



St Peter's Catholic High School & Sixth Form Centre

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1. Aims and Background

- St Peter's aims to be a place where love of one's neighbour is obvious at all times. As St John reports, *Christ said to His disciples at the Last Supper "This is my commandment, that you love one another, as I have loved you"*.
- St Peter's is a caring school, staffed by teachers who are not only qualified and expert in their own field but who also, having freely chosen to become teachers in a Catholic institution, commit themselves to care for and help children in every way possible consistent with Catholic doctrine, principles and the Catholic ethos of the school. Although it is extremely rare, as in any organisation parents/carers may from time to time raise a concern.
- The main purposes of the complaint procedure is:
 - to resolve problems;
 - to raise issues of concern and have them addressed.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

Initial concerns

The underlying principle is that concerns ought to be handled, if at all possible, without the need for formal procedures in an environment of reconciliation. In most cases a staff member will receive the first approach, as an expression of concern and it will be resolved.

Formal procedures

The Governing Body's complaints procedure does not replace the arrangements for dealing with certain types of complaint that fall outside the remit of the Governing Body's complaints procedure. A number of other procedures already exist:

- Admissions procedures
- Child protection and safeguarding policy and procedures
- Curriculum Complaints procedures
- Staff grievance procedures
- Staff disciplinary procedures
- Exclusion and suspension procedures
- Special Educational Needs procedures, including Statutory assessments of special educational needs (SEN)
- SEN policy and information report

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- Privacy notices
- Whistleblowing

When responding to complaints, we aim to:

- Be impartial and non-adversarial
- Facilitate a full and fair investigation by an independent person or panel, where necessary
- Address all the points at issue and provide an effective and prompt response
- Respect complainants' desire for confidentiality
- Treat complainants with respect and courtesy
- Ensure that any decisions we make are lawful, rational, reasonable, fair and proportionate, in line with the principles of administrative law
- Keep complainants informed of the progress of the complaints process
- Consider how the complaint can feed into school improvement evaluation processes

The school will aim to give the complainant the opportunity to complete the complaints procedure in full. To support this, we will ensure we publicise the existence of this policy and make it available on the school website. Throughout the process, we will be sensitive to the needs of all parties involved, and make any reasonable adjustments needed to accommodate individuals.

Formal procedures only need to be invoked on the rare occasion that initial attempts to resolve the issue are unsuccessful and the person raising concerns remains dissatisfied and wishes to take the matter further.

The member of staff with responsibility for the operation and management of the school complaints procedure is known as the school's 'complaints co-ordinator'.

Where the first approach is made to a governor, the next step would be to refer the complainant to the appropriate person and advise them about the procedure. Governors should not act unilaterally on an individual complaint outside the formal procedure or be involved at the early stages in case they are needed to sit on a panel at a later stage of the procedure.



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2. Legislation and guidance

This document meets the requirements set out in part 7 of the schedule to [the Education \(Independent School Standards\) Regulations 2014](#), which states that we must have and make available a written procedure to deal with complaints from parents of pupils at the school.

It is also based on guidance from the [good practice guidance on setting up complaints procedures](#) from the Department for Education (DfE).

This policy complies with our funding agreement and articles of association.

3. Definitions and scope

3.1 Definitions

The DfE guidance explains the difference between a concern and a complaint:

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

3.2 Scope

As stated, St Peter's intends to resolve complaints informally where possible, at the earliest possible stage. There may be occasions when complainants would like to raise their concerns formally but it is a requirement of the policy that efforts are made to resolve matters at the informal stage. This policy outlines the procedure relating to handling such complaints.

This complaint policy applies only to parents/carers (i.e. your child concerned is on roll) at the time of the complaint. You must be a designated contact for the child.

A complaint against the school by a person who is not a parent/carer of a child on the roll must be addressed in writing to the Principal (or to the Chair of Trustees if about the Principal). The complaint will be acknowledged within 5 school days and a written response will be issued within 15 school days. This response is final. There are no additional stages for non-parent complaints.

