



ST. MARK'S CE SCHOOL
ONE SCHOOL - SERVING ALL - THROUGH EXCELLENCE

Complaints Policy & Procedure

**(including Unreasonable,
Persistent and/ or Vexatious
Complaints Policy**

Policy Statement and Guidelines

Policy Date: December 2025

Review Date: Spring 2026

Policy Statement

At St Mark's Church of England School, we believe that:

- We work in partnership with parents/guardians or carers/other stakeholders and seek to improve our school by paying close attention to their concerns;
- All complaints should be received courteously;
- The complainant should feel that their complaint has received full attention;
- All complaints should be fully investigated;
- The complainant should receive prompt feedback;
- Urgent complaints should receive immediate attention;
- Complaints, wherever possible, should be resolved through open, informal discussion between the complainant and the staff member.

Complaints Procedure

Timescales

These guidelines have been written to ensure that all complaints will be dealt with as quickly and efficiently as possible by the school. The length of the period of time to respond to and resolve complaints will vary with the gravity and complexity of the complaint and the urgency with which it needs to be settled. The intention is that all complaints should be settled within a period which is considered reasonable by all parties and where appropriate indicative timescales have been identified.

Concern or Complaint?

A **concern** means 'an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought'.

A **complaint** means 'an expression or statement of dissatisfaction about actions taken or a lack of action'.

Any concerns expressed by parents/guardians or carers and others about the school curriculum and related matters should be addressed by informal discussion with the Teacher(s), Senior Leadership Team/Executive Headteacher in the first instance. This includes complaints about Religious Education and Collective Worship, the operation of charging policies and the provision of information.

Levels of complaint

There are 4 levels which define the procedure for making a complaint:

Level 1	Informal complaint to the Teacher, Leadership Team or Head of School
Level 2	Formal complaint to the Head of Primary or Head of Secondary
Level 3	Formal complaint to the Executive Headteacher
Level 4	Formal complaint to Governors

Level 1 Procedure

- If parents/guardians or carers have any concerns about their child's educational progress they should first discuss their concerns with the Teacher. This usually enables the problem to be sorted out swiftly and to everyone's satisfaction. Teachers will share concerns/complaints, as appropriate, with a member of the Senior Leadership Team and/or Executive Headteacher and record the conversation on CPOMs.
- If, following discussion with the Teacher, the parent/guardian or carer are still not satisfied; they may wish to bring their concerns to the attention of the Leadership Team or Head of School Primary or Secondary and finally the Executive Headteacher. Full investigation and discussion should enable most complaints to be resolved at this stage.
- Expressions of concern or complaints at this stage may be **verbal or in writing**.
- If unsatisfied with the response received at Level 1, please submit a formal complaint, in writing, **within 10 school days** of the date of the Level 1 response.

Level 2 Procedure

- Where complaints cannot be resolved informally the matter may then be considered to be the subject of a formal complaint and the complainant may then refer it to the Head of School Primary or Executive Headteacher (for secondary complaints).
- The formal complaint should be made in writing and a suggested format for the complaint is provided in **Appendix A**.
- Acknowledgement of receipt of this complaint will be made within **5 school days**.
- The Head of school primary or secondary will fully investigate the complaint and respond, in writing, within 10 school days.
- Where a formal complaint concerns the Executive Headteacher then it should be referred to the Chair of Governors via the Clerk to Governors.
- If unsatisfied with the response received at Level 2, please submit a formal complaint to the Executive Headteacher, in writing, **within 10 school days** of the date of the Level 2 response.

Level 3 Procedure

- Where complaints cannot be resolved informally the matter may then be considered to be the subject of a formal complaint and the complainant may then refer it to the Executive Headteacher.
- The formal complaint should be made in writing and a suggested format for the complaint is provided in **Appendix A**.
- Acknowledgement of receipt of this complaint will be made within **5 school days**.
- The Executive Headteacher will fully investigate the complaint and respond, in writing, within 10 school days.
- Where a formal complaint concerns the Executive Headteacher then it should be referred to the Chair of Governors via the Clerk to Governors.
- If unsatisfied with the response received at Level 3, please submit a formal complaint to the Governing Body, in writing, **within 15 school days** of the date of the Level 3 response.

Level 4 Procedure

- Where complaints cannot be resolved by the Executive Headteacher the matter may then be considered to be the subject of a formal complaint to the Governing Body.
- If any complaint is received by individual Governors, including the Chair, before the above stages have been completed, those Governors should refer the parent to the Teacher, Senior Leadership Team or Executive Headteacher.
- A formal complaint to the governors will need to be in writing to the Clerk or Chair of the Governing Body. A suggested format for making a formal complaint is provided in **Appendix A**. Acknowledgement of receipt of the complaint will be made within **5 school days**.
- Depending on the nature of the complaint, it may be that action will need to be taken by the Chair before the panel meets. This may include the resolution of the complaint without proceeding to a governors' panel hearing.
- A panel of Governors will be established to investigate and hear the complaint. The panel will not previously have been involved in any detailed discussion of this complaint.
- Urgent cases will be considered as a priority and the time between receipt of the complaint and the panel hearing should not normally exceed **15 school days**.
- Guidelines relating to the panel hearing are included in **Appendix B**.
- The complainant may wish to make an oral presentation in support of their complaint and may wish to be accompanied by a friend or representative.
- The panel will consider the complaint and the chair of the panel will notify the complainant, in writing, of the panel's decision within **5 school days**.

Nature of complaint

Complaints about the education provided for pupils are to be considered as complaints about the Governing Body's responsibilities in respect of the school curriculum, but will not cover complaints about the actions of individual Teachers or the Executive Headteacher. If, in the course of consideration of a complaint, the Executive Headteacher and/or Governing Body conclude that disciplinary or other proceedings should be initiated, they should take separate action as appropriate.

Policy Monitoring & Review

Recording complaints

- The Executive Headteacher will monitor all written complaints and keep a copy of all relevant correspondence.
- If there are a number of complaints about the same issue, or a rise in the number of complaints overall, the Executive Headteacher will ensure a full investigation is undertaken.

Governing Body review

- The Governing Body will monitor the level and nature of all written complaints and review the outcomes on a regular basis to ensure the effectiveness of the procedure and make changes where necessary. The process of listening to, and resolving complaints should contribute to school improvement.
- Wherever practicable, complaints information shared with the whole Governing Body will not name individuals.

Appendix A – Formal Complaint Form



If making a complaint in writing, the following form identifies the key information required.

Name:			
Pupil's name and class/Tutor Group:			
Relationship to the pupil:			
Address:			
Postcode:			
Day time telephone:			
Evening telephone:			
Please give details of your complaint:			
<p>What action, if any, have you already taken to try and resolve your complaint? (i.e. Who did you speak to and what was the response?)</p>			
<p>What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?</p>			
<p>Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details.</p>			
Signature:			
Date:			
Official use:	Complaint referred to:		Date:

Appendix B – Complaints Panel Guidelines *(Taken from the Complaints Procedure Toolkit (Department for Education, 2011))*

The Complaints Panel

- The Governing Body will nominate a number of members with delegated powers to hear a formal complaint.
- The panel will consist of an uneven number of governors, usually
- No Governor may sit on the panel if they have had a prior involvement in the complaint or the circumstances surrounding it.
- In deciding the make-up of the panel, every effort will be made to try and ensure that it is a cross-section of the categories of Governor and sensitive to the issues of race, gender and religious affiliation.
- The complaints panel will select their own Chair.

The Remit of the Complaints Panel

- It is important that the panel hearing is independent and impartial and that it is seen to be so.
- The aim of the hearing, which will be held in private, will always be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant.

