



Concerns and Complaints Procedure

Purpose of this procedure

All parents will have concerns about the welfare and education of their children. The aim of this procedure is to achieve a fair and speedy resolution of any concerns.

Parents will be advised by the school if the nature of their concern means that it should be addressed by an alternative procedure e.g. admissions, child protection, or disability.

When we refer in this procedure to “parents” or “you” we include any carer having parental responsibility for the child.

What to do if you have a concern or complaint

If you have a concern our policy is that it should be settled fairly, quickly and informally.

Our procedure has four stages. We hope that most, in fact all, concerns will be dealt with at stages 1, 2, and 3 which are informal and semi-formal. If you wish to take an issue to stage 4 then it will be treated as a complaint rather than a concern and there will be a greater degree of formality- but we will try to keep this to a minimum.

Stage 1 – Informal

Step 1: If you have a concern about your child please contact the Class Teacher. The Class Teacher may consult other members of staff including the Head or Deputy Head but responsibility for resolving your concern at this stage rests with the Class Teacher. Our aim is that you should receive an initial response to your concern within five school days of receipt. Working with the class teacher is the best way to reach a resolution to concerns.

Step 2: If after working with your child’s Class Teacher you feel the issue has not been resolved, then speak or write to the Year Head or if your concern relates to a SEN matter, please contact the school SENCO at this stage. If you think it appropriate you may miss step 1 and contact the Year Head directly. Our aim is that you should receive an initial response to your concern within five school days of receipt.

There is no formal procedure at Stage 1. You can speak, write to or email the Class Teacher or Year Head. There is no requirement for notes of meetings to be kept at this stage, although you may ask the teacher concerned to keep a record.



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Although we have suggested time limits for an initial response please bear in mind that resolution may take longer, in particular if investigations have to be made to ascertain the facts behind the concern.

Special Cases

There may be cases when speaking to the class teacher is not appropriate, for example if your concern is about the Class Teacher or Year Head. In these cases please contact the Head or Deputy Head directly. Please be aware that these concerns will still be treated as being at Stage 1 in the first instance.

If your concern relates to the Deputy Head then please contact the Head, and if your concern relates to the Head then please contact the Chair of the Governors c/o St Mary's. Again, where this is an initial concern it will be dealt with as a Stage 1 concern.

We do recommend that you try to resolve your concern by speaking directly with the individual concerned before turning to this procedure.

Stage 2: Semi-formal

If your concern has not been resolved at stage 1 then please write or speak to the Deputy Head or Head. *At this stage the matter may be reviewed either by the Head or Deputy Head, and where we refer to "Head" we include the Deputy Head.*

If your concern relates to the Head and was not resolved at stage 1 then please contact the Chair of Governors under stage 3.

The Head will review your concern and this will probably involve meeting you and receiving a report from the Class Teacher or Year Head. He/she may also need to establish the factual background and speak to pupils or staff. The Head will aim to acknowledge your Stage 2 concern within five days of receipt and will agree with you the next steps towards reaching a resolution of the concern.

While the emphasis will be on informality, and there is no set procedure for this stage, a record will be kept by the Head of all meetings. The aim throughout will be to reach a resolution of the concern in order to safeguard the learning and well-being of children and a good working relationship between adults.

To aid this process either parents or the Head may approach the LEO for advice and support with mediation. Contact details are available from the school office.

Stage 3: Semi-formal

If your complaint has not been resolved by stage 2, please write to the Chair of Governors using the official complaints form. Your complaint will then be reviewed by one or more governors, ("nominated governors") one of whom may be the Chair of the Governors. If your concern was about the Head and Stage 1 was dealt with by the Chair of Governors then the Chair will not be one of the nominated governors.



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The nominated governors will investigate the concern and may wish to meet you to in order to discuss the concern or investigate what happened. At any meeting, you may, if you wish, be accompanied by a friend or relative or representative. The school will notify the Surrey County Council Area Schools Officer of your concern and he or she may contact you to discuss your concern and may assist in mediation between you and the School.

The nominated governors will seek to resolve or reply to your concern within 15 school days of receiving the complaint form or meeting you, whichever is the later.

Stage 4: Formal

In very rare cases an impasse may be reached at which point the stage 4 procedure may be needed.

This stage is more formal, recognising that if a concern has not been settled it should be regarded as a complaint. This stage involves the complaint being considered by a Panel selected from amongst the Governors.

