



St. Joseph's Catholic Primary School

RESPONDING TO PARENTS' CONCERNS

The Mission Statement of our school includes:

- ✦ encouraging each person to see themselves as a valued member of a wider community who can act independently and make a positive contribution for the good of all.

Our aims

St Joseph's School aims to establish and promote a close relationship with all parents, in the interests of their children. We recognise that children will feel more secure when they receive consistent messages from both home/school. Parents' views about our school are welcomed, including the expression of any serious concerns. At the same time we undertake to inform parents as soon as possible about any issues of concern to the school so that we can work together to resolve them.

What we do to avoid concerns arising

At St Joseph's School we work closely with parents in order to keep them informed of all aspects of school life. We have:

- the home school agreement
- parents' evenings held every term
- a written report for parents about their child once a year

- an annual written report for parents from the governing body, followed by an invitation to an annual meeting at least two weeks after the report is issued
- the weekly newsletter
- Happy Grams and Reward Stickers
- The school website
- Individual home/school books in special circumstances.
- Parent notice boards
- Invitation to regular school events
- The School has achieved Working in Partnership with Parents Award

In addition, we have a section in the school's prospectus explaining how parents can raise concerns. We recognise that parents may not keep the prospectus throughout the time their child is with us and so the same guidance is on permanent display in the school's reception area. Further, we ensure that any member of staff joining the school, both teaching and support staff, is aware of our policy and of the procedure for parents to follow.

How we respond to a concern raised by a parent

The County Council has produced a model procedure for parents who wish to express a concern about their child's school. This procedure is summarised in the leaflet for parents, 'Responding to Parents' Concerns', is detailed in the County's guidance pack for schools and has been adopted by this school.

At St Joseph's School we are committed to responding to a parental concern as quickly and as sensitively as possible in order to resolve the issue promptly. Most concerns are resolved by the child's classteacher or the Nursery Manager. Parents who wish to discuss a concern with the Headteacher are asked, wherever possible, to make an appointment in advance, so that sufficient time and attention can be given to the matter.

We will normally respond to letters of concern within 2 days and keep parents informed at all stages if the matter cannot be resolved immediately.

How we plan to improve our practice

We keep a record of all complaints so that we are informed about:

- the nature of complaints
- the time taken to resolve each complaint
- the measures adopted to resolve each complaint.

The headteacher and senior staff will review this record on a regular basis, to enable consideration to be given to any underlying issues which need to be addressed by the school and the governing body.

Any formal complaint made to a complaints panel of the governing body will be reported, in outline only, and anonymously, to the next meeting of the full governing body.

St. Joseph's Catholic Primary School

PROCEDURE:

RESPONDING TO PARENTS' CONCERNS

INFORMAL STAGES OF THE COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

The following is adapted from Surrey County Guidelines and has been adopted by the St Joseph's School Governing Body.

Stage 1: The initial approach

- 1.1 The school has a duty to ensure that the confidentiality of all complaints is respected at all times by any member of staff and of the governing body involved in the case.
- 1.2 The vast majority of concerns expressed by parents are dealt with effectively by the child's teacher, without the need to take these concerns further. If parents contact the LEA or the County's Contact Centre first they are advised to talk directly to the school. For Nursery Ofsted respond to concerns see address at the foot of the policy.
- 1.3 The member of staff should reassure the parent that the matter will be investigated and may be able to explain how the situation arose. If the Headteacher has not been involved, the member of staff must inform the Headteacher or Head of Year of the parent's approach, according to school policy.
- 1.4 A clear note of the date, name, contact address or telephone number should be taken, with brief details of the concern.
- 1.5 The staff member dealing with the concern should make sure that the parent is clear what action (if any) or monitoring of the situation has been agreed, putting this in writing to the parent only if this seems the best way of making things clear. However, a record should always be kept for internal purposes. Any action taken to address a staff disciplinary/capability matter should not be disclosed to the parent other than to say that appropriate action has been taken.
- 1.6 The Local Education Officers and Assistant Local Education Officers are available to assist the school in dealing with parental complaints, but are not permitted to take sides. Their role is to ensure that the integrity of the procedures is maintained by all those involved (see Page 16 and the attached parents' leaflet).

Stage 2: Referral to the Headteacher for investigation

- 2.1 **Parents should have an opportunity to discuss more serious concerns with the Headteacher, or Deputy Headteacher, who should clarify with the parent the nature of the concern and identify the outcome the parent is seeking.**
- 2.2 Headteachers should make arrangements to ensure that their involvement will not dominate every stage of the investigation of a particular complaint unless the issue is one

which could later become a disciplinary/capability matter.

