





Contents

1. Introduction.....	3
2. Aims	3
3. Legislation and guidance	4
4. Definitions and scope	4
5. Roles and responsibilities	5
6. Principles for investigation	7
7. Stages of complaint (not complaints against the headteacher or a governor)	8
8. Complaints against the headteacher or a governor.....	12
9. Persistent or vexatious complaints.....	13
10. Record-keeping	14
11. Learning lessons	14
12. Monitoring arrangements.....	14
13. Links with other policies.....	15
14. Further action	15
15. Additional information	15



1. Introduction

At St Dominic's Priory School, we welcome suggestions and comments from parents and students and take seriously any complaints and concerns you have. A complaint will be treated as an expression of genuine dissatisfaction which needs a response. All complaints will be treated in a professional manner and will not rebound adversely on students or parents within the school. The following policy sets out the procedures that the school follows in such cases.

If any parents are unhappy with the education that their child is receiving, or have any concerns relating to the school, we encourage them to talk to the child's form or subject teacher immediately.

2. Aims

Our school aims to meet its statutory obligations when responding to complaints from parents of pupils currently on role at the school.

When responding to complaints, we aim to:

- Treat complainants with respect
- 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
- Keep complainants informed of the progress of the complaints process
- Consider how the complaint can feed into school improvement evaluation processes
- Ensure that any decisions we make are lawful, rational, reasonable, fair, and proportionate, in line with the principles of administrative law

We try to resolve concerns or complaints by informal means wherever possible. Where this is not possible, formal procedures will be followed.

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.

3. Legislation and guidance

This document meets the requirements set out in part 7 of the schedule to *Independent School Inspectorate Regulatory Requirements 2020*, which states that we must have and make available a written procedure to deal with complaints from parents of current pupils at the school.

It is also based on guidance published by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) on creating a complaints procedure that complies with the above regulations, and refers to good practice guidance on setting up complaints procedures from the Department for Education (DfE).

In addition, it addresses duties set out in the *Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework* with regards to dealing with complaints about the school's fulfilment of Early Years Foundation Stage requirements.

4. Definitions and scope

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”

The school intends to resolve complaints at the earliest possible stage and where possible, informally.

There may be occasions when complainants would like to raise their concerns formally. This policy outlines the procedure relating to handling such complaints. This policy does **not** cover complaints procedures relating to:

- Admissions
- Statutory assessments of special educational needs (SEN)
- Safeguarding matters
- Exclusion
- Whistleblowing
- Staff grievances
- Staff discipline

Please see our separate policies for procedures relating to these types of complaint.

Arrangements for handling complaints from parents of children with special educational needs (SEN) about the school's support are within the scope of this policy. Such complaints should first be made to the class teacher/special educational needs coordinator (SENCO) or headteacher; they will then be referred to this complaints policy. Our SEN policy and information report includes information about the rights of parents of pupils with disabilities who believe that our school has discriminated against their child.

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

5. Roles and responsibilities

5.1 The complainant

The complainant will:

- 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

- Maintain confidentiality and will not share the details of the complaint with members of staff not directly involved in the process, other parents or to publish details about the complaint on social media

5.2 The investigator

An individual will be appointed to investigate the complaint and establish the facts. They will:

- Interview all relevant parties
- Consider records and any written evidence
- Prepare a comprehensive report to the headteacher or complaints committee which includes the facts and potential solutions

5.3 The complaints co-ordinator

The complaints co-ordinator can be:

- The headteacher
- The designated complaints governor
- Any other staff member providing administrative support

The complaints co-ordinator will:

- Keep the complainant up to date at each stage in the procedure
- Make sure the process runs smoothly by liaising with staff members, the headteacher, chair of governors

➤ Be aware of issues relating to:

- Sharing third party information
 - Additional support needed by complainants, for example interpretation support or where the complainant is a child or young person
- Keep records

5.4 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
- Arrange the complaints hearing
- Record and circulate the minutes and outcome of the hearing

5.5 Committee chair

The committee chair will:

- Chair the 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

6. Principles for investigation

When investigating a complaint, we will try to clarify:

- what has happened,
- who was involved,
- when it has happened,
- how it has happened, and
- why it has happened.

The complainant will be asked to advise as to what they consider would be the resolution to their complaint, which will be considered as part of the outcome and actions that follow the process.