If you wish your complaint to be considered by the Panel please write to the Chair of the Governors at St Mary's School, Silkham Road, Oxted, Surrey, RH8 0NP, using the official complaints form.

Please note that no complaint at Stage 4 can be considered without evidence that resolution has been sought in accordance with Stages 1, 2, and 3.

A Panel will be convened, consisting of three Governors, none of whom shall have played an active role in the matter to date. The Chair will not be a member of the Panel. The Chair or the Clerk to the Governors will acknowledge the complaint within five school days.

The Panel shall have the discretion not to review a complaint if it considers the issue such that a panel review would be disproportionate in terms of time or cost.

The Panel will elect its Chair and set a date for the panel review. This will normally be within forty school days of the date of the complaint being sent to the Chair, or from the time of receipt of the complaints form if requested and received later. The intent is that a date should be chosen which is acceptable to the parents, the school, the Panel and representatives of Surrey County Council (SCC) and Southwark Diocesan Board of Education (SDBE).

The school and parents should provide documentation relevant to the complaint to the Panel at least ten school days before the review date. Parents will be provided with documentation received from the school (and the school provided with documents received from the parents) at least five school days before the review date.



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Parents may be accompanied to the review by one other person. This may be a relative, teacher or friend, but legal representation will not be appropriate. Witnesses may be invited subject to the approval of the Panel given before the review date, but witnesses may only attend the part of the review for which they are required.

The school will normally be represented by the Head or Deputy Head and the Chair of the Governors.

Conduct of the review will be as determined by the Panel. Normally it will take the following form:

1. The complainant will outline the complaint
2. The Head may seek clarification from the complainant
3. The Panel may seek clarification from the complainant
4. The Head will respond
5. The Complainant may seek clarification from the Head
6. The Panel may seek clarification from the Head
7. The Head may summarise how the school tried to resolve the complaint
8. The complainant may summarise why he/she feels the school has not properly addressed the complaint

The Panel will consider the relevant facts and representations and will reach a decision and may make recommendations. The Panel will write to the parents within ten school days informing them of its decision and the reasons for it. Representatives from SCC and SDBE may assist the Panel.

A report and recommendations will be made to the governors at their next full meeting.

The Clerk to the Panel (normally the Clerk to the Governors) will take minutes of the review. Records of the complaint will be destroyed six years after the date of the review unless the complaint concerns personal injury. Records relating to the complaint are confidential but may be disclosed to the complainant, the Head, the Chair of the Governors and where relevant any person who is the subject of the complaint. Disclosure may also be required in connection with an inspection of the school or where there is a legal obligation to disclose.

If the complainant feels the Governors have acted or are proposing to act unreasonably or that they or the Local Authority have failed to discharge duties under legislation the complainant's final course of action is to write to the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, Sanctuary Buildings, Great Smith Street, Westminster, London SW1P 3BT to ask for the case to be reviewed.

Details

Is there a complaints form?



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We do have a complaints form, but it is only needed for stages three and four. Concerns can be put in writing to members of staff at any time, with no form required.

What if there is a complaint by another parent involving my child?

Our policy is that procedures should be fair. This means that if allegations are made about another child or member of staff then the person against whom the allegations are made must be given an opportunity to give his/her point of view.

Is there a time limit for mentioning concerns?

There is no formal time limit but if you delay in mentioning a concern it may be impractical to carry out adequate investigations and the school may decline to take the procedure forward if this is the case. You should aim to mention a concern as soon as possible and a delay of over one month may make an investigation difficult.

Is the Local Authority or the Diocese of Southwark involved?

If a concern moves to stage 4 then the School will notify Surrey County Council and the Southwark Diocesan Board of Education and may inform them of the concern at an earlier stage and seek their advice. You may also ask for advice and mediation from Surrey County Council. Both organisations may decide to send representatives to a stage 4 review.

Can I bring an adviser?

In line with our policy of informality it is not appropriate to bring an adviser to meetings at stages 1, or 2 unless needed for special reasons, for example if you do not speak English and need a translator. However you may bring one adviser to the review meeting at stage 3 and that adviser may speak on your behalf.

Does the school have to consider every concern or complaint?

While the school is keen to hear of your concerns and keen for them to be resolved it is not obliged to implement this procedure if the substance of the concern or complaint has already been considered or if it reasonably believes the concern or complaint to be vexatious.

And finally...

The school's policy is that staff, parents and pupils should treat each other with mutual respect throughout this procedure.