Complaints about services provided by other providers who use school premises or facilities should be directed to the provider concerned.

The complainant will get a more effective and timely response to their complaint if they:

- Follow these procedures



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- Co-operate with the school throughout the process, and respond to deadlines and communication promptly
- Ask for assistance as needed
- Treat all those involved with respect
- Not publish details about the complaint on social media

4. Roles and responsibilities

4.1 The complainant

The complainant will get a more effective and timely response to their complaint if they:

- Follow these procedures
- Co-operate with the school throughout the process, and respond to deadlines and communication promptly
- Ask for assistance as needed
- Treat all those involved with respect
- Not publish details about the complaint on social media

4.2 The complaints co-ordinator

An individual will be appointed to look into the complaint, and establish the facts. They will:

- Interview all relevant parties, keeping notes
- Consider records and any written evidence and keep these securely
- Prepare a comprehensive report to the Principal or complaints committee which includes the facts and potential solutions

4.3 Clerk to the governing board

The clerk will:

- Be the contact point for the complainant and the complaints committee, including circulating the relevant papers and evidence before complaints committee meetings for Formal Stage 2.
- Arrange the complaints hearing
- Record and circulate the minutes and outcome of the Formal Stage 2 hearing

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4.4 Committee chair

The committee chair will:

- Chair the Formal Stage 2 meeting, ensuring that everyone is treated with respect throughout
- Make sure all parties see the relevant information, understand the purpose of the committee, and are allowed to present their case

5. Principles for investigation

When investigating a complaint, we will try to clarify:

- What has happened
- Who was involved
- What the complainant feels would put things right

5.1 Time scales

The complainant must raise the complaint within 3 months of the incident. If the complaint is about a series of related incidents, they must raise the complaint within 3 months of the last incident.

We will consider exceptions to this time frame in circumstances where there were valid reasons for not making a complaint at that time and the complaint can still be investigated in a fair manner for all involved.

When complaints are made out of term time, we will consider them to have been received on the first school day after the holiday period.

If at any point we cannot meet the time scales we have set out in this policy, we will:

- Set new time limits with the complainant
- Send the complainant details of the new deadline and explain the delay

6. Procedure

6.1 Stage 1 (informal)

The school will take concerns seriously and make every effort to resolve the matter quickly. It may be the case that the provision or clarification of information will resolve the issue.

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The complainant should raise the complaint as soon as possible with the relevant member of staff or the Principal, either in person or by telephone, letter, or email (at the informal stage, any complaint in writing should be no more than 2 pages of A4). The school will acknowledge the complaint, and investigate through the relevant person (i.e. form tutor, Head of Year, Head of Key Stage, Head of Department) and provide a response within 15 school days.

Stage 1 may involve a meeting between the complainant and the member of staff concerned, if appropriate, or another senior colleague.

If the complaint is not resolved informally, it can be escalated to a formal complaint (Stage 2).

6.2 (Stage 2)

Stage 2 will involve the complainant putting the complaint to the Principal and/or the complaints officers:

- In a letter
- In an e-mail
- In extreme circumstances over the phone/verbally

The complainant should provide details such as relevant dates, times and the names of witnesses of events, alongside copies of any relevant documents. The complainant should also state what they feel would resolve the complaint.

If complainants need assistance raising a formal complaint, they can contact the school office using the contact details on the school website.

The Principal or complaints officer (s) will acknowledge the Stage 2 complaint within 5 school days. The appropriate person (which may be the Principal or the complaints officer) will take steps to investigate the complaint. This may include a meeting with the complainant and other relevant individuals.

The findings of this investigation, which will include a summary of the conclusions reached, will be sent to the complainant within 10 school days of the meeting with the complainant. Where circumstances dictate further time is needed to complete the investigation the complainant will be notified.

