

St. Thomas of Canterbury Catholic Academies Trust



Thomas Becket
Secondary



St. Gregory's
Primary



St. Mary's
Primary



The Good Shepherd
Primary

Complaints Policy

1 Purpose

We want all pupils in our four schools and their families to be happy with the education we offer and the policies and procedures we follow. Most queries or concerns can be resolved satisfactorily through discussion or by providing clarification or further information. However, when a more serious concern is raised, the school has adopted a procedure that explains how to complain and what to expect in response.

The purpose of this procedure is to ensure, for all parties, a fair and consistent approach to dealing with complaints.

2 Scope

Separate arrangements apply in relation to safeguarding, pupil admissions and exclusions, details of which are held at your school. Please check that your complaint does not fulfil the 'exceptions' criteria as set out in the DfE guidance on page 9.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-complaints-procedures>

| Exceptions | Who to contact |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Admissions to schools Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs (SEN) School re-organisation proposals Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation | <p>Concerns should be raised direct with local authorities (LA).</p> <p>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.</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exclusion of children from school | <p>Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at: www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions.</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Whistleblowing | <p>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:</p> <p>WBHL, Ofsted Piccadilly Gate Store Street Manchester M1 2WD.</p> <p>The Department for Education is also a prescribed body for whistleblowing in education.</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff grievances and disciplinary procedures | <p>These matters will invoke the school's internal grievance procedures. Complainants will not be informed of the outcome of any investigation.</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complaints about services provided by other providers who may use school premises or facilities. | <p>Providers should have their own complaints procedure to deal with complaints about service. They should be contacted direct.</p> |

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The Complaints Procedure provides a supportive framework for dealing with all matters relating to the conduct and actions of members of the school community and the application of school procedures as they affect individual pupils.

The procedure may be used by a parent, carer, local resident, governor or any person within the community who has a genuine interest in the school.

All complaints will be investigated by an appropriate person; this may be a teacher, a senior member of staff, a governor or the headteacher depending on the nature of the complaint. If the complaint is against the headteacher, the chair of governors will investigate and may draw upon the Trust or the Diocese for advice.

As part of any investigation, all relevant parties will be given an opportunity to comment.

3 Principles

Comments, concerns or complaints should be raised as soon as possible. They will be dealt with:

- openly in a manner consistent with the values of the Trust.
- fairly, thoroughly and promptly
- safely - nobody will be victimised as a result of a complaint being made
- efficiently and helpfully
- respectfully.

Outcomes could include;

- an explanation or clarification an apology from either party;
- an assurance, where appropriate, that the same thing will not happen again,
- and every effort to take action to put matters right.

4 Timescales

Complaints should be raised as soon as possible. Any complaint raised more than one month after the incident has occurred will not be considered, unless there are exceptional circumstances.

The designated timescales apply during term time and additional time may be required over school holiday periods.

Where the headteacher or chair of the local governing school committee is unable to comply with the timescales for reasons beyond his/her control, such as the complexity of the complaint or the availability of witnesses, she/he will inform the complainant, within seven calendar days of receipt of the complaint.

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5 Procedure

5.1 Complaint relating to a member of staff, other than the headteacher

5.1.1 Stage 1 - Informal Stage

Many areas of concern can be dealt with quickly and harmoniously through discussion. Where appropriate concerns or complaints should be referred initially to the individual concerned and this may be by letter, by email, by telephone or in person by an appointment made at a mutually convenient time. If you feel uncomfortable or it is inappropriate then please contact a more senior member of the school staff.

A comment form is available for completion, which is attached as Appendix 1.

Every effort will be made by all involved to resolve the complaint and bring about a speedy resolution for all parties.

In the case of more serious concerns, it may be appropriate to discuss these with a senior member of staff or directly with the headteacher, who will normally be able to resolve the matter and take any necessary actions to put matters right.

At Stage 1, the member of staff will respond to the complainant as promptly as possible.

