. 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 3. The Dicoesan Board (SDBE) acts in an advisory capacity to headteachers and governing bodies, it does not have any general power to investigate complaints. Any complaints received by the Diocesan Board will be responded to be referring the complainant to the school's procedures; the Diocesan Board will inform schools of any complaint received.

14.2. The Department for Education will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by St Bartholomew's Primary. They will consider whether St Bartholomew's Primary has adhered to education legislation and any

statutory policies connected with the complaint.

14.3. The complainant can refer their complaint to the Department for Education 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

15. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

14.1 Complainant

The complainant will receive a more effective response to the complaint if they:

- explain the complaint in full as early as possible
- co-operate with the school in seeking a solution to the complaint
- respond promptly to requests for information or meetings or in agreeing the details of the complaint
- ask for assistance as needed
- treat all those involved in the complaint with respect
- refrain from publicising the details of their complaint on social media and respect confidentiality.

14.2 Investigator

The investigator's role is to establish the facts relevant to the complaint by:

- providing a comprehensive, open, transparent and fair consideration of the complaint through:
  - sensitive and thorough interviewing of the complainant to establish what has happened and who has been involved
  - interviewing staff and children/young people and other people relevant to the complaint
  - consideration of records and other relevant information o analysing information
- liaising with the complainant and the complaints co-ordinator as appropriate to clarify what the complainant feels would put things right.

The investigator should:

- conduct interviews with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning
- keep notes of interviews or arrange for an independent note taker to record minutes of the meeting
- ensure that any papers produced during the investigation are kept securely pending any appeal
- be mindful of the timescales to respond
- prepare a comprehensive report for the headteacher or complaints panel that sets out the facts, identifies solutions and recommends courses of action to resolve problems.

  The headteacher or complaints panel will then determine whether to uphold or dismiss the complaint and communicate that decision to the complainant, providing the appropriate escalation details.

14.3 Complaints Co-ordinator

The complaints co-ordinator should:

- ensure that the complainant is fully updated at each stage of the procedure
- liaise with staff members, headteacher, Chair of Governors, Clerk and LAs (if appropriate) to ensure the smooth running of the complaints procedure
- be aware of issues regarding:
  - sharing third party information
  - additional support. This may be needed by complainants when making a complaint including interpretation support or where the complainant is a child or young person
- keep records.

14.4 Clerk to the Governing Body

The Clerk is the contact point for the complainant and the panel and should:

- 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 (DPA) 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)
- set the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that the dates are convenient to all parties (if they are invited to attend) and that the venue and proceedings are accessible
- collate any written material relevant to the complaint (for example; stage 1 paperwork, school and complainant submissions) and send it to the parties in advance of the meeting within an agreed timescale
- record the proceedings
- circulate the minutes of the meeting
- notify all parties of the panel's decision.

14.5 Complaints panel chair

The panel's chair, who is nominated in advance of the complaint panel meeting, should ensure that:
- both parties are asked (via the Clerk) to provide any additional information relating to the complaint by a specified date in advance of the meeting
- the meeting is conducted in an informal manner, is not adversarial, and that, if all parties are invited to attend, everyone is treated with respect and courtesy
- complainants who may not be used to speaking at such a meeting are put at ease. This is particularly important if the complainant is a child/young person
- the remit of the panel is explained to the complainant
- 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. If a new issue arises it would be useful to give everyone the opportunity to consider and comment upon it; this may require a short adjournment of the meeting
- both the complainant and the school are given the opportunity to state their case and seek clarity, either through written submissions ahead of the meeting or verbally in the meeting itself
- the issues are addressed
- key findings of fact are made
- the panel is open-minded and acts independently
- 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 meeting is minuted
- they liaise with the Clerk (and complaints co-ordinator, if the school has one).

14.6 Complaints panel member

Panel members should be aware that:
- the meeting must be independent and impartial, and should be seen to be so
- no governor may sit on the panel if they have had a prior involvement in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it.
- the aim of the meeting should be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant
- we recognise that the complainant might not be satisfied with the outcome if the meeting does not find in their favour. It may only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations.
- many complainants will feel nervous and inhibited in a formal setting
- parents/carers often feel emotional when discussing an issue that affects their child.
- extra care needs to be taken when the complainant is a child/young person and present during all or part of the meeting
- careful consideration of the atmosphere and proceedings should ensure that the child/young person does not feel intimidated.
- the panel should respect the views of the child/young person and give them equal consideration to those of adults.
- if the child/young person is the complainant, the panel should ask in advance if any support is needed to help them present their complaint. Where the child/young person's parent is the complainant, the panel should give the parent the opportunity to say which parts of the meeting, if any, the child/young person needs to attend.
- however, the parent should be advised that agreement might not always be possible if

the parent wishes the child/young person to attend a part of the meeting that the panel considers is not in the child/young person's best interests.
- the welfare of the child/young person is paramount.

16. SERIAL AND UNREASONABLE COMPLAINTS – *Previously commonly known as vexatious*

16.1. St Bartholomew's Primary 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.

16.2. St Bartholomew's Primary 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 taken into account 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 or a similar complaint (despite previous investigations or responses concluding that the complaint is groundless or has been addressed) or makes serial complaints
- 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.

16.3. 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.

16.4. Whenever possible, the headteacher or Chair of Governors will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before making a formal determination that a complaint is *'serial and unreasonable'*.

16.5. 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 Bartholomew's Primary 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.

16.6. 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 the school.

17. SCOPE OF THIS COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

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

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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 St Bartholomew's Primary
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 Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH Feliz Osman 020 8314 7280 LewishamLADO@Lewisham.gov.uk.
Exclusion of children from school*	Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at: www.gov.uk/schooldiscipline-exclusions/exclusions. **complaints about the application of the behaviour policy can be made through the school's complaints procedure.*
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 whistleblowers 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 (LA) or the Department for Education (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 directly.
National Curriculum - content	Please contact the Department for Education at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus

If other bodies are investigating aspects of the complaint, for example the police, 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 Bartholomew's Primary 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.

APPENDIX I

St Bartholomew's Primary

SCHOOL COMPLAINTS FORM

Please complete and return to the headteacher via the school office who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

Your name:
Pupil's name (if relevant):
Your relationship to the pupil (if relevant):
Address: **Postcode:** **Day time telephone number:** **Evening telephone number:**

Please give details of your complaint, including whether you have spoken to anybody at the school about it and any relevant dates.

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 who:
Complaint referred to:
Date: