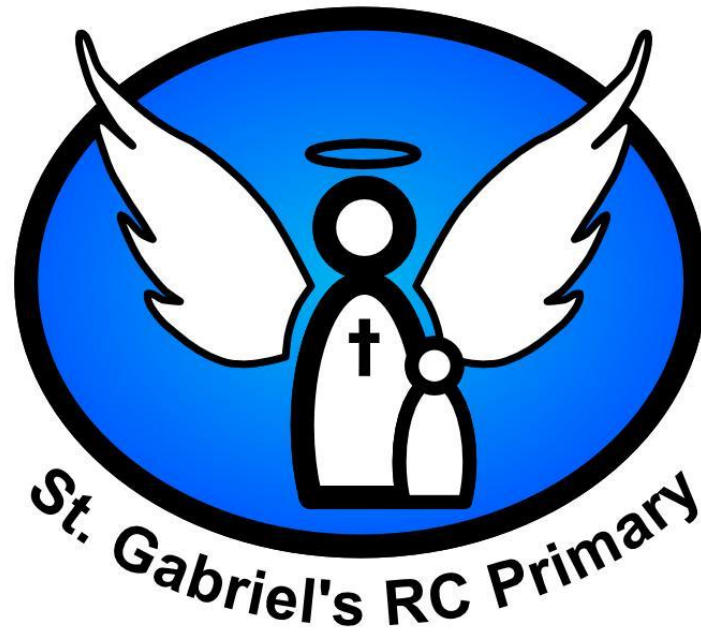




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Complaints Procedure Policy

Updated: September 2024
Review: September 2026
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In God's Love: We Welcome



We Learn

We Grow

TOGETHER

Showing re**S**pect for everyone and everything

We are s**t**ronger, together,

Keeping the **G**ospel values in our hearts,

We are proud to be **a** part of a hard-working team.

Everyone a mem**b**er of God's family,

Progressing th**r**ough life, progressing through faith,

Walking **i**n Jesus' footsteps,

Learning for lif**e**, following our dreams.

We are al**l** unique, but all equal

Sharing God'**s** love through friendship and mutual respect.

Vision

Here at St Gabriel's, Jesus Christ is our role model. We promote the Gospel messages of love, tolerance, support, forgiveness and care. We believe that all children should be happy and safe. We recognise that whilst every person in our school is unique and special, we are all made in the image and likeness of God and we are all members of God's family.

There may be occasions where parents/members of the public feel that they wish to raise concerns and make complaints. The following procedure indicates how to do so.

Part 1

Dealing with Complaints – Initial Concerns

- At our school, we aim to take informal concerns seriously so that issues can be dealt with at the very earliest stages.
- The staff member that you approach will always aim to address your concern, seeking advice and support from other staff where necessary and acting with as much immediacy as the situation allows.
- Complainants are encouraged to meet with the service provider initially (eg, class teacher for a class based concern / After School Care Supervisor for an out of hours concern). This staff member will do everything they can to resolve the situation swiftly and sensitively.

Dealing with Complaints – Formal Procedures

- Formal procedures are invoked when the initial attempts to resolve the issue are unsuccessful and the person raising the concern remains dissatisfied and wishes to take the matter further.
- At our school, the matter is escalated, by the complainant, to the line manager of the staff member who dealt with the initial concern (School's Administrator can advise on who this person is). This person then becomes the investigating officer.

Principles

Our procedure:-

- Encourage resolution of problems by informal means wherever possible;
- Is accessible and publicised;
- Is simple to understand and use;
- Is impartial;
- Is non-adversarial;
- Allows swift handling with established time limits for action, keeping all parties informed of progress;
- Ensures a full and fair investigation by an independent person where necessary;
- Respects people's desires for confidentiality;
- Addresses all the points at issue and provides an effective response and appropriate redress, where necessary;
- Provides feedback to the Senior Leadership team so that policies and practices can be revised where necessary.

Investigating Complaints

The Investigating Officer:-

- Establishes what has happened so far and who has been involved;
- Clarifies the nature of the complaint and what remains unresolved;
- Meets with the complainant (or speaks to them on the phone if a meeting is not possible) to establish all the facts;
- Clarifies what the complainant feels would put things right;
- Interviews those involved in the matter and / or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish;
- Conducts the interviews with an open mind and is prepared to persist in the questioning;
- Arranges for an independent note taker to record the minutes of each meeting.