5.1.2 Stage 2 - Formal Stage

If the complaint is not resolved at the informal stage the complainant must write to the headteacher within fourteen calendar days of receiving the outcome of the Stage 1 complaint.

The headteacher will provide a copy of the complaint to the member of staff against whom the complaint has been made and will investigate it. Complainants will be asked to complete a Complaint Form and suggest a preferred resolution to their concerns. This form is attached as Appendix 2.

Members of staff will be advised to record their recollection of the event for future reference.

The complainant, and staff member, should include details that might assist the investigation, such as names of potential witnesses, dates and times of events, and copies of relevant documents. In addition, the headteacher may meet with the complainant, who may be accompanied by a friend, to clarify the complaint.

The headteacher will be responsible for collecting such other evidence as she/he deems necessary. Where this involves an interview with a member of staff, who is the subject of the complaint, the employee may be accompanied by a work colleague or representative. In addition to receiving a copy of the complaint, the member of staff will be provided with any additional evidence presented by the complainant or collected by the headteacher.

The investigation will be undertaken as soon as possible and will be completed within fourteen calendar days of receipt of the formal complaint. The headteacher will inform the complainant and the member of staff concerned, in writing, of the outcome. This may be to the effect that:

- the concern is not substantiated by the evidence;
- the concern is substantiated in part or in full and an explanation and/or an apology given. Some details may then be given of the action the headteacher and governing body may

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be taking to put matters right or an assurance, where appropriate. However, details of the investigation or of any disciplinary procedures will not be released;

- there is insufficient evidence to reach a conclusion, so the complaint cannot be upheld;
- The headteacher will confirm that consideration of the complaint is now concluded.
- If the complainant is not satisfied that the procedure has been followed correctly, the complainant may request that the school governing committee reviews the headteacher's handling of the complaint. Any such request must be made in writing within fourteen calendar days of receiving notice of the outcome from the headteacher, and should include a statement specifying clearly any perceived failures. The procedure described in 5.4 will be followed.
- If the complainant is still not satisfied that the procedure has been followed correctly the complainant may request that the St. Thomas of Canterbury Trust review the school governing committee's handling of the complaint. The panel will include at least one member who is independent of the management and running of the school.

5.2 Complaint relating to the headteacher

5.2.1 Stage 1 - Informal stage

Most areas of concern can be dealt with quickly and harmoniously through discussion. Any concerns or complaints should be referred initially to the headteacher and this may be by letter, by email, by telephone or in person by an appointment made at a mutually convenient time.

The headteacher will make every effort to resolve the issue and bring about a speedy resolution that is satisfactory to both parties.

Many concerns can be resolved by simple clarification or by providing further information and it is anticipated that most complaints will be resolved by this informal stage. The matter may be resolved by involving the chair of the school committee.

At Stage 1, the headteacher will respond to the complainant as soon as possible.

5.2.2 Stage 2 - Formal Stage

If the complaint is not resolved at the informal stage, the complainant must write to the chair of school committee within fourteen calendar days of receiving the outcome of the Stage 1 complaint. The chair of school committee will provide a copy of the complaint to the headteacher and will investigate the complaint. Complainants will be asked to complete a Complaint Form and suggest a preferred resolution to their concerns.

This form is attached as Appendix 2. The headteacher will be advised to record their recollection of the events for future reference. The complainant and headteacher should include details that will assist the investigation, such as names of potential witnesses, dates and times of events, and copies of relevant documents. In addition, the chair of the local governing school committee will invite the complainant to meet him/her to give the complainant the opportunity to present oral evidence or to clarify the complaint. The complainant may be accompanied by a friend.

The chair of the school committee will provide a note taker for the meeting to record the details of the complaint and a copy of the notes will be provided to the complainant and the

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headteacher. The chair of the school committee will collect such other evidence as is deemed necessary. This may include the interviewing of witnesses and others who may provide relevant information. In addition to receiving a copy of the complaint, the headteacher will be provided with any additional evidence presented by the complainant or collected by the chair of governors. Once there has been an opportunity for the headteacher to consider the evidence, s/he will be invited to meet separately with the chair of the school committee, in order to present written and oral evidence in response. The headteacher may be accompanied at this meeting by a work colleague or representative. The investigation will be undertaken as soon as possible and will be completed within twenty one calendar days of receipt of the formal complaint. The chair of the school committee will inform the complainant and the headteacher in writing, of the outcome. This may be to the effect that:

- the concern is not substantiated by the evidence;
- the concern is substantiated in part or in full and an explanation and/or an apology given. Some details may then be given of the action the headteacher and governing body may be taking to put matters right or an assurance, where appropriate. However, details of the investigation or any disciplinary procedures will not be released;
- there is insufficient evidence to reach a conclusion, so the complaint cannot be upheld;
- The complainant will be told that consideration of his/her complaint by the chair of governors is now concluded.

If the complainant is not satisfied that the procedure has been followed correctly or that his/her complaint has been addressed appropriately, s/he may request that the school committee reviews the chair of the school committee's handling of the complaint. Any such request must be made in writing within fourteen calendar days of receiving notice of the outcome from the chair of governors, and should include a statement specifying clearly any perceived failures. The procedure described in 5.4 will be followed.

If the complainant is still not satisfied that the procedure has been followed correctly the complainant may request that the St. Thomas of Canterbury Trust review the school committee's handling of the complaint. The panel will include at least one member who is independent of the management and running of the school.

5.3 Complaint relating to a governor/director

Formal complaints about a governor/director will be referred directly to the chair (or in the case where the complaint is against the chair, the vice-chair) of governors. A governor who is the subject of the complaint would normally be advised of the situation immediately. However, if the complaint involves a child protection issue, child protection arrangements will come into force involving the Children's Services and potentially the police. It is advisable that the chair (or in the case where the complaint is against the chair, the vice-chair or other nominated person) meet with the complainant, before any investigation, in order to clarify the precise nature of the complaint and to discuss ways in which the matter might be resolved. It may be that the complaint can be informally resolved at this point.

The following procedure will be followed to investigate complaints about the conduct of a governor:

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If the chair (or in the case where the complaint is against the chair, the vice-chair or other nominated person) deems that a formal investigation is required, then she/he will adhere to the following principles:

- a) A copy of the complaint will be given to the governor against whom the complaint has been made and they will be advised to contact NORES for advice and support as necessary.
- b) The chair (or in the case where the complaint is against the chair, the vice-chair or other nominated person) will invite all parties (including witnesses) to provide written statements as part of the investigation.
- c) The governor/director will be advised that or a 'friend' may accompany him/her at any subsequent interview or hearing.
- d) Following the investigation, the chair (or in the case where the complaint is against the chair, the vice-chair or other nominated person) will write up the findings and notify the complainant in writing of the outcome. This may be to the effect that:
 - the concern is not substantiated by the evidence;
 - the concern is substantiated in part or in full and an explanation and/or an apology given. Some details may then be given of actions to be taken to put matters right or an assurance, where appropriate, that the same thing will not happen again. However, details of the investigation or its outcome will not be released;
 - there is insufficient evidence to reach a conclusion, so the complaint cannot be upheld;
- e) The chair (or in the case where the complaint is against the chair, the vice-chair) or other nominated person) will also inform the governor against whom the complaint was made of the outcome. This might result in a recommendation to the Trust Board to suspend or remove the governor/director in question in line with the regulations:

The process detailed above will be concluded within four weeks from the date the complaint was received.

