



ST HILDA'S
CE HIGH SCHOOL

Complaints Policy

Approved by Governing Committee: Business Resources Committee

Ratified by Full Governing Body: 18th June 2026

Next Review Month: June 2027

Policy Owner / Author: JCo

Review Frequency: Annual

This policy remains in force until superseded by a revised policy approved by the Governing Board.

CHRIST JESUS AS OUR CORNERSTONE

Ephesians 2:20

THE ST HILDA'S FAMILY

We are the St Hilda's family, with **Jesus Christ** as our **cornerstone**.
Building on foundations of **wisdom hope community dignity and equality**
we nurture and support one another to be our very best.
We rejoice in our **diversity** and celebrate our many achievements.

Aims and Principles

This policy sets out the school's approach to responding to concerns and complaints in a way that is clear, fair and consistently applied. The school is committed to resolving concerns at the earliest possible stage and, where this is not achievable, to ensuring that complaints are managed through a structured, transparent and robust process.

The school will act impartially at all times, ensuring that all parties are treated with respect and that decisions are based on a careful consideration of the evidence. Outcomes will be reasonable, proportionate and in line with the principles of good administrative practice.

As a Church of England school, we are committed to resolving concerns and complaints in a way that reflects our Christian vision and values. This includes a commitment to dignity, respect, justice and reconciliation, ensuring that all parties are heard and valued throughout the process.

The school is committed not only to resolving individual issues, but also to reflecting on complaints to identify any underlying causes and to drive continuous improvement in practice.

Legislation and Guidance

This procedure meets the requirements of section 29 of the Education Act 2002 and reflects the expectations set out in Department for Education guidance on school complaints procedures.

Definitions

A concern is an expression of worry or doubt for which reassurance is sought. A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction about actions taken or a lack of action.

The school recognises the importance of resolving concerns informally wherever possible. Where this is not sufficient, complaints will proceed through the formal stages outlined in this procedure.

Scope of the Procedure

This procedure applies to complaints about the provision of education and services at the school. It does not apply to matters where separate statutory procedures are in place, including admissions, safeguarding, special educational needs assessments, exclusions, staff grievances or whistleblowing. These will be managed under the appropriate policies.

Where a complaint raises safeguarding concerns, the school will immediately follow its safeguarding procedures. In such cases, aspects of the complaints process may be paused while safeguarding enquiries are undertaken.

Raising a Concern or Complaint

Concerns and complaints may be raised in person, by telephone, in writing or through a third party acting on behalf of the complainant, where appropriate consent has been provided.

Concerns should initially be directed to the relevant member of staff or the Headteacher, with the expectation that most issues can be resolved quickly at this stage. Where a concern cannot be resolved, it may be progressed to a formal complaint.

Complaints should normally be raised within three months of the incident, or within three months of the last incident in a series. The school may consider complaints outside of this timeframe where there are exceptional circumstances.

If a complaint is submitted during school holidays, it will be treated as received on the next school day after the school reopens.

The school will ensure that appropriate support and reasonable adjustments are available so that all individuals are able to access the complaints process fully. This may include providing information in alternative formats or adapting meeting arrangements to meet individual needs.

Stages of the Complaints Procedure

Stage 1: Informal Concern

At this stage, the emphasis is on early resolution through open and constructive dialogue. The concern should be raised as soon as possible with the relevant member of staff or the Headteacher.

The school will acknowledge the concern within five school days and, where appropriate, arrange a meeting or discussion to explore the issue in more detail. A written response will normally be provided within five school days following this discussion.

If the matter remains unresolved, the complainant will be advised on how to progress to the formal stage.

Stage 2: Formal Complaint

A formal complaint should be submitted in writing to the Headteacher. Where the complaint relates to the Headteacher, it should be addressed to the Chair of Governors via the school office.

The school will acknowledge receipt within five school days and will undertake a thorough and proportionate investigation. This will be conducted by a member of staff who has had no prior involvement in the matter wherever possible, in order to ensure impartiality.

The investigation may include meetings with the complainant and relevant staff to establish the facts. Decisions will be made on the balance of probabilities, taking into account all available evidence.

A written response will normally be provided within fifteen school days of receipt. Where it is not possible to meet this timescale, the school will communicate clearly with the complainant, explaining the reasons for any delay and providing an updated timeframe.