6.1 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 from 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

6.2 Complaints about our fulfilment of early years' requirements

We will investigate all written complaints relating to the school's fulfilment of the Early Years Foundation Stage requirements and notify the complainant of the outcome within 28 days of receiving the complaint. The school will keep a record of the complaint (see section 9) and make this available to Ofsted on request.

Parents and carers can notify Ofsted if they believe that the school is not meeting Early Years Foundation Stage requirements, by calling 0300 123 4666, or by emailing enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk. An online contact form is also available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted#org-contacts>.

We will notify parents and carers if we become aware that the school is to be inspected by Ofsted/ISI. We will also supply a copy of the inspection report to parents and carers of children attending the setting on a regular basis.

7. Stages of complaint (not complaints against the headteacher or a governor)

7.1 Stage 1: informal

It is hoped that most complaints and concerns will be resolved quickly and informally.

The school will take informal 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.

The complainant should raise the complaint as soon as possible with the relevant member of staff or the headteacher, either in person or by letter, telephone, or email. If the complainant is unclear who to contact or how to contact them, they should contact the school office.

The school will acknowledge informal complaints, and provide a response within 5 working (term time) ¹ days.

The informal stage may involve a meeting between the complainant and the headteacher and/or the subject of the complaint, if appropriate.

If the complaint is not resolved informally, and the parent is not satisfied with the response and wishes to take the matter further, then parents will be advised to proceed with their complaint in accordance with Stage 2 of this procedure, a formal complaint.

7.2 Stage 2: formal resolution

The formal stage involves the complainant putting the complaint to the headteacher and/or the subject of the complaint:

- In a letter or email
- Over the phone
- In person
- Through a third party acting on their behalf

The complainant should provide, to the headteacher, 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 01785 814181 ext. 2 and speak to the headteacher.

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 2 school days. They will then appoint either an internal or external investigating officer and advise of the process they will undertake.

Written records of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint will be kept.

¹ Working days – Mon-Friday during School term time – refer to school calendar

At the conclusion of the investigation, the headteacher will provide a formal written response to the parents of the outcome in writing by email or conventional mail.

The headteacher will give reasons for the decision and where appropriate, it will include details of any actions the school will take to resolve the complaint.

The written conclusion of this investigation will be sent to the complainant within 14 working days (term time). If for any reason this is not possible, the headteacher will write to the parents within the 14-working day period referred to above, stating the reason or reasons why a decision could not be issued within this timeframe and inform the parents of a revised timeframe, which will normally be within 28 working days of receipt of the complaint in any event.

If the complainant is not satisfied with the response and wishes to proceed to the next stage of this procedure, they should inform the chair of governors in writing within 7 working days of receipt of the outcome.

7.3 Stage 3: panel hearing

Upon receipt of the written decision, if parents seek to invoke Stage 3 of this procedure, they are to write to the chair of governors informing them of their decision to do so within 28 working days, whereupon the matter will be referred to a named governor. The named governor will then take responsibility for the organisation of a complaints panel hearing.

The panel will be appointed by or on behalf of the trustees 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 named governor, on behalf of the panel, will then acknowledge the complaint and schedule a hearing to take place as soon as practicable and normally within 10 working days

If the named governor and/or the members of the panel deem it necessary, they may require (in writing) that further particulars of the complaint or any other related matter be supplied in advance of the hearing. Copies of such particulars shall be supplied to all parties no later than 5 days before the hearing. Any such further particulars received within 5 days before the hearing shall be disregarded and inadmissible to the panel

because it will not be possible to provide copies to all parties within that timescale.

The panel will not review any new complaints at this stage or consider evidence unrelated to the initial complaint to be included.

The complainant must have reasonable notice of the date of the review panel; however, the review panel reserves the right to convene at their convenience rather than that of the complainant. 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 5 working days before the hearing.

The complainant must be allowed to attend the panel hearing and be accompanied if they wish. Legal representation will not normally be appropriate.

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.

If possible, the panel will resolve the parent's complaint at the hearing without the need for further investigation. However, should the panel decide at the hearing that further investigation is required, the panel shall decide how such investigations should be carried out and by when they should be concluded. The panel will reconvene and, after due consideration of all facts they consider relevant, will make findings, reach a decision, and may make recommendations. This procedure will be completed within 14 working days of the first hearing wherever possible but within 28 working days in any event unless otherwise agreed with the parents.

The possible outcomes include:

- upholding the complaint in whole or in part
- dismissing the complaint in whole or in part

if the complaint is upheld in whole or in part, the panel 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 panel will either email or send by conventional mail their decision together with their reasons and a copy of this will be emailed or sent by conventional mail to the person or persons being complained about. A further copy will be securely filed at school and will be available for inspection by the Chair of Governors and headteacher. The decision of the panel will be final.

The panel's findings and, if any, recommendations will be sent by email or conventional mail to the headteacher, governors and, where the complaint relates to an individual, to that individual.

Parents can be assured that all complaints and concerns will be treated seriously and confidentially. Correspondence, statements, and records will be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection (including ISI (Independent Schools Inspectorate)) under section 162A of the 2002 Act requires access to them or where any other legal obligation prevails.

With reference to the Early Years Foundation Stage, we will keep the record of complaints for at least three years and complainants will be notified of the outcome of an investigation within 28 days of the school having received the complaint.

8. Complaints against the headteacher or a governor

Complaints made against the headteacher should be directed to the chair of governors or any member of the governing body.

Where a complaint is against headteacher 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 stage 1 (set out in section 7 above).

9. **Persistent or vexatious complaints**

Where a complainant continues to make representations to the school on the same issues after the complaint's procedure has been fully exhausted and the school has done everything it reasonably can in response to the complaint, or it has been determined that the complaint is of a vexatious nature, the chair of governors (or other appropriate person in the case of a complaint about the chair) will inform the complainant that the matter is closed.

If the complainant subsequently contacts the school again about the same issue, the school can choose not to respond. The normal circumstance in which we will not respond is if:

- The school has taken every reasonable step to address the complainant's needs, *and*

The complainant has been given a clear statement of the school's position and their options (if any) *and*

- The complainant is contacting the school repeatedly but making substantially the same points each time

However, this list is not intended to be exhaustive.

The school will be most likely to choose not to respond if:

- We have reason to believe the individual is contacting the school with the intention of causing disruption or inconvenience, and/or
- The individual's letters/emails/telephone calls are often or always abusive or aggressive, and/or
- The individual makes insulting personal comments about, or threats towards, school staff

Unreasonable behaviour, which is abusive, offensive, or threatening may constitute an unreasonably persistent complaint.

Once the school has decided that it is appropriate to stop responding, the complainant will be informed in writing, either by letter or email.

The school will ensure when making this decision that complainants making any new complaint are heard, and that the school acts reasonably.

10. Record-keeping

The school will comply with the provisions of UK data protection law. All data will be processed in accordance with the principles of that legislation and as set out in the school's privacy notice.

The school will record the progress of all complaints, including information about actions taken at all stages, the stage at which the complaint was resolved, and the final outcome. The records will also include copies of letters and emails, and notes relating to meetings and phone calls.

Personal information will be treated as confidential and held securely and privately in accordance with the school's Data Protection Policies and Procedures.

This is except where the secretary of state (or someone acting on their behalf) or the complainant requests access to records of a complaint through a freedom of information (FOI) request or under the terms of the Data Protection Act, or where the material must be made available during a school inspection.

11. Learning lessons

The governing board will review any underlying issues raised by complaints with the headteacher, 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.

12. Monitoring arrangements

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

The complaints records are logged and managed by the headteacher.
This policy will be reviewed by the headteacher every year.
At each review, the policy will be approved by the Chair of governors.

13. 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

14. Further Action

If a complaint has not been resolved within the school parents have the right to make a complaint to the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) and/or the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI), their addresses and phone numbers are shown below:

For Parents with a complaint relating to Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) contact may be made with OFSTED (Office for Standards in Education) and/or ISI.

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE
CAP House
9 - 12 Long Lane
London
EC1A 9HA
Telephone: 020 7600 0100
Email: info@isi.net

OFSTED
Civic House
70 Petty France
London
SW1H 9EX
Tel: 0300 123 4666
CIE@Ofsted.gov.uk

15. Additional Information

This policy can be made available for in alternative formats such as Braille, large print, audio, and easy read on request.

16. Number of complaints for last academic year:

The number of Stage 3 complaints in the 2024/2025 academic year was 