The School Governance (Constitution) (England) Regulations 2007/

The School Governance (Constitution) (England) Regulations 2012

The School Governance (Role, Procedures and Allowances) (England) Regulations 2013

The Governance Handbook (November 2015)

5.4 Stage 3 - Review Process

The Trust Board's complaints committee will undertake any review of the process undertaken by the headteacher or the chair of governors if requested by the complainant. The review will normally be conducted through a consideration of written submissions, but reasonable requests to make oral representations will be considered sympathetically. The committee will invite the complainant to submit written evidence of his/her complaint.

This information will then be given to the headteacher or chair of governors, as appropriate, and s/he will be invited to make a response to the complaint.

The committee may also have access to the records kept by the headteacher or chair of governors as appropriate of the details of the original complaint.

The committee will meet within twenty one calendar days of receipt of the request for the review to consider the evidence and decide:

- whether the complaint should be upheld or denied
- the reasons for their decision

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- any action to be taken
 - any recommendation they wish to make to the headteacher or chair of governors
- The chair of the committee will send a letter to the complainant and the headteacher or chair of governors within five calendar days, notifying them of the outcome.

This may be to the effect that:

- the complaint is not substantiated by the evidence;
- the complaint is substantiated in part or in full but the procedural failure did not affect the outcome significantly and therefore the matter is now closed;
- the complaint is substantiated in part or in full and the governing body will take steps to rectify the situation (where this is practicable) or to prevent a recurrence;
- there is insufficient evidence to reach a conclusion, so the complaint cannot be upheld.

The committee itself does not have any power to take remedial action. If it reaches a conclusion that disciplinary action may be appropriate, it can only recommend such action to the appropriate person. If the committee wishes to make a recommendation regarding a change to the school's policy or procedures, this will be referred to the school governing committee for consideration and may be referred directly to the Trust.

This effectively ends the complaints procedure. There is no appeal stage beyond the governing body, although the complainant may pursue the matter with the Secretary of State for Education.

6 Vexatious complainants

There may be rare occasions when the complainant is deemed to be "vexatious". This could be because it is clear that the complainant has insufficient grounds for complaint, or that a complaint has been investigated and is found not to be justified, but the complainant persistently engages in making further accusations relating to the same issues. Any such case will be dealt with on an individual basis but the headteacher and chair of governors reserve the right to close the complaint if the complainant is deemed to be "vexatious", and to determine that the matter is now concluded. It is vital that full notes of the reasons for this are made.

7 Unreasonable Complainants

The Trust 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.

The Trust 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;

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- 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 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 the school.

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8) The role of the EFA (Education Funding Agency)

The EFA can support academies to achieve a compliant procedure but it is the responsibility of this Trust to make sure that our complaints procedure is fully compliant. If a complaint goes to the EFA they will check whether the complaint has been dealt with properly by the academy. The EFA will consider complaints about academies that fall into any of the following three areas:

1. where there is undue delay or the academy did not comply with its own complaints procedure when considering a complaint
2. where the academy is in breach of its funding agreement with the Secretary of State
3. where an academy has failed to comply with any other legal obligation

They will not overturn an academy's decision about a complaint. However, if they find an academy did not deal with a complaint properly they will request the complaint is looked at again and procedures meet the requirements set out in the Regulations.

If the academy's complaints procedure does not meet the Regulations, they will ask the academy to put this right. They may seek to enforce the decision under the terms of the funding agreement on behalf of the Secretary of State, if appropriate.

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APPENDIX 1: COMMENT FORM

Please use this form if you would like to comment on any aspect of school and/or to record discussion points from a meeting with a member of staff about issues you have raised.

Name

Signed

Date

Name of member of staff spoken to

Nature of Comment

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APPENDIX 2: COMPLAINT FORM

Name of School:

Name:

Address:

Telephone (day):

Telephone (evening)

Email address:

Please give concise details of your complaint to allow the matter to be fully investigated.
Have you complained to the headteacher? Yes / No

When did you do this? Date:

What happened when you complained to the headteacher?

What would you like us to do to put things right?

Signed

Date

**Please return this form to the relevant School Office for the attention of either the
Headteacher or Chair of Governing School Committee**

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