If the complainant is not satisfied with the findings and conclusions and wishes to proceed to the next stage of this procedure, (Stage 3) they should inform the clerk to the governing board in writing, with their reasons of continuing dissatisfaction, within 10 school days of receipt of the summary conclusions of the stage 2 investigation.

6.3 Formal Stage 3: Review Panel with External Member

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Complaints will be escalated to the panel hearing stage if the complainant is not satisfied with the response to the complaint after the second, formal, stage. The school will be requested to respond to the reasons of continuing dissatisfaction as expressed by the complainant and to provide that response to the clerk to the governing body within 10 school days.

The panel will be appointed by or on behalf of the proprietor and must consist of at least 3 people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint. At least 1 panel member must be independent of the management and running of the school. The panel cannot be made up solely of governing board members, as they are not independent of the management and running of the school.

The complainant must have reasonable notice of the date of the review panel and reasonable efforts will be undertaken to hold the meeting at a convenient time and date for all parties. At the review panel meeting, the complainant and representatives from the school, as appropriate, will be present. Each will have an opportunity to set out written or oral submissions prior to the meeting.

The complainant must be allowed to attend the panel hearing and be accompanied if they wish. However legal representation is not allowed.

At the meeting, each individual will have the opportunity to give statements and present their evidence, and witnesses will be called, as appropriate, to present their evidence.

The panel, the complainant and the school representative(s) will be given the chance to ask and reply to questions. Once the complainant and school representative(s) have presented their cases, they will be asked to leave and evidence will then be considered.

The panel will then put together its findings and recommendations from the case. The panel will also provide copies of the minutes of the hearing and the findings and recommendations to the complainant and, where relevant, the individual who is the subject of the complaint, and make a copy available for inspection by the proprietor and headteacher.

The school will inform those involved of the decision in writing within 5 school days of the meeting.

General Points

The details of the complaint, including the names of individuals involved, will not be shared with the whole governing board in case a review panel needs to be organised at a later point.



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Where the governing board is aware of the substance of the complaint before the review panel stage, the school will (where reasonably practicable) arrange for an independent panel to hear the complaint.

Complainants may request an independent panel at stage 3 if they believe there is a probable risk of bias in the proceedings. The decision to approve this request is made by the governing board, who will not unreasonably withhold consent.

7. Complaints against the Principal, a governor or the governing board

7.1 Informal

Complaints made against the Principal or any member of the governing board should be directed to the clerk to the governing board in the first instance.

If the complaint is about the Principal or one member of the governing board (including the chair or vice-chair), a suitably skilled and impartial governor will carry out the steps at the informal stage (set out in section 6 above).

7.2 Stage 1: Formal

If the complaint is jointly about the chair and vice-chair, the entire governing board or the majority of the governing board, an independent investigator will carry out the steps in formal stage 1 (set out in section 6 above). They will be appointed by the governing board, and will write a formal response at the end of their investigation.

7.3 Stage 2: Formal review panel

If the complaint is jointly about the chair and vice-chair, the entire governing board or the majority of the governing board, a committee of independent persons will hear the complaint. They persons may be sourced for example from the local authority, the diocese, or other suitable entity and will carry out the steps at stage 3 (set out in section 6 above).

8. Persistent complaints

8.1 Unreasonably persistent complaints

All complaints raised will be listened to, and we will treat them seriously.

However, a complaint may become *unreasonable* if the person:

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- Has made the same complaint before, and it's already been resolved by following the school's complaints procedure
- Makes a complaint that is obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific, defamatory or repetitive
- Knowingly provides false information
- Insists on pursuing a complaint that is unfounded, or out of scope of the complaint procedure
- Pursues a valid complaint, but in an unreasonable manner e.g. refuses to articulate the complaint, refuses to co-operate with this complaint procedure, or insists that the complaint is dealt with in ways that are incompatible with this procedure and the time frames it sets out
- Changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation goes on
- Makes a complaint designed to cause disruption, annoyance or excessive demands on school time
- Seeks unrealistic outcomes, or a solution that lacks any serious purpose or value

Steps we will take

We will take every reasonable step to address the complainant's concerns, and give them a clear statement of our position and their options. We will maintain our role as an objective arbiter throughout the process, including when we meet with individuals. We will follow our complaints procedure as normal (as outlined above) wherever possible.

If the complainant continues to contact the school in a disruptive way, we may put communications strategies in place. We may:

- Give the complainant a single point of contact via an email address
- Limit the number of times the complainant can make contact, such as a fixed number per term
- Ask the complainant to engage a third party to act on their behalf, such as

[Citizens Advice](#)

- Put any other strategy in place as necessary



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Stopping responding

We may stop responding to the complainant when one or a number of these factors apply:

- We believe we have taken all reasonable steps to help address their concerns
- We have provided a clear statement of our position and their options
- The complainant contacts us repeatedly, and we believe their intention is to cause disruption or inconvenience
- letters, emails, or telephone calls are often or always abusive or aggressive
- insulting personal comments about or threats towards staff

Where we propose to stop responding to a complaint that has not completed the full process, we will inform the individual that we intend to do so, the reason why and afford them a final opportunity to change their approach. We will also explain that we will still consider any new complaints they make.

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 our school site.

8.2 Duplicate complaints

If we have resolved a complaint under this procedure and receive a duplicate complaint on the same subject from a partner, family member or other individual *covered within the scope of the policy*, we will assess whether there are aspects that we hadn't previously considered, or any new information we need to consider.

If we are satisfied that there are no new aspects, we will:

- Tell the new complainant that we have already investigated and responded to this issue, and the local process is complete. Direct them to the DfE if they are dissatisfied with our original handling of the complaint
- If there are new aspects, we will follow this procedure again.

8.3 Complaint campaigns

Where the school receives 5 or more complaints about the same topic or subject the school may respond to these complaints by:

- Publishing a single response on the school website
- Sending a template response to all of the complainants



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If complainants are not satisfied with the school's response, or wish to pursue the complaint further, the school will consider the most effective and fair way of dealing with the complaint.

9. Record keeping

The school will maintain a written record of all complaints that are resolved at stage 2 and 3 including information about actions taken as a result of the complaints.

The correspondence (e.g. copies of letters and emails) statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential and held centrally, and will only be made available where the Secretary of State (or someone acting on their behalf) or a body conducting a regulatory inspection requests access to them.

Records of complaints will be kept securely, only for as long as necessary and in line with data protection law, our privacy notices and according to standard educational document archiving.

Where the complainant requests access to records of a complaint through a freedom of information (FOI) request or through a subject access request under the terms of the Data Protection Act any such request will be dealt with in accordance with the School's obligations under Data Protection or FOI law.

10. Learning lessons

St Peter's is a learning community, and the governing body will review any underlying issues raised by complaints with the Principal and complaints officer where appropriate, and respecting confidentiality, to determine whether there are any improvements that the school can make to its procedures or practice to help prevent similar events in the future.

11. Monitoring arrangements

The governing body will monitor the effectiveness of the complaints procedure in ensuring that complaints are handled properly. The governing body will track the number and nature of complaints, and review underlying issues as stated in section 11.

The complaints records are logged and managed by the complaints co-ordinator.

This policy will be reviewed by the complaints co-ordinator and the full governing body every 3 years.

At each review, the policy will be approved by the full governing body.



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12. Links with other policies

Policies dealing with other forms of complaints include:

- Child protection and safeguarding policy and procedures
- Admissions policy
- Exclusions policy
- Staff grievance procedures
- Staff disciplinary procedures
- SEN policy and information report
- Privacy notices
- External assessments and examination appeals

Please refer to the school's child protection/safeguarding policies for guidance on any safeguarding/child protection issues that this policy may highlight. The school's child protection/safeguarding policies can be found on the school's website. The Gloucestershire Safeguarding Children's Executive policy can be found at www.gscb.org.uk