



St Hilda's C.E. Primary School

Complaints Policy and Procedure 2025 - 26

Introduction

- The procedure set out in this document is based on the principles set out within the Department for Education guidance to schools in respect of responding to complaints - *Best Practice Advice for School Complaints Procedures 2020*. The guidance may be accessed via the following link:
[Best practice guidance for school complaints procedures 2020 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/531212/best-practice-advice-for-school-complaints-procedures-2020.pdf)
- The procedure set out in this document should be read and will be implemented in conjunction with the support and guidance of DfE documentation, as outlined above.
- This procedure also takes account of the document *Oldham Council: Responding to Complaints and Representations - Guidance for Schools and Governing Bodies, January 2016*.
- The Diocese of Manchester is recognised and will be resourced, as required, by the school as a key asset in supporting and offering guidance where complaints may be deemed contentious.
- The Headteacher and all staff in school strive to build positive relationships with families and with partners in the wider community. We encourage people to raise concerns with us as soon as possible, in order that we may act swiftly and effectively to resolve matters to the satisfaction of all involved.
- Any safeguarding, disciplinary or grievance matters fall outside of the scope of the complaints process and will need to be addressed via the appropriate procedure.
- Complaints from persons attending an event in school organised by a third party must be directed to the organiser of the event and not to the school.

Who can make a complaint?

- This complaints procedure is not limited to parents or carers of children registered at the school. Any person, including members of the public, reserves the right to make a complaint to St Hilda's CE Primary School about any provision of facilities or services that we provide. Unless complaints are dealt with under separate statutory procedures (such as appeals relating to exclusions or admissions), the school will follow 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 the interests of everyone that concerns and complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. The majority of issues can be resolved informally, without the need to use the formal stages of the complaints procedure. St Hilda's CE Primary School takes concerns and complaints seriously and will make every effort to resolve matters as quickly as possible.
- If you have difficulty discussing a concern with a particular member of staff, we will endeavour to respect your views. In such cases, the Headteacher may refer you to another staff member. Similarly, if the member

of staff directly involved feels unable to deal with a concern, the Headteacher may refer you to another staff member. The member of staff may be more senior but this is not an essential requirement; the ability to consider the concern objectively and impartially is more important.

- We understand that there are occasions when people wish to raise their concerns formally. In this case, [Best practice guidance for school complaints procedures 2020 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/best-practice-guidance-for-school-complaints-procedures-2020) will be used as a model in attempting 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. A concern or complaint can be made by a third party acting on behalf of the complainant, providing they have appropriate consent to do so.
- In the first instance, parents / carers should raise concerns with their child's Class Teacher. Parents / carers should contact the school office and arrange a time to speak with the Class Teacher either on the telephone or, where appropriate, in person. In the vast majority of cases, parents /carers will have their concern resolved at this first, informal stage.
- If a member of the public raises a concern about the provision or facilities on offer in school, again it is highly likely that this will be resolved on an informal basis.
- If a member of staff is unable to address a concern immediately - whether from a parent / carer or from a member of the public - the staff member should communicate clear and firm arrangements about when the concern will be dealt with **or** refer the matter to another member of staff. This may include the Phase Lead or Deputy Headteacher. Where the concern is regarding a serious matter, it may require the immediate attention or involvement of the Headteacher and staff should seek advice from the Headteacher where necessary. If no satisfactory solution can be found within 15 working days or any other agreed timeframe, the complainant may ask for a formal complaint to be progressed. They will be given clear information about how to proceed and any advice and support that may be available to them.
- The Headteacher should be kept informed about details and outcomes of any concerns.
- Complainants should **not** approach individual governors to raise concerns or complaints. Governors have no jurisdiction to act on an individual basis and it may also prevent them from considering complaints at a later stage of the procedure.
- Complaints against school staff (except the Headteacher) should be addressed to Patricia Burton (the Headteacher) via the school office. Please mark correspondence *Private and Confidential*.
- Complaints that involve or are about the Headteacher should be addressed to Elizabeth Scoltock (the Chair of Governors) via the school office. Please mark correspondence *Private and Confidential*.
- Complaints about the Chair of Governors, any individual governor or the whole Governing Body should be addressed to Emma Bennett (Clerk to the Governing Body) via the school office. Please mark correspondence *Private and Confidential*.

- For ease of use, a template complaint form is included within this document. If you require help completing the form, please contact the school office. You can also seek support from a third party organisation such as Citizens Advice.
- In accordance with equality law and if required, school will consider making reasonable adjustments, to enable complainants to access and complete the complaints procedure. For instance, providing information in alternative formats, assisting complainants in raising a formal complaint and / or holding meetings in accessible locations. The services of a translator / interpreter may be available, on request.

Anonymous Complaints

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

Timescales

- You must raise the complaint within three months of the incident or, where a series of associated incidents has occurred, within three months of the last of these incidents. School 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 St Hilda's CE Primary School other than complaints that are dealt with under other statutory procedures, including those listed below.

Exceptions	Who to contact
- Admissions to schools - Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs - School re-organisation proposals	Concerns about admissions, statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs, or school re-organisation proposals should be raised with Oldham Council.
Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation	Complaints about child protection matters are handled under our Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy and in accordance with relevant statutory guidance. 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). Oldham's LADO is Colette Morris. Contact details are, as follows: Office: 0161-7708870 Mobile: 07583 101 863 email: colette.morris@oldham.gov.uk Oldham MASH Team: 0161-770 7777
Exclusion of children from school*	Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at: www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions. Complaints about the application of the Behaviour Policy can be made through the school's complaints procedure.
Whistleblowing	There is an internal whistleblowing procedure for all our employees, including temporary staff and contractors. The Secretary of State for Education is the prescribed person for matters relating to education for whistleblowers in education who do not want to raise matters direct with their employer. Referrals can be made at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus. 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 LA or the Department for Education (see link above), depending on the substance of your complaint.
Staff grievances	Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the school's internal grievance procedures.

• Staff conduct	Complaints about staff will be dealt with under the school's internal disciplinary procedures, as appropriate. Complainants will not be informed of any disciplinary action taken against a staff member as a result of a complaint. However the complainant will be notified that the matter is being addressed.
• Complaints about services provided by other providers who may use school premises or facilities	Providers have their own complaints procedure to deal with complaints about service. Please contact them direct.
• National Curriculum - content	Please contact the Department for Education 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 school's 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 St Hilda's CE Primary School in relation to their complaint, school 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, St Hilda's CE Primary School places a priority on resolving 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 wishes to withdraw their complaint, school will ask them to confirm this in writing.

How to Make a Formal Complaint

Stage I

- 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 acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 3 school days.
- Within their 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 will not delegate the outcome / 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 20 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.
- 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 St Hilda's CE Primary 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 I.
- 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 I.
- Complaints about the Headteacher or a member of the Governing Body must be addressed to Emma Bennett (Clerk to the Governing Body), via the school office. Please mark correspondence *Private and Confidential*.

If the complaint is:

- jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair or
- the entire Governing Body or
- the majority of the Governing Body;