Resolving Complaints

At each stage in this procedure, school will stay mindful of how best to resolve the complaint. Where it is appropriate, the complaint will be acknowledged as valid, in whole or in part. In this instance, one or more of the following will be offered by the Investigating Officer:-

- An apology;
- An explanation;
- An admission that the situation could have been handled better / differently;
- An assurance that the complained of will not recur;
- An explanation of the steps that have been taken to ensure that it will not happen again;
- An undertaking of review of school policies in light of the complaint.

The Investigating Officer will encourage the complainant to state what actions they feel would resolve the problem at any stage.

The Investigating Officer will identify areas of agreement between both parties.

The Investigating Officer will clarify and misunderstandings that might have occurred between both parties.

Vexatious Complaints

We aim, through this procedure to limit the number of complaints that become protracted. However, there may be occasions where, despite following all stages of this procedure, the complainant remains dissatisfied. If the complainant tries to re-open the same issue, the Chair of the Governing Body will inform, in writing that the procedure has been exhausted and that the matter is now closed. If the complainant writes again on the same issue, then the correspondence will be recognised as vexatious and there will be no obligation on the part of the school to respond. The school would like to be clear that it is the correspondence, not the complainant which is deemed to be vexatious. Should the complainant raise an entirely new, separate complaint, it will be responded to in accordance with this complaints procedure.

Time Limits

Both in the informal and formal stage of the procedure, all staff will aim to consider and resolve a complaint as swiftly and as efficiently as possible. Each staff member at each stage will provide a realistic time scale for feedback (eg, within the next 24 hours, by the end of the school day on Friday) and will arrange to meet the complainant to discuss the findings and outcome. Where further investigation is required the staff member will ask the office team to make contact with the complainant to explain the delay and provide a new date for feedback.

Cut Off Limits

The complainant is expected to raise the complaint as soon as possible after an incident has arisen. School does accept that, in certain circumstances, there may be reasons why this has not been possible and would ask that complainants explain this delay in their initial contact. School will always aim to discuss the matter with the complainant, even if the lateness of the contact means that the issue has now passed.

Part 2

The Stages of Complaint

Our school complaints procedure has five specific stages:-

Stage 1 (informal) – complainant puts the complaint in writing to the appropriate staff member.

[If not satisfied with resolution move to Stage 2]

Stage 2 (formal) – complainant contacts the school office and arranges to meet with the staff member's line manager. Investigation and written outcome provided, meeting to discuss outcome offered.

[If not satisfied with the resolution, move to Stage 3]

Stage 3 (formal) – complainant contacts the school office requesting an appointment with the head teacher. Investigation and written outcome provided, meeting to discuss outcome offered.

[If not satisfied with the resolution, move to Stage 4]

Stage 4 (formal) – the complainant writes to the Chair of Governors requesting a meeting and outlining the points for discussion in this meeting.

[If not satisfied with the resolution, move to Stage 5]

Stage 5 (formal) – the complainant writes to the Chair of the Complaints Committee of the Governing Body requesting that they hear the complaint. The panel will:-

- Issue a letter inviting the complainant to a meeting.
- Issue a letter confirming the panel's decision.
- Inform the head teacher of the outcome.
- Advise the complainant of escalation routes to the Secretary of State for Education.
- If a complaint relates to the conduct of the head teacher, the complainant should write directly to the Chair of Governors.

- If a complaint relates to the conduct of the Chair of Governors or any other member of the Governing Board, the complainant should write directly to the Clerk to the Governing Board. (michelle.henry@rochdale.gov.uk)

Part 3

Recording Complaints

- School will record the progress of the complaint at every stage and will record the final outcome.
- Every effort will be made by the school to ensure that a common understanding of the issue exists between school and the complainant.
- The Investigating Officer will retain a copy of written complaints and written responses.

Governing Body Review

- The Governing Body will review the number of complaints made to school and review the Complaints Procedure annually at the first Full Governing Body of the year. All of the information informing this discussion will be anonymised.
- School will use this monitoring exercise to consider its policies and procedures and make changes where necessary.

Publicising the Complaints Procedure

- The school Complaints Procedure is published as follows:-
- On the school website at www.stgabrielsrc.com
- Be available in hard copy form the school office on request.
- Be issued to all new families at school as part of the new starter pack.

Summary of the Complaints Procedure

Stage One

The staff member who takes the initial contact is:-

- Professional
- Respectful
- Courteous
- Patient

Stage 2

The Investigating Officer is:-

- All of the above
- Thorough in their pursuit of detail and understanding
- Timely (in their response)

Stage 3

The head teacher is:-

- All of the above
- In charge of promoting an open dialogue with parents and promoting a culture of co-operation amongst all parties

Stage 4

The Chair of Governors is:-

- All of the above
- Monitoring complaints made to school and instigating policy review where necessary.