Where appropriate, the outcome may include an explanation, an acknowledgement that the situation could have been handled differently, an apology, or a commitment to review procedures or practice.

Where a complaint relates to staff conduct, this may be considered under internal disciplinary procedures. In such cases, the outcome of any disciplinary process will not be shared with the complainant, although they will be informed that the matter has been addressed.

Stage 3: Review Panel

If the complainant remains dissatisfied, they may request that the complaint is reviewed by a panel of governors. This request should be made within ten school days of receiving the Stage 2 response.

The panel will consist of at least three governors who are independent and impartial and who have had no prior involvement in the complaint. Where necessary, independent governors will be appointed to ensure fairness and transparency.

The panel will normally meet within twenty school days. All relevant documentation will be shared in advance, and the complainant will be given the opportunity to attend and to be accompanied by a supporter if they wish.

The panel will consider only the issues that have been raised at earlier stages of the procedure and will not consider new complaints or matters introduced at this stage.

Following careful consideration of all evidence, the panel will reach a decision and set out its findings clearly in writing within five school days. This decision represents the conclusion of the school's complaints procedure.

Complaints Against the Headteacher or Governors

Where a complaint is made against the Headteacher, it must be addressed to the Chair of Governors. Complaints concerning a governor or the governing body should be directed to the Clerk to Governors.

Individual governors will not investigate complaints outside of this formal procedure, as doing so may compromise their ability to act impartially at a later stage.

Referral to the Department for Education

If, after completing the school's procedure, the complainant remains dissatisfied, they may refer the matter to the Department for Education. The Department will not re-investigate the complaint but will consider whether the school has followed its procedures correctly and acted in line with its legal responsibilities.

Further information is available at: www.gov.uk/complain-about-school

Timescales

The school is committed to handling complaints promptly and efficiently. While timescales may vary depending on the complexity of the case, the school aims to acknowledge complaints within five school days, complete formal investigations within fifteen school days and convene panel hearings within twenty school days. Any variation from these timescales will be clearly communicated.

Unreasonable or Persistent Complaints

The school expects all parties to engage with the complaints process in a reasonable, respectful and constructive manner. The majority of complaints are handled appropriately within this framework. However, in a small number of cases, the manner in which a complaint is pursued may become unreasonable.

A complaint may be considered unreasonable where, for example, a complainant persistently makes the same complaint without presenting new evidence, submits excessive amounts of correspondence, raises multiple complaints on closely related matters, or engages in behaviour that is abusive, offensive or harassing towards staff. A complaint may also be considered unreasonable where the complainant refuses to accept the outcome of the procedure once it has been completed in full, or seeks outcomes that are disproportionate or unrealistic.

The school recognises that complainants may choose to use digital tools, including artificial intelligence, to assist in preparing correspondence. This is entirely acceptable. However, where the use of such tools results in excessive, repetitive or substantially similar submissions, or places a disproportionate burden on staff time and resources, the school may take proportionate steps to manage communication in line with this policy. The school will respond to the substance of a complaint rather than the volume or format of correspondence received. Where multiple communications raise substantially the same issues, including those supported by automated tools, these may be treated as a single complaint and responded to accordingly.

Where a complaint is considered to be unreasonable or persistent, the school will take a measured and proportionate approach. This may include setting clear expectations about

future communication, limiting the frequency or mode of contact, requiring correspondence to be directed through a single point of contact, or responding to issues in summary form.

In exceptional cases, where all reasonable steps have been taken to address the complaint and the complainant continues to pursue the same matter without introducing any new information, the school may determine that the complaint is closed. In such circumstances, the complainant will be informed of the school's position and advised that further correspondence on the same matter will not receive a response.

The school will not apply these measures lightly and will ensure that any decision to manage or restrict contact is reasonable, proportionate and clearly communicated. Where appropriate, arrangements will be reviewed periodically.

Record Keeping and Confidentiality

The school will maintain accurate records of all complaints, including actions taken and outcomes reached. These records will be stored securely and handled in accordance with data protection legislation. Information will be shared only with those directly involved in the investigation of the complaint.

Equality and Accessibility

The school is committed to ensuring that the complaints procedure is accessible to all. Reasonable adjustments will be made where necessary to support individuals in accessing and engaging with the process.

Learning from Complaints

The school and governing body will review complaints on a regular basis to identify trends, themes or areas for development. This ensures that lessons learned contribute to strengthening practice and improving outcomes for pupils and the wider school community.