Stage I will be considered by an independent investigator appointed by the Governing Body or Manchester Diocese. At the conclusion of their 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 the 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, via the school office, within 5 school days of receipt of the Stage 1 response.
- The Clerk will record the date the Stage 2 request is received and acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 3 school days.
- Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.
- The Clerk will write to the complainant to inform them of the date of the meeting. They will aim to convene a meeting within 20 school days of receipt of the Stage 2 request. If this is not possible, the Clerk will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed.
- The Clerk will ask the complainant to submit any written material they wish to be considered by the Complaints Committee within 5 school days of their Stage 2 request being acknowledged.
- If the complainant rejects the offer of three proposed dates - without good reason - the Clerk will decide when to hold the meeting. The meeting will then proceed in the complainant's absence on the basis of a written submission 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 amongst themselves who will act as the Chair of the Complaints Committee. If there are fewer than three governors from St Hilda's CE Primary School available, the Clerk will source any additional, independent governors through another local school or through the LA Governor Services team, in order to make up the committee. Alternatively, an entirely independent committee may be convened to hear the complaint at Stage 2.
- The Complaints Committee will decide whether to deal with the complaint by inviting parties to a meeting or through written representation; in making their decision they will be sensitive to the complainant's needs.
- If the complainant is invited to attend the meeting they may be accompanied as a form of support. This can be a relative or friend. Generally, we do not encourage either party to bring legal representation to the committee meeting. However there may be occasions when legal representation is appropriate, for instance, if a school employee is called as a witness in a complaint meeting, they may wish to be supported by union and/or legal representation.

Note: Complaints about staff conduct will not generally be handled under this complaints procedure. Complainants will be advised that any staff conduct complaints will be considered under staff disciplinary procedures, if appropriate, but outcomes will not be shared with them.

- Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

- At least 10 school days before the meeting, the Clerk 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.
- The Clerk will request copies of any further written material to be submitted to the Complaints Committee at least 7 school days before the meeting. Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least 3-5 school days before the date of the meeting. The Complaints 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 Complaints 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 need requires it. Prior knowledge and consent of all parties attending must be sought before recording of meetings or conversations takes place. Consent will be recorded in any minutes taken. Platforms that support remote attendance e.g. *Zoom*, *MS Teams* may be used under certain circumstances.
- The Complaints Committee will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented. The Complaints 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 Complaints 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 St Hilda's CE Primary School with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within 10 school days.
- The letter to the complainant will include details of how to contact the Department for Education if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled by St Hilda's CE Primary 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 St Hilda's CE Primary School will take to resolve the complaint.
- The response will also advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied.

At this point, the Governors of St Hilda's CE Primary School will consider the matter closed.

Please note - at times specifically when further investigation is needed, complainants need to be aware that it may not be possible to respond within the agreed timescales. If for any reasons this occurs, the appropriate person investigating the complaint will endeavour to provide regular updates to the complainant during this process.

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 Department for Education will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by St Hilda's CE Primary School. They will consider whether St Hilda's CE Primary School has adhered to education legislation and any statutory policies connected with the complaint.
- The complainant can refer their complaint to the Department for Education online at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus by telephone on 0370 000 2288 or in writing to:

Department for Education
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

Complaint Form

Please complete and return to Patricia Burton (Headteacher) 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:
Postcode:
Day time 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 whom:

Complaint referred to:

Date:

Roles and Responsibilities

Complainant

The complainant will receive a more effective response to the complaint if they:

- explain the complaint in full as early as possible;
- co-operate with the school in seeking a solution to the complaint;
- respond promptly to requests for information or meetings or in agreeing the details of the complaint;
- ask for assistance as needed;
- treat all those involved in the complaint with respect;
- refrain from publicising the details of their complaint on social media and respect confidentiality;

Investigator

The investigator's role is to establish the facts relevant to the complaint by:

- providing a comprehensive, open, transparent and fair consideration of the complaint through:
 - sensitive and thorough interviewing of the complainant to establish what has happened and who has been involved;
 - interviewing staff and children / young people and others relevant to the complaint;
 - consideration of records and other relevant information;
 - analysing information;
- liaising with the complainant and the complaints co-ordinator as appropriate to clarify what the complainant feels would put things right;

The investigator should:

- conduct interviews with an open mind and be prepared to persist with questioning;
- keep notes of interviews or arrange for an independent note taker to record minutes of the meeting;
- ensure that any papers produced during the investigation are kept securely pending any appeal;
- be mindful of the timescales to respond;
- prepare a comprehensive report for the Headteacher or Complaints Committee that sets out the facts, identifies solutions and recommends courses of action to resolve problems;

The Headteacher or Complaints Committee will then determine whether to uphold or dismiss the complaint and communicate that decision to the complainant, providing the appropriate escalation details.