However, it is recognised that the complainant might not be satisfied with the outcome if the hearing does not find in their favour. It may only be possible to

- establish the facts and make recommendations which will satisfy the complainant that his or her complaint has been taken seriously.
- The panel can:
 - Dismiss the complaint in whole or in part;
 - Uphold the complaint in whole or in part;
 - Decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint;
 - Recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to mitigate against problems of a similar nature reoccurring.

The Role of the Clerk

- The complaints panel will normally be clerked by the Clerk to the Governors unless that person is either unavailable or part of the complaint. In such cases alternative clerking arrangements will be made.
- The clerk will be the contact point for the complainant and will be required to:
 - Set the date, time and venue of the hearing, ensuring that the dates are convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible;
 - Collate any written material and send it to the parties in advance of the hearing;
 - Meet and welcome the parties as they arrive at the hearing;
 - Record the proceedings;
 - Notify all parties of the panel's decision.

The Role of the Chair of the Complaints Panel

The Chair of the panel will ensure that:

- The remit of the panel is explained to the parties and each party has the opportunity of putting their case without undue interruption;
- The issues are addressed;
- Key findings of fact are made;
- The panel seeks to assist parents and others who may not be used to speaking at such a hearing to feel at ease;
- The hearing is conducted in an informal manner with each party treating the other with respect and courtesy;
- The panel is open minded and acting independently;
- No member of the panel has a vested interest in the outcome of the proceedings or any involvement in an earlier stage of the procedure;
- Each side is given the opportunity to state their case and ask questions;
- Written material is seen by all parties and if any new and relevant issue arises give all parties the opportunity to consider and comment on it;
- Notify the complainant of the panel's decision, in writing. The letter will also explain if there are any further rights of appeal and, if so, to whom they need to be addressed.

Checklist for a Complaints Panel Hearing

The panel needs to take the following points into account:

- The hearing should be as informal as possible.
- Witnesses are only required to attend for the part of the hearing in which they give their evidence.
- After introductions, the complainant is invited to explain their complaint, and be followed by their witnesses.
- The Executive Headteacher may question both the complainant and the witnesses after each has spoken.
- The Executive Headteacher is then invited to explain the school's actions and be followed by the school's witnesses.
- The complainant may question both the Headteacher and the witnesses after each has spoken.
- The panel may ask questions at any point.
- The complainant is then invited to sum up their complaint.
- The Executive Headteacher is then invited to sum up the school's actions and response to the complaint.
- Both parties leave together while the panel decides on the issues.
- The Chair explains that both parties will hear from the panel within a set time scale.

Unreasonable, Persistent and/ or Vexatious Complaints Policy

1. Vision Statement

St Mark's C of E School is to be a place where students acquire the knowledge and skills to become confident, resilient, lifelong learners who can contribute to the world they live in. Through our core Christian values of love, service and belonging students will be supported by the whole community, to achieve excellence.

2. Introduction

St Mark's CE School is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, and to providing a high-quality service to those who complain. We will not normally limit the contact complainants have with our school. However, we do not expect our staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour and will take action to protect staff from that behaviour, including that which is abusive, offensive or threatening.

The Executive Headteacher and SLT (Senior Leadership Team) deal with specific complaints as part of their day-to-day management of the school, in accordance with the School's Complaints Policy.

The majority of complaints are handled in an informal manner and are resolved quickly, sensitively and to the satisfaction of the complainant.

However, there are occasions when complainants behave in an unreasonable manner when raising and/or pursuing concerns. The consequences are that the actions of the complainants begin to impact negatively on the day-to-day running of the school and directly or indirectly the overall wellbeing of the children or staff in the school.

In these exceptional circumstances, the school may act in accordance with this policy.

3. Aims of the policy

The aims of this policy are to:

- Uphold the standards of courtesy and reasonableness that should characterise all communication between the school and persons who wish to express a concern or pursue a complaint;
- Support the well-being of children, staff and everyone else who has legitimate interest in the work of the school, including governors and parents;
- Deal fairly, honestly, openly and transparently with those who make persistent or vexatious complaints and those who harass members of staff while ensuring that other stakeholders suffer no detriment.

4. Parents' Expectation of the School

Parents/carers/members of the public who raise either informal concerns or formal complaints with the school can expect the school to:

- Ensure that the Complaints policy and this policy are available on the school's website.
- Respond within a reasonable time;
- Be available for consultation within reasonable time limits bearing in mind the nature of the complaint;
- Respond with courtesy and respect;
- Attempt to resolve problems using reasonable means in line with the school's complaints policy, other policies and practice.

5. The School's expectations of carers/parents/ members of the public

St Mark's can expect parents/carers/members of the public who wish to raise concerns with the school to:

- Treat all staff with courtesy and respect;
- Respect the needs and well-being of pupils and staff in the school;
- Avoid any use, or threatened use, of violence to people or property;
- Avoid any aggression, verbal abuse, verbal threats or other intimidating behaviour;
- Ensure that written communications state the facts surrounding the concern without using threatening or unpleasant, aggressive or accusatory language;
- Recognise the time constraints under which members of staff in school's work and allow the school a reasonable time to respond;
- Recognise that resolving a specific problem can sometimes take time;
- (In the case of a complaint) follow the School's Complaints Policy
- Complainants should try to limit their communication with the school that relates to their complaint, while the complaint is being progressed. It is not helpful if repeated correspondence is sent (either by letter, phone, email or text), as it could delay the outcome being reached.

6. Persistent complaint

For the purpose of this policy, a persistent complainant is a parent/carer or member of the public who complains about issues, either formally or informally, or frequently raises issues that the complainant considers to be within the remit of the school, and whose behaviour is unreasonable.

Such behaviour may be characterised by:

- Actions which are obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific, repetitious;
- Prolific correspondence or excessive e-mail or telephone contact about a concern or complaint;
- Uses Freedom of Information requests excessively and unreasonably;
- An insistence upon pursuing unsubstantial complaints and/or unrealistic or unreasonable outcomes;

- An insistence upon pursuing complaints in an unreasonable manner;
- An insistence on only dealing with the Executive Headteacher on all occasions irrespective of the issue and the level of delegation in the school to deal with such matters;
- An insistence upon repeatedly pursuing a complaint when the outcome is not satisfactory to the complainant but cannot be changed, for example, if the desired outcome is beyond the remit of the school because it is unlawful.

7. Unreasonable behaviour

St Mark's defines unreasonable behaviour as that which hinders our consideration of complaints because of the frequency or nature of the complainant's contact with the school, such as, if the complainant:

- refuses to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcomes sought by raising the complaint, despite offers of assistance
- Refuses to raise the complaint as outlined in our school complaints policy.
- refuses to cooperate with the complaints investigation process
- refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of the complaints procedure
- insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the complaints procedure or with good practice
- introduces trivial or irrelevant information which they expect to be taken into account and commented on
- raises large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions, and insists they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales
- makes unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues, and seeks to have them replaced
- changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds
- repeatedly makes the same complaint (despite previous investigations or responses concluding that the complaint is groundless or has been addressed)
- refuses to accept the findings of the investigation into that complaint where the school's complaint procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed including referral to the Department for Education
- seeks an unrealistic outcome
- makes excessive demands on school time by frequent, lengthy and complicated contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with
- uses threats to intimidate
- uses abusive, offensive or discriminatory language or violence
- knowingly provides falsified information
- publishes unacceptable information on social media or other public forums.

For the purpose of this policy, harassment is the unreasonable pursuit of such actions above, in such a way that they:

- Appear to be targeted over a significant period of time on one or more members of school staff / governors and/or;
- Cause on-going distress to individual member(s) of school staff and/or;
- Have a significant adverse effect on the whole/parts of the school community and/or;

- Are pursued in a manner which can be perceived as intimidating and oppressive by the recipient. This could include situations where persistent demands and criticisms, whilst not particularly taxing or serious when viewed in isolation, have a cumulative effect over time of undermining confidence, well-being and health.

8. What is a vexatious complaint?

In accordance with the DFE guidance, St Mark's CE School defines a vexatious complaint as one which;

- is obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific, repetitious;
- insists upon pursuing unmeritorious complaints and/or unrealistic outcomes beyond all reason;
- insists upon pursuing meritorious complaints in an unreasonable manner;
- is designed to cause disruption or annoyance;
- demands redress that lacks any serious purpose or value.

St Mark's CE School will take steps to protect its staff from members of the public/ parents or carers who are behaving in a way which is considered abusive and/or vexatious. This may include physical, written or verbal abuse and could include the following (however this list is not exhaustive):

- Speaking to the member of staff or about a member of staff in a derogatory manner which causes offence.
- Swearing, either verbally or in writing despite being asked to refrain from using such language.
- Using threatening language towards school staff which provokes fear whether verbally or in written format.
- Repeatedly contacting a member of staff regarding the same matter which has already been addressed
- Is repetitious and lacks substantive new information;
- Contains unsubstantiated allegations or the use of inflammatory and accusatory language;
- Seeks to disrupt or harass rather than resolve a genuine issue;
- Often pursues unfounded complaints and/or unrealistic outcomes beyond all reasons
- Is made to cause disruption or annoyance.

9. The School's actions in case of persistent, unreasonable and/ or vexatious complaints or harassment

In the first instance the school will:

Communicate either in writing or verbally (confirmed with a letter) to inform the complainant that his/her behaviour is considered to be becoming unreasonable/unacceptable and, if it is not modified, action may be taken in accordance with this policy.

If the behaviour is not modified St Mark's will take some or all of the following actions as necessary, having regard to the nature of the complainant's behaviour and the effect of this on the academy community:

- Inform the complainant in writing that his/her behaviour is now considered by the school to be unreasonable/unacceptable and, therefore, to fall under the terms of this policy;
- Inform the complainant that all meetings with a member of staff will be conducted with a second person present and that notes of meetings may be taken in the interests of all parties;
- Inform the complainant that, except in emergencies, all routine communication with the

complainant to the school should be by letter only;

- Inform the complainant that, except in emergencies, all routine communication with the complainant to the school should be addressed to 1 point of contact within the school whether email, phone call or face-to-face;
- In the case of physical, or verbal aggression or other forms of intimidating behaviour, take appropriate advice and consider warning the complainant about being banned from the school site; or proceed straight to a temporary ban;
- Consider taking appropriate advice on pursuing a case under Anti-Harassment legislation;
- Consider taking advice from the HR about putting in place a specific procedure for dealing with complaints from the complainant, i.e. the complainant will not be able to deal directly with the Executive Headteacher but only with a third person, to be identified by the Chair of Governors, who will investigate, determine whether or not the concern / complaint is reasonable or vexatious and then advise the Executive Headteacher accordingly.

In the event of extreme situations or events, the school may take the decision to implement one of the above steps immediately. In this situation the complainant will be informed in writing.

The Executive Headteacher and SLT will keep the Co-Chairs of Governors informed at all times.

Legitimate new complaints will still be considered, even if the person making them is, or has been, subject to the Policy for Dealing with Persistent or Vexatious Complaints and/or Harassment. However, the school will be advised by the HR.

If a complainant's persistent complaining/harassing behaviour is modified and is then resumed at a later date within a reasonable period of time, the school may resume the process identified above at an appropriate level. In these circumstances, advice may be sought from the HR.

10. Reviewing

St Mark's will review as appropriate, and at a minimum once during the school year, any sanctions applied in the context of this policy.

Guidance used in creation of this policy:

- DFE Model policy for managing serial and unreasonable complaints
- Honeyguide School Leader Support for managing vexatious complaints
- Stone King Solicitors dealing with and managing vexatious complaints
- Best Practice guidance for school complaints procedures DFE

MODEL LETTER 1:

INITIAL LETTER INFORMING A COMPLAINANT THAT HIS/HER BEHAVIOUR IS CONSIDERED TO FALL BELOW A REASONABLE/ ACCEPTABLE STANDARD

Dear XXX

This letter is to inform you that the school considers your actions in [describe actions, dates, behaviour] on when you to be unreasonable/unacceptable [delete as appropriate].

We would ask you to bear in mind the fact that such behaviour on a school site/ communication with school can be disruptive and distressing to students, staff and parents/carers [delete if behaviour complained of did not occur on school site e.g. persistent use of e- mail, verbally abusive telephone calls].

We are aware that you have raised some concerns and would advise you that these are usually dealt with most effectively through the School's Complaints Procedure.

At the moment we are dealing with these issues by [describe actions being taken to resolve concern]. Please note that the School's Policy for Dealing with Persistent or Vexatious Complaints/Harassment sets out standards of behaviour expected of all people in their dealings with the School.

These include:

- *Behaving reasonably.*
- *Treating others with courtesy and respect.*
- *Resolving complaints using the School's Complaints Procedure.*
- *Avoiding physical and verbal aggression at all times.*

The Policy also indicates the steps that we may take if these standards are breached.

These include:

- *Making special arrangements for meetings and communication with the school.*
- *Considering a ban from the school premises.*
- *Considering legal action.*

I would ask that you allow school time to resolve the issues according to the correct procedures, and would assure you that we shall take every step to move this process forward as quickly as possible.

Yours sincerely

MODEL LETTER 2:

INFORMING A COMPLAINANT THAT HIS/HER BEHAVIOUR IS NOW CONSIDERED TO FALL UNDER THE TERMS OF THE POLICY FOR DEALING WITH PERSISTENT OR VEXATIOUS COMPLAINTS/ HARASSMENT

Dear xxx

You will recall that I wrote to you on [insert date] telling you that I felt your behaviour was unreasonable. I am now writing to inform you that in view of your behaviour on [date], when you [describe actions/behaviour] it has been decided that the School's Policy for Dealing with Persistent or Vexatious Complaints/Harassment Policy will apply from the date of this letter. In the circumstances I have made the following arrangements for your future contact with the school: [*Delete A or B as applicable]

**A For the foreseeable future, should you wish to meet with any member of staff, I would ask you to note:*

- *All routine communication, including any request for a meeting between you and the school, will be by letter only. Letters from you need to be addressed to at the school address; email correspondence will not be responded to.*
- *An appointment will be arranged and confirmed in writing as soon as possible.*
- *A third party from the school will be present.*
- *In the interests of all parties, formal notes of this meeting may be made.*

**B For the foreseeable future, all meetings arising from any written communication with the school will not be conducted by a member of staff, but will be conducted by representing the school. I would ask you to note:*

- *All routine communication, including any request for a meeting between you and the school, will be by letter only. Letters from you need to be addressed to at the school address; email correspondence will not be responded to.*
- *An appointment will be arranged and confirmed in writing as soon as possible.*
- *A third party will be present.*
- *In the interests of all parties, formal notes of this meeting may be made.*

Exceptionally, these arrangements do not apply to any emergency involving [insert name of student] – in which case you should contact the school in the usual way. While these arrangements are in place, with respect to normal access to information available on parents' evenings, this will be provided in a summary written report.

These arrangements take effect straight away. If you wish to make a representation about the contents of this letter, which may include any expressions of regret on your part and any assurances that you are prepared to give about your future good conduct, you can do so by writing to me at the school by [state ten working days from the date of the letter].

If on receipt of your comments I consider that the arrangements outlined above should continue, you will be supplied with details of how to review a circumstance of your case. I do hope that the difficulties we are currently experiencing can soon be resolved.

Yours sincerely