- 2.3 The complaint should be acknowledged either orally or in writing within three working days, stating briefly the steps to be taken and the time that the investigation is likely to take (normally up to 10 working days). This is especially important in the days leading up to a school holiday when it may not be possible to respond in detail until later. See Appendix C, (Pages 20 to 25) re standard letters.
- 2.4 The complainant should be invited to a meeting as necessary to supplement any information provided and to talk the matter over. Previous experience demonstrates that face to face discussion at this stage is the most effective means of resolving a concern.
- 2.5 If necessary, the Headteacher or another senior member of staff should interview witnesses and take statements from those involved. If the complaint is pupil-focused, the pupil(s) should also be interviewed and a statement recorded.
- 2.6 The Headteacher should keep written records of meetings, telephone conversations, and other documentation.
- 2.7 Once all the relevant facts have been established, the Headteacher should produce a written response to the complainant, which includes a full explanation of the decision reached and the reasons for it. Where appropriate this should include what action the school will take to resolve the complaint but **must not** disclose confidential details of any disciplinary/capability action taken. The headteacher will have to tell the complainant that appropriate action is being taken but details cannot be disclosed.

Stage 3: Referral to the governing body

- 3.1 If a complaint is against the action of the headteacher, or if the headteacher has been unable to resolve the issues to the satisfaction of the complainant, the complainant is advised in the leaflet for parents to write to the Chair of Governors requesting him/her to investigate the case as part of the **informal** procedure.
- 3.2 The Chairman of Governors may choose to refer the complaint to a nominated governor who has responsibility for investigating parental concerns. This is to enable the Chairman of Governors to remain impartial in case he/she is needed as part of a formal Complaints Panel (see paragraph 4.5). The nominated governor may decide, as a first action, to meet the parent informally. The governor may call upon advice from the Local Education Officer at any stage of the investigation.
- 3.3 If, after this informal investigation, the complainant still remains dissatisfied, he or she should be advised to make the complaint **formal** by notifying the Chairman of Governors in writing within five weeks of receiving the outcome letter following the informal investigation.

FORMAL STAGES OF THE COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

Stage 4(a): Review by the governing body (*see detailed advice given in Appendix E for governors, Appendix F for the clerk and Appendix G for parents*)

- 4.1 Complaints rarely reach this **formal** level, but it is important that governing bodies are prepared to deal with them when necessary. If a formal complaint is received, governing bodies should seek advice from any relevant authority, e.g., LEA (see Page 37), Board of Education (C of E) or Diocesan Schools' Commission (RC).
- 4.2 It is important that this review is not only independent and impartial but that it is seen as such. **Therefore, individual complaints should not be considered by the full governing body as serious conflicts of interest can arise; for example, in exceptional circumstances a complaint may result in disciplinary action against a member of staff, and governors might be required to give an unprejudiced hearing to an appeal by the member of staff concerned.** Similarly some governors might have previous knowledge or experience of the problem which led to the complaint and would be unable to give fair, unbiased consideration to the issue.
- 4.3 If the complaint relates to a staff disciplinary/capability matter and the Headteacher has already taken action that he/she considers appropriate, any further progression of a formal complaint must from then on focus on how the original complaint was managed. The parent may find such a distinction difficult to accept but there needs to be a clear shift of focus to the headteacher's response to the complainant in order not to prejudice any ongoing disciplinary/capability procedures and to maintain the strict confidentiality of these procedures.
- 4.4 The clerk to the Governing Body should acknowledge receipt of the written request from the parent and, having ascertained that it is a **formal** complaint, arrange to convene a Governors' Complaints Panel appointed from members of the Governing Body. In exceptional circumstances, the clerking may have to be assigned to another person should there be a conflict of interest for the clerk or the clerk is still new in role. Advice should be taken from Governance Consultancy at FourS.
- 4.5 The Panel members should be governors who have had no prior involvement with the complaint. If he or she has not previously been involved, the Chairman of Governors may chair the Panel.
- 4.6 All relevant correspondence regarding the complaint should be given to each panel member by the clerk as soon as the composition of the panel is confirmed. If the correspondence is extensive, the Chairman of the Panel should arrange with the headteacher for the preparation of a thorough, chronological summary for sending to Panel members as part of the full documentation. In addition, the Chairman of the Panel should invite the headteacher to prepare a written report for the Panel in response to the complaint. The headteacher may already have obtained statements from members of staff involved directly in matters raised by the complainant, and these can be

incorporated if appropriate into the report. Any documentation, including the headteacher's account of events, should be received by all concerned – including the complainant – at least 5 working days prior to the hearing

- 4.7 The Panel should decide whether the hearing should be held *in camera* with just themselves and a clerk or whether the complainant and the headteacher should be invited to present their cases in person (see paragraphs E9 and E10, Page 29). If the hearing is not to be held *in camera* the Chairman of the Panel should invite the headteacher to attend the Panel hearing. The members of staff involved directly in the matters raised by the complainant are not required to attend the Panel hearing. The headteacher may ask the governor involved at Stage 3 of the complaints procedure to attend, to provide an account of their contribution to the resolution.

- 4.8 The clerk should write and inform the complainant, the headteacher and the members of the Panel, at least 10 working days in advance of the date, time and place of the hearing and whether or not it will be held *in camera*. The notification to the complainant should also explain the complainant's right to submit further written evidence to the Panel (which should also be made available to the headteacher by the clerk), to be received at least 7 working days prior to the hearing. If the hearing is not to be held *in camera*, the notification should contain a clear invitation to the complainant to attend the hearing, should explain the manner in which the hearing will be conducted, and should explain the complainant's right to be accompanied to the hearing by a partner or friend or, if necessary, an interpreter. This person would be there essentially to provide moral support but may be called upon to speak if they have had any involvement in the complaint. Parents should be provided with Appendix G.
- 4.9 It is the responsibility of the Chairman of the Panel to ensure that the hearing is properly minuted.
- 4.10 **The aim of the meeting should be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant.** However, it has to be recognised that sometimes it may only be possible to establish facts and make recommendations which demonstrate that the complaint has at least been taken seriously.
- 4.11 The Panel should remember that some parents are unused to dealing with groups of people in formal situations and may feel inhibited when speaking to the Panel. It is therefore recommended that the Chairman of the Panel ensures that the proceedings are as sympathetic and informal as possible.
- 4.12 If either party wishes to introduce previously undisclosed evidence or witnesses, the Panel may choose to decide not to accept it. If it is decided to admit the evidence, it is in the interests of natural justice to adjourn the meeting so that the other side has time to consider and respond to the new evidence.
- 4.13 The meeting should allow for:
- (a) the complainant to explain the complaint and the headteacher to explain the school's response
 - (b) the headteacher to question the complainant about the complaint and the complainant to question the headteacher
 - (c) Panel members to have an opportunity to question both the complainant and the headteacher
 - (d) final statements by the headteacher, followed by the complainant.

Full details of the procedure for a Panel meeting are given on Page 27 in Appendix E, Guidance for governing bodies, and Appendix F, Guidance for clerks.

- 4.14 The chairman of the Panel should explain to the complainant and the headteacher that the Panel will next consider its decision and that if one cannot be made immediately, a written decision will be sent to both parties within seven working days. The complainant

and the headteacher will then leave.

- 4.15 The Panel should then consider the complaint and all the evidence presented and
- (a) reach a decision, if necessary by majority vote, on the complaint, giving reasons for it, and
 - (b) decide upon the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint, and
 - (c) where appropriate, recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not happen again.
- 4.16 The full meeting to reconvene when the chairman will announce either:
- the decision and the reasons for it, or
- that it has not been possible to come to a decision at this stage, but that the outcome of the complaint will be communicated in writing.
- 4.17 A written statement outlining the decision of the Panel must be sent to the complainant and the headteacher within five working days of the hearing. The letter to the complainant should explain to whom a further appeal can be made, if desired.
- 4.18 The school should ensure that a copy of all correspondence and notes are kept on file in the school's records. **These records should be kept separately from the pupil's and staff member's personal records and destroyed twelve months when the pupil leaves the school, unless the complaint concerns personal injury for which a claim may later arise and records need to be kept until the pupil reaches 21 years.** The complainant should be informed that this will be done.

Stage 4(b):

- 4.19 Stage four is the final stage of the procedure within the LEA for the vast majority of complaints. However, in the rare circumstances where the complaint relates only to any of the following, the County Council is required to hear that complaint under section 23 of the Education Reform Act, 1988:
- Complaints about the National Curriculum
 - Collective Worship
 - Religious Education
 - Non-Approved External Qualifications or Syllabuses
 - Provision of Information
 - Temporary Withdrawal of Pupils from Part or All of the National Curriculum.

In such cases the parent should be referred to the Local Education Officer who will make arrangements for the County Council's Executive to hear the complaint.

Stage 5: Beyond the governing body's complaints procedure

- 5.1 **The Secretary of State:** Complaints can be taken to the Secretary of State for Education and Skills under section 496 of the Education Act 1996, on the grounds that a Governing Body or LEA is acting or proposing to act unreasonably, or under Section 497 of the same Act on the grounds that either the Governing Body or the LEA has failed to

discharge its duties under the Act. The Secretary of State may contact the Governing Body or the LEA for more information in order to consider the complaint.

- 5.2 **The Local Government Ombudsman:** Complaints about the maladministration of Local Authority services including the way a Local Authority operates **any** general school complaints procedure could be made to the Ombudsman. However, the Ombudsman does not look at internal school management matters and usually expects that thorough attention has been given to a complaint locally before investigation by the Ombudsman.

For the Nursery Complaints can be taken to Ofsted's **Early Years Complaints Line** on **0845 640 4040. or in writing to:**

South Region
Freshford House
Redcliffe Way
Bristol
BS1 6LX

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Annex 1

Complaints related to Child Care National Standards

The above concerns and complaints procedures will apply to all concerns expressed to the school. The recording of those complaints however, that relate to national standards will follow the guidelines published by Ofsted using the forms attached to the policy below. The log of these complaints will be available to parents on request.

Concerns initially should be expressed directly to the Nursery Manager who following the above procedure will try to resolve those concerns. Parents who are not satisfied following a concern or wish to pursue a complaint should do so to the Headteacher or if it is regarding the Headteacher to the Chair of Governors. The school will respond to formal complaints within 28 days.

Annex: Provider complaints record and how to complete the complaints record

Provider complaints record

Date of complaint			
A: Source of complaint			
Parent (in writing, including email) ¹	<input type="checkbox"/>	Staff member	<input type="checkbox"/>
Parent (in person)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Anonymous	<input type="checkbox"/>
Parent (phone call)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Ofsted (include complaint number if known)	<input type="checkbox"/>
		Other (please state)	<input type="checkbox"/>
B: Nature of complaint			
<i>(please tick all standards that the complaint relates to)</i>			
Standard 1: Suitable Person	<input type="checkbox"/>	Standard 8: Food and Drink	<input type="checkbox"/>
Standard 2: Organisation	<input type="checkbox"/>	Standard 9: Equal Opportunities	<input type="checkbox"/>
Standard 3: Care, Learning & Play	<input type="checkbox"/>	Standard 10: Special Needs	<input type="checkbox"/>
Standard 4: Physical Environment	<input type="checkbox"/>	Standard 11: Behaviour	<input type="checkbox"/>
Standard 5: Equipment	<input type="checkbox"/>	Standard 12: Working in Partnership	<input type="checkbox"/>
Standard 6: Safety	<input type="checkbox"/>	with Parents and Carers	
Standard 7: Health	<input type="checkbox"/>	Standard 13: Child Protection	<input type="checkbox"/>
		Standard 14: Documentation	<input type="checkbox"/>
Please give details of the complaint:			

¹ Regulations require providers to investigate all complaints notified to them, in writing, by a parent of a child attending the setting.

C: How it was dealt with	
Internal investigation	<input type="checkbox"/>
Investigation by Ofsted	<input type="checkbox"/>
Investigation by other agencies (please state)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Please give details of any internal investigation or attach any outcome letter from Ofsted:	
D: Actions and outcomes	
Internal actions	<input type="checkbox"/>
Actions agreed with Ofsted	<input type="checkbox"/>
Changes to conditions of registration	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other action taken by Ofsted	<input type="checkbox"/>
No action	<input type="checkbox"/>
Actions imposed or agreed with other agencies	<input type="checkbox"/>
Please give details:	
Has a copy of this record been shared with parents? Yes or No	
Name of recorder:	Outcome notified to parent: Yes (within 28 days) ² Date:
Position: Name: Signature:	Date Completed:

² Regulations require providers to give an account of the findings of the investigation into the complaint and any action taken to the parent who made the complaint, within 28 days of the date of the complaint.

Annex 2 School Record of Parent Concern

The following record should be kept of any concern expressed by a parent. The record is not intended to record every meeting and should not be used to record meetings where information is passed on or clarification is being sort, however where there is any suspicion that a concern is being expressed the staff member should complete the form attached to this policy.

The form should be completed in the parent's presence or where this is not possible the parent should be informed that the member of staff will be making notes for the child's file. Staff should be open and honest showing the parent what has been recording and providing a copy where requested.

A follow up should be planned unless the matter was clearly and immediately resolved.

The record should be placed in the child's file and a copy given to the Headteacher.

This record should not be used to note information provided that relates to the Vulnerable Children's register please use the Pastoral Referral Record



St Joseph's Catholic Primary School Record of Concern

Staff/Parent-Carer meeting/telephone

Parent/ Carer		Child & Class		Date
Others involved				
Staff Member receiving and responding to concern				
Concern/Issue/Information shared				
Agreed Action to be taken				
Follow up		Brief note of outcome		
Date				
Telephone	Meeting			
Please make sure that a copy of this record is placed in the child's file and a second copy is given to the headteacher				