Complaints Co-ordinator (Headteacher / designated complaints governor or other staff member providing administrative support)

The Complaints Co-ordinator should:

- ensure that the complainant is fully updated at each stage of the procedure;
- liaise with staff members, Headteacher, Chair of Governors, Clerk and LA (if appropriate) to ensure the smooth running of the complaints procedure;

- be aware of issues regarding:
 - sharing third party information;
 - additional support - this may be needed by complainants when making a complaint including interpretation support or where the complainant is a child or young person;
- keep records;

Clerk to the Governing Body

The Clerk is the contact point for the complainant and the Complaints Committee, and as such should:

- ensure that all people involved in the complaints procedure are aware of their legal rights and duties, including any under legislation relating to school complaints, education law, the Equality Act 2010, the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act (DPA) 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR);
- set the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that the dates are convenient to all parties (if they are invited to attend) and that the venue and proceedings are accessible;
- collate any written material relevant to the complaint (for example Stage 1 paperwork, school and complainant submissions) and send it to the parties in advance of the meeting within agreed timescales;
- record the proceedings;
- circulate the minutes of the meeting;
- notify all parties of the committee's decision;

Committee Chair

The Committee Chair, who is nominated in advance of the complaint meeting, should ensure that:

- both parties are asked (via the Clerk) to provide any additional information relating to the complaint by a specified date in advance of the meeting;
- the meeting is conducted in an informal manner, is not adversarial, and that, if all parties are invited to attend, everyone is treated with respect and courtesy;
- complainants who may not be used to speaking at such a meeting are put at ease – this is particularly important if the complainant is a child / young person;
- the remit of the Complaints Committee is explained to the complainant;
- written material is seen by everyone in attendance, provided it does not breach confidentiality or any individual's rights to privacy under the DPA 2018 or GDPR;

If a new issue arises it would be useful to give everyone the opportunity to consider and comment upon it; this may require a short adjournment of the meeting.

- both the complainant and the school are given the opportunity to make their case and seek clarity, either through written submissions ahead of the meeting or verbally in the meeting itself;
- the issues are addressed;
- key findings of fact are made;

- the Complaints Committee is open-minded and acts independently;
- no member of the committee has an external interest in the outcome of the proceedings or any involvement in an earlier stage of the procedure;
- the meeting is minuted;
- they liaise with the Clerk (and Complaints Co-ordinator, if the school has one);

Committee Member

Committee members should be aware that:

- the meeting must be independent and impartial;
No governor may sit on the committee if they have had a prior involvement in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it.
- the aim of the meeting should be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant;

We recognise that the complainant might not be satisfied with the outcome if the meeting does not find in their favour. It may only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations.

- many complainants will feel nervous and inhibited in a formal setting - parents / carers often feel emotional when discussing an issue that affects their child;
- extra care needs to be taken when the complainant is a child / young person and present during all or part of the meeting;

Careful consideration of the atmosphere and proceedings should ensure that the child/young person does not feel intimidated.

The committee should respect the views of the child / young person and give consideration which is equal to that given to adults.

If the child / young person is the complainant, the Complaints Committee should ask in advance if any support is needed to help them present their complaint. Where the child / young person's parent is the complainant, the committee should give the parent the opportunity to say which parts of the meeting, if any, the child / young person needs to attend. However, the parent should be advised that agreement might not always be possible if the parent wishes the child / young person to attend a part of the meeting that the committee considers is not in the best interests of child / young person.

- the welfare of the child / young person is paramount.

Ratified by the Governing Body on Monday 24th November 2025.

This policy will be reviewed annually.

Next review September 2026.