[where a staff member feels that they cannot consider a complaint objectively, they will in discussion with their line manager, pass the complaint on to a colleague].

Stage 5

The Complaints Panel Committee

Remit

- The panel is independent and impartial.
- The panel is made up of three or five Governors, none of which will have had prior involvement in the case.
- The panel is made up of a cross section of Governors.
- The panel holds a private hearing with the complainant.
- The panel aims to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between school and the complainant.

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 systems or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not recur

Roles and Responsibilities

The Role of the Clerk

The panel of Governors considering a complaint will be clerked. The clerk is the contact point for the complainant and:

- Sets 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;
- Collates any written material and sends it to the parties in advance of the hearing;
- Meets and welcomes the parties as they arrive at the hearing;
- Records the proceedings;
- Notifies all parties of the panel's decision;
- Shares minutes from all meetings with all parties, providing the opportunity for minutes to be challenged and agreed.

The Role of the Chair of the Governing Body

The Chair of Governors:

- Checks that the correct procedure has been followed;
- If a hearing is appropriate, notifies the clerk to arrange the panel.

The Role of the Chair of the Panel

The Chair of the Panel ensures that:

- The remit of the panel is explained to the parties and that each party has the opportunity to put their case without undue interruption;
- The issues are addressed;
- Key findings of fact are made;
- Parents and others who may not be used to speaking at such hearings are put at ease;

The hearing is conducted in an informal manner with each party treating the other with respect and courtesy;

- The panel is open minded and acting independently;
- No member of the panel has a vested interest in the outcome of the proceedings or any involvement in an earlier stage of the procedure;
- Each side is given the opportunity to state their case and ask questions;
- Written material is seen by all parties. If a new issue arises, the Chair gives all parties the opportunity to consider and comment on it.

Panel Hearing Checklist

- The panel takes the following points into account:-
- The hearing is as informal as possible;
- 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 complainant may question both the headteacher and the witnesses after each has spoken;
- The panel may ask questions at any point;
- The complainant is 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 decide on the issues;
- The Chair explains that both parties will hear from the panel within a set time scale.

The Chair of the Panel ensures that the complainant is notified of the panel's decision, in writing, including reasons for the decision, within ten working days of the panel hearing.

The letter will explain that there is further right of appeal to the Secretary of State for Education at:-

The School Complaints Unit (SCU)
Department for Education,
2nd Floor,
Piccadilly Gate,
Manchester
M1 2WD

Complaints not in scope of the procedure

A complaints procedure should cover all complaints about any provision of facilities or services that a school provides with the **exceptions** listed below, for which there are separate (statutory) procedures.

Exceptions	Who to contact
• Admissions to schools • Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs (SEN) • School re-organisation proposals • Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation	Concerns should be raised direct with local authorities (LA). For school admissions, it will depend on who is the admission authority (either the school or the LA). Complaints about admission appeals for maintained schools are dealt with by the Local Government Ombudsman.
• Exclusion of children from school	Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at: www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions .
• Whistleblowing	Schools have an internal whistleblowing procedure for their employees and voluntary staff. Other concerns can be raised direct with Ofsted by telephone on: 0300 123 3155, via email at: whistleblowing@ofsted.gov.uk or by writing to: WBHL, Ofsted Piccadilly Gate Store Street Manchester M1 2WD. The Department for Education is also a prescribed body for whistleblowing in education.
• Staff grievances and disciplinary procedures	These matters will invoke the school's internal grievance procedures. Complainants will not be informed of the outcome of any investigation.
• 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. They should be contacted direct.

Unreasonable Complainants

St. Gabriel's RC 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 staff from that behaviour, including that which is abusive, offensive or threatening.

St Gabriel's RC 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:

- 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 complaints 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;
- 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, complicated and stressful contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with.

A complaint may also be considered unreasonable if the person making the complaint does so either face-to-face, by telephone or 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.

Complainants should limit the numbers of communications with a school while a 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 asking them to change it. For complainants who excessively contact St. Gabriel'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 usually be reviewed after 6 months.

In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, the concerns and actions taken will be put in writing immediately and the police informed. This may include banning an individual from St. Gabriel's premises.

Approval and Review

Policy Author and Designation:	Laura Bolton – Head Teacher
Date of Authorship:	September 2020
Policy Approved By:	Full Governing Board
Next Policy Review Date:	September 2026



Complaint Form

Please complete and return to the line manager (as advised by the School Administrator) who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action has been taken.

Your name:

Pupil's name:

Your relationship to the pupil:

Address:

Postcode:

Day time 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.
(Please detail who you spoke to and what the response was)

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:

Next Steps:

Date: