

SACRED HEART OF MARY GIRLS' SCHOOL



COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

Policy adopted	December 2022	
SLT Member Responsible	Ms V Qurrey	
To be reviewed	Annually	
Date of next review	December 2023	
Headteacher	Ms V Qurrey	Date: December 2022

Sacred Heart of Mary Girls' School is a Catholic community that aims to actively live out its mission to live "Life to the Full". This policy aims to help all stakeholders live out the Gospel values as given by Jesus Christ in The Beatitudes.

These reveal the goal of human existence and are the objective values as given by Christ;

- Forgiveness & Mercy
- Truth & Justice
- Tolerance & Peace
- Dignity & Compassion
- Purity & Holiness
- Humility & Gentleness
- Faithfulness & Integrity
- Preferential Option for the Poor & Vulnerable
- Sanctity of Life & Care for God's Creation
- Solidarity & The Common Good
- Charity & Subsidiarity
- Distributism & Social Justice

Since the foundation of Sacred Heart of Mary Girls' School by the Sacred Heart of Mary Sisters these values have formed the basis of all relationships.

All adults that have chosen to work in this community must ensure that they fulfil their mission of Catholic education by displaying, modelling and promoting these values.

All who work in a Catholic school must conduct themselves in a way which does not conflict with the "precept" and "tenets" of the Catholic Church and are bound by their contractual obligations "not to do anything in any way detrimental or prejudicial to the interest of the Catholic character of the school".

Every individual in a Catholic school, most especially the students, have the entitlement to be treated with the love, respect and dignity that comes from being a child of God, with the face of Christ.

This policy has expectations for all that are rooted in these Gospel Values and conform to the teaching of the Catholic Church. The implementation of these policies should demonstrate the importance of personal responsibility and the need for justice but also facilitate healing and reconciliation.

ETHOS

As a Catholic school is it important that all individuals that work with the school feel that they can trust the school and that they are fully supported by the management and leadership. This policy is designed to ensure that all complainants are cared for and have their concerns dealt with in an effective and caring manner.

The majority of issues raised by parents, the extended community or students, are concerns rather than complaints. We are committed to taking these concerns seriously and dealing with them effectively at the earliest opportunity. We hope that this will keep the number of formal complaints to a minimum and without needing formal procedures.

All complaints will be handled in a sensitive manner, in a way that is fair and just to all parties with all details being kept confidential.

Malicious or vexatious complaints can occur in any organisation. After investigation, if a complaint is deemed to be malicious or vexatious, appropriate action will be taken by the school.

All formal complaints that are made about a member of staff must be detailed in writing on the school Complaints Form, following an attempt to deal with any concerns in an informal manner - this is at the end of this Procedures and Policy document.

It is important that any party that has a concern with any part of the school practice does initially attempt to solve the problem in an informal manner, preferably in the first instance with the member of staff concerned.

Who can make a complaint?

This complaints procedure is mainly aimed at parents or carers of children who are registered at the School, but it is not limited to them.

Any member of the public may make a complaint to Sacred Heart of Mary Girls' School about any provision of facilities or services that the School provides.

Unless complaints are dealt with under separate statutory procedures (such as appeals relating to exclusions or admissions), the School will use this complaints procedure.

The difference between a concern and a complaint

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

It is in everyone's interest that concerns and complaints are resolved at the earliest opportunity. Many issues can be resolved informally, without the need to use the formal stages of the complaints procedure. Sacred Heart of Mary Girls' School takes concerns seriously and will make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.

If you have difficulty discussing a concern with a particular member of staff, the Headteacher (or complaints administrator, Mrs Lefèvre) will refer you to another staff member. Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels unable to deal with a concern, the Headteacher will refer you to another staff member. The member of staff may be more senior but does not have to be. The ability to consider the concern objectively and impartially is more important.

We understand however, that there are occasions when people would like to raise their concerns formally. In this case, Sacred Heart of Mary Girls' School will attempt to resolve the issue internally, through the stages outlined within this complaints procedure.

How to raise a concern or make a complaint

A concern or complaint can be made in person, in writing or by telephone. They may also be made by a third party acting on behalf on a complainant, as long as they have appropriate consent to do so.

Concerns should be raised with either the class teacher or Headteacher. If the issue remains unresolved, the next step is to make a formal complaint.

Complainants should not approach individual governors to raise concerns or complaints. They have no power to act on an individual basis and it may also prevent them from considering complaints at stage 2 of the procedure.

Complaints against school staff (except the Headteacher) should be made in the first instance, to the Headteacher via the school office. Please mark them as 'private and confidential'.

Complaints that involve or are about the Headteacher should be addressed to the Chair of Governors, via the school office. Please mark them as 'private and confidential'.

Complaints about the Chair of Governors, any individual governor or the whole Governing Body should be addressed to the Clerk to the Governing Body via the school office. Please mark them as 'private and confidential.'

For ease of use, a template complaint form is included at the end of this procedure. If you require help in completing the form, please contact the school office. You can also ask third party organisations such as Citizens Advice to help you.

In accordance with equality law, we will consider making reasonable adjustments if required, to enable complainants to access and complete this complaints procedure. For instance, providing information in alternative formats, assisting complainants in raising a formal complaint or holding meetings in accessible locations.

Anonymous complaints

The School will not normally investigate anonymous complaints. However, the Headteacher or Chair of Governors, if appropriate, will determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation.

Duplicate complaints

If, after closing a complaint at the end of the complaints procedure, we receive a duplicate complaint from a spouse, a partner, a grandparent or a child not attending this School, we will remind them that we have already considered the complaint and the local process is complete. Complainants will be advised to contact the DfE if they are dissatisfied with our handling of the complaint.

Complaint campaigns

If we receive what we consider to be a large volume of complaints, all based on the same subject and possibly from complainants not connected to the School, then we will treat these complaints as being part of a campaign and respond in one of the following two ways, depending upon the nature and scale of the complaint:

- send the same response to all complainants; or
- publish a single response on the School's website.

Timescales

Complainants must raise the complaint within three months of the incident, or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within three months of the last of these incidents. We will consider complaints made outside of this time frame if exceptional circumstances apply.

Complaints received outside of term time

We will consider complaints made outside of term time to have been received on the first school day after the holiday period.

Scope of this complaints procedure

This procedure covers all complaints about any provision of community facilities or services by Sacred Heart of Mary Girls' School other than complaints that are dealt with under other statutory procedures, including those listed below.

Exceptions	Who to contact
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Admissions to schools • Statutory assessments of special educational needs • School re-organisation proposals 	<p>Concerns about admissions, statutory assessments of special educational needs or school reorganisation proposals should be raised with the London Borough of Havering</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation 	<p>Complaints about child protection matters are handled under our child protection and safeguarding policy and in accordance with relevant statutory guidance.</p> <p>If you have serious concerns, you may wish to contact the local authority designated officer (LADO) who has local responsibility for safeguarding or the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH): 01708 433222 (day) 01708 433999 (night). LADO: lado@haverling.gov.uk 01708 431653</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> <p><i>*complaints about the application of the behaviour policy can be made through the school's complaints procedure.</i></p> <p>https://sacredheartofmary.net/wp-content/uploads/Behaviour-Policy.pdf</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whistleblowing 	<p>We have an internal whistleblowing procedure for all our employees, including temporary staff and contractors.</p> <p>The secretary of state for education is the prescribed person for matters relating to education for whistle-blowers in education who do not want to raise matters direct with their employer. Referrals can be made at www.education.gov.uk/contactus.</p> <p>Volunteer staff who have concerns about our school should complain through the school's complaints procedure. You may also be able to complain direct to the local authority or the DfE (see link above), depending on the substance of your complaint.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff grievances 	<p>Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the school's internal grievance procedures.</p>
<p>Staff conduct</p>	<p>Complaints about staff will be dealt with under the school's internal disciplinary procedures, if appropriate.</p> <p>Complainants will not be informed of any disciplinary action taken against a staff member</p>

	as a result of a complaint. However, the complainant will be notified that the matter is being addressed.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complaints about services provided by other providers who may use school premises or facilities 	Providers should have their own complaints procedure to deal with complaints about service. Please contact them direct.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National curriculum - content 	Please contact the DfE at www.education.gov.uk/contactus

If other bodies are investigating aspects of the complaint, for example the police, local authority (LA) safeguarding teams or tribunals, this may impact on our ability to adhere to the timescales within this procedure or result in the procedure being suspended until those public bodies have completed their investigations.

If a complainant commences legal action against Sacred Heart of Mary Girls' School in relation to their complaint, we will consider whether to suspend the complaints procedure in relation to their complaint until those legal proceedings have concluded.

Resolving complaints

At each stage in the procedure, Sacred Heart of Mary Girls' School wants to resolve the complaint. If appropriate, we will acknowledge that the complaint is upheld in whole or in part. In addition, we may offer one or more of the following:

- an explanation;
- an admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better;
- **an assurance that we will try to ensure the event complained of will not recur;**
- an explanation of the steps that have been or will be taken to help ensure that it will not happen again and an indication of the timescales within which any changes will be made;
- an undertaking to review school policies in light of the complaint;
- an apology.

Withdrawal of a complaint

If a complainant wants to withdraw their complaint, we will ask them to confirm this in writing.

Stage 1

- Formal complaints must be made to the Headteacher (unless they are about the Headteacher), via the school office. This may be done in person, in writing (preferably on the complaint form), or by telephone. The Headteacher will record the date the complaint is received and will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email)

within 5 school days. Within this response, the Headteacher will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, ask what remains unresolved and what outcome the complainant would like to see. The Headteacher can consider whether a face-to-face meeting is the most appropriate way of doing this.

Note: The Headteacher may delegate the investigation to another member of the School's senior leadership team but not the decision to be taken.

During the investigation, the Headteacher (or investigator) will:

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

At the conclusion of their investigation, the Headteacher will provide a formal written response within 15 school days of the date of receipt of the complaint. If the Headteacher is unable to meet this deadline, they will provide the complainant with an update and revised response date.

The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions Sacred Heart of Mary Girls' School will take to resolve the complaint.

The Headteacher will advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 1. If the complaint is about the Headteacher or a member of the Governing Body (including the Chair or Vice-Chair), a suitably skilled governor will be appointed to complete all the actions at Stage 1.

Complaints about the Headteacher or member of the Governing Body must be made to the Clerk to the Governing Body, via the school office.

If the complaint is jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair, or the entire Governing Body, or the majority of the Governing Body, stage 1 will be considered by an independent investigator appointed by the Governing Body or by the Diocese of Brentwood) At the conclusion of its investigation, the independent investigator will provide a formal written response.

Stage 2

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome at stage 1 and wishes to take the matter further, they can escalate the complaint to stage 2 – a meeting with members of a Governing Body's complaints committee, which will be formed of the first three, impartial, governors available. This is the final stage of the complaints procedure.

A request to escalate to stage 2 must be made to the Clerk to the Governors, via the school office, within 5 school days of receipt of the stage 1 response.

The Clerk to the Governors will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 5 school days.

Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.

The Clerk to the Governors will write to the complainant to inform them of the date of the meeting. They will aim to convene a meeting within 10 school days of receipt of the stage 2 request. If this is not possible, the Clerk to the Governors will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed.

If the complainant rejects the offer of three proposed dates without good reason, the Clerk to the Governors will decide when to hold the meeting. It will then proceed in the complainant's absence on the basis of written submissions from both parties. The complaints committee will consist of at least three governors with no prior involvement or knowledge of the complaint. Prior to the meeting, they will decide among themselves who will act as the chair of the complaints committee. If there are fewer than three governors from Sacred Heart of Mary Girls' School available, the Clerk to the Governors will source any additional, independent governors in order to make up the committee. Alternatively, an entirely independent committee may be convened to hear the complaint at stage 2.

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

If the complainant is invited to attend the meeting, they may bring someone along to provide support. This can be a relative or friend.

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

At least 5 school days before the meeting, the Clerk to the Governors will:

- confirm and notify the complainant of the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that if the complainant is invited, the dates are convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible;
- request copies of any further written material to be submitted to the committee at least 5 school days before the meeting.

Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least 5 school days before the date of the meeting. The committee will not normally accept as evidence recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.

The committee will also not review any new complaints at this stage or consider evidence unrelated to the initial complaint to be included. New complaints must be dealt with from stage 1 of the procedure.

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

The committee will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented.

The committee can:

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

If the complaint is upheld in whole or in part, the committee will:

- decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint;
- where appropriate, recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future.

The Chair of the committee will provide the complainant and Sacred Heart of Mary Girls' School with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within 5 school days.

The letter to the complainant will include details of how to contact the DfE if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled by Sacred Heart of Mary Girls' School.

If the complaint is jointly about the Chair and Vice-Chair or the entire Governing Body or the majority of the Governing Body, stage 2 will be heard by a committee of independent governors.

The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions <School Name> will take to resolve the complaint.

The response will also advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied.

Next steps

If the complainant believes the School did not handle their complaint in accordance

with the published complaints procedure or they acted unlawfully or unreasonably in the exercise of their duties under education law, they can contact the Department for Education after they have completed Stage 2.

The DfE will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by Sacred Heart of Mary Girls' School. They will consider whether Sacred Heart of Mary Girls' School has adhered to education legislation and any statutory policies connected with the complaint.

The complainant can refer their complaint to the DfE online at www.education.gov.uk/contactus, by telephone on 0370 000 2288 or by writing to:

Department for Education
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

Complaint form

Please complete and return to Mrs Lefèvre (complaints coordinator) who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

Your name:
Pupil's name (if relevant):
Your relationship to the pupil (if relevant):
Address: Daytime telephone number: Evening telephone number:
Please give details of your complaint, including whether you have spoken to anybody at the school about it.

What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?

Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details.

Signature:

Date:

Official use

Date acknowledgement sent:

By who:

Complaint referred to:

Date: