



**St Albert the Great Catholic Primary School**  
"The more I learn about the world in which I live the closer I grow to God"



## Complaints Procedure

### The Catholic Ethos of the School

At St. Albert the Great Catholic Primary School we aim to provide the highest quality education and care for all our children. We aim to offer a welcome to each child and family and to provide a warm and caring environment within which all children can learn and develop.

At our school parental concerns are of particular importance. As the first educators of their children, parents have a duty to take an active interest in their school. "Since parents have given children their life, they are bound by the most serious obligation to educate their offspring." (*Gravissimum Educationis*). For this reason, "there must be the closest co-operation between parents and the teachers to whom they entrust their children to be educated. In fulfilling their task, teachers are to collaborate closely with the parents and willingly listen to them." (Can.796) In St. Albert the Great Catholic Primary School, therefore, dealing with parental concerns will be an intrinsic part of the school's ethos and mission. In addition, terms of reference for governing bodies now include the legal obligation to "be open about the decisions they make and the actions they take and in particular ..... to explain their decisions and actions to interested parties". (The Education (School Government) (Terms of Reference) (England) Regulations 2000). Therefore a climate of openness and partnership is essential.

We believe children, parents and staff are entitled to expect courtesy and prompt, careful attention to their needs and wishes. Our intention is to work in partnership with parents and the community generally and we welcome suggestions on how to improve our school at any time. Many concerns can be resolved quickly by an informal approach to the appropriate member of staff. If this does not achieve the desired result, the following procedures should be used.

### Introduction

These Complaints Procedures do not cover:

- Child Protection Procedures
- Appeals about admissions
- Appeals to governors discipline committee against permanent exclusion from school
- Staff Disciplinary Procedures

These Complaints Procedures are totally separate from any Disciplinary or Capability Procedures. If the investigation of any complaint were to lead to concerns on the part of the Head Teacher or Governors about the capability or conduct of a member of staff, these would not be discussed or dealt with within the procedures outlined in this document.

This Complaints Procedure sets out basic guidelines and principles only. The Governing Body of St. Albert the Great Catholic Primary School has adopted the Hertfordshire model (September 2002 which was revised in September 2005, including an explanation of the legal framework surrounding complaints) and followed guidance from Westminster Diocese (September 2003) for dealing with school-based complaints and details of this procedure are available on request from the school (see attachment).

This policy should be read in conjunction with the school's Behaviour Policy and the Home-School Agreement.

### Aims and Purpose

This policy aims to outline clearly the procedures that should be followed when dealing with complaints about the service we offer at St. Albert the Great Catholic Primary School. It is our intention that:

1. Making a complaint is as easy as possible;
2. We treat as a complaint any clear expression of dissatisfaction with our school which calls for a response, whether it is made in person, by telephone, by letter, by fax, or by e-mail;
3. We treat it seriously and we deal with it promptly, politely and, where appropriate, informally (for example, by telephone);
4. We respond in the right way — for example, with an explanation, or an apology where we have got things wrong, or information on any action taken or to be taken in the future;
5. We learn from complaints, use them to improve our school community, and provide feedback to our community through, for example, newsletters governors' reports and parents' evenings

If you remain dissatisfied with the manner in which we have responded to you, please formally lodge your complaint in writing and we will then log your concerns as a recordable complaint.

At every stage of the Complaints Procedure, the handling of the complaint will be:

- non-adversarial
- swift (using agreed time limits)
- fair (using independent investigation where necessary)
- confidential

**We are unlikely to react to a complaint made anonymously.**

### **Guidelines**

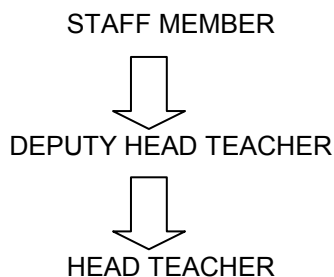
Complaints can be made in writing (preferred method), by fax, by e-mail, by telephone or in person (by appointment please). If you are writing, faxing or e-mailing your complaint, please provide your telephone number if a response by telephone would be convenient. If you are e-mailing, please state if a reply by e-mail is required and, if not, please provide a full postal address.

Different causes for complaints require different personnel to find resolutions. We will aim to reply within 24 hours to your complaint. If a more detailed investigation is required we will reply within 20 working days from when we receive your complaint. If it is not possible to give you a full reply within this time — for instance, because other agencies or groups are involved— we will give you an interim response, telling you what is being done to deal with your complaint, when you can expect the full reply and from whom.

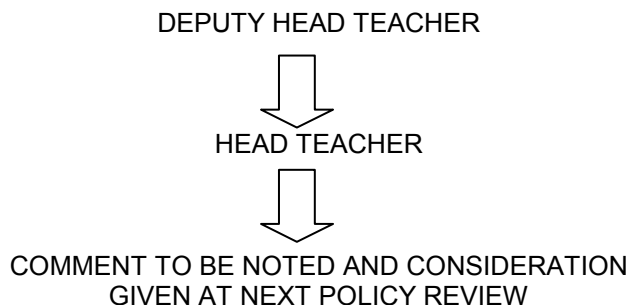
That full reply will include details of who to contact next if you believe that your complaint has not been dealt with properly. This will normally be the Headteacher. If, following that second response, you are still not satisfied, you can ask for your complaint to be referred to the Chair of Governors.

### **Who should you address your complaint to?**

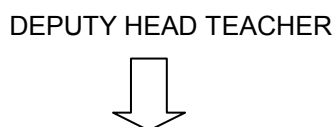
#### **1. Complaint relating to issues with the day to day running of the class / school:**

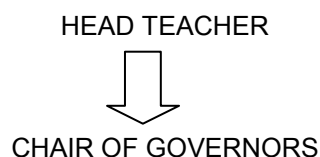


#### **2. Complaint relating to school policy:**

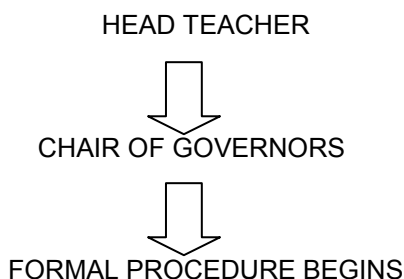


#### **3. Allegation of minor misconduct by member of staff:**





**4. Allegation of serious misconduct by member of staff:**



A summary of all recordable complaints will be included in the Head teacher's reports to Governors (at least once annually).

**Complaints about related organisations and issues**

Some of the school's programmes and services are delivered to the students through a range of other organisations. In all cases, the school will act as the first point of contact for pursuing complaints against related organisations or groups.

**Time Limits**

Complaints should be made as soon as possible after the event to which they relate. Generally the school will investigate complaints that are:

- a. Made within 6 months of the event; or
- b. Made within 6 months of the complainant realising that they have cause for complaint, as long as that is no more than 12 months after the event itself.

If the complainant was not aware that there was cause for complaint, then the complaint must be made within 6 months of the date from which they become aware or 12 months from the date of the event whichever is earlier.

The School has discretion to extend these time limits where it would have been unreasonable for the complaint to be made earlier and where it is still possible to investigate the facts. If this discretion is rejected, the complainant may appeal to the Governing Body.

**Policy approved:** Summer 2011

**Date for review:** Summer 2013

Appendix A: Hertfordshire Formal Complaints Procedure

Appendix B: Formal Complaint Form: Stage 2 (to be completed by parent / member of the community)

Appendix C: Record of Complaint: Stage 2 (to be completed by Headteacher)

Appendix D: Action Taken in Accordance with the Complaints Procedure (to be completed by Headteacher)

## Appendix A: Hertfordshire Formal Complaints Procedure



There are three stages to the formal procedure:

### **Stage 1**

#### **Complaint heard by a member of staff (not the subject of the complaint).**

**1.1** The Deputy Head Teacher (DHT) / Assistant Head Teacher for Achievement and Standards (DHT / AHT) will either hear a complaint personally or, where appropriate, refer the matter to another member of staff. The DHT / AHT will also keep records of each complaint and of action taken in regard to it using Appendix A so that the senior managers and governors of the school can be kept informed of all issues that arise and as a result can change or develop school practices where necessary or appropriate. Thus complaints about the school can be used positively as a self-evaluation tool.

**1.2** The DHT / AHT will investigate the complaint personally or refer it to an appropriate member of staff. In making this decision, the co-ordinator will be sensitive to any indication that the complainant would have difficulty discussing the complaint with a particular member of staff.

**1.3** If the complaint concerns the Head Teacher, the DHT / AHT should refer it to the Chair of Governors and, in courtesy, inform the Head Teacher that this has been done. If the complaint concerns the Chair of Governors, the DHT / AHT should refer it to the Vice-Chair.

**1.4** Whoever investigates the complaint will:

- establish what has happened so far, and who has been involved;
- clarify the nature of the complaint and what remains unresolved;
- meet with the complainant or contact them (if unsure or further information is necessary);
- clarify what the complainant feels would put things right, clearing up any areas of misunderstanding, identifying areas of agreement and discussing what might be possible;
- interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish ( - this should include adults and pupils as appropriate, whether main players or witnesses- );
- conduct each interview with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning;
- keep notes of each interview.

**1.5** Within ten school days of receiving the complaint, the investigator will complete the investigation and contact the complainant to arrange a meeting. At any point in the process, the DHT / AHT may decide or agree to commission a further investigation, whether by a member of staff or an independent person. If this occurs, the timescale may be extended and the complainant must be informed of the extension and the reason for it.

**1.6** When the investigation is complete, the member of staff investigating will meet the complainant to try to resolve the complaint. **Every effort should be made to try to resolve the complaint at this meeting.** The complainant and members of staff involved are entitled to send a representative to the meeting or to bring another person for support. Any of the following may be appropriate, either in verbal or written form, at this point:

- an acknowledgement that the complaint is valid in whole or in part;
- an apology;
- an explanation;
- a clarification of misunderstandings;
- an admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better;
- an assurance that the event complained of will not recur;
- an explanation of the steps that have been taken to ensure that it will not happen again;
- an undertaking to review school policies in light of the complaint.

**1.7** Some of the above may require that the investigator seek authority from the head teacher. Naturally, nothing should be offered or promised that cannot be justified or fulfilled.

***If the complaint cannot be resolved, the complainant may refer it to Stage 2.***

### **Stage 2**

#### **Complaint heard by the Head Teacher.**

**2.1** Where a complaint has not been resolved at Stage 1, it will be referred to the Head Teacher, **unless** the original complaint concerned either the Head Teacher or the chair of governors, in which case the complainant may refer it straight to Stage 3.

**2.2** The Head Teacher will either investigate the complaint personally or refer it to another senior member of staff (who has not so far been involved) or arrange for an independent investigation if appropriate. At this point it is possible that the complaint will have escalated to

include a complaint concerning the manner in which the original complaint has been handled. Both parts of the complaint would in this case need to be investigated.

**2.3** In conducting the investigation, the investigator will operate in accordance with section 1.4.

**2.4** Within ten school days of receiving the complaint, the investigator will report back to the Head Teacher. Within a further three school days, the Head Teacher will contact the complainant and arrange a meeting. (See 2.5) At any point in the process, the Head Teacher may decide or agree to commission a further investigation, whether by another senior member of staff or a governor or an independent person (eg from the diocese or the LEA or another appropriate agency depending on the nature of the complaint). If this occurs, the timescale may be extended and the complainant must be informed of the extension and the reason for it.

**2.5** When the investigation is complete, the Head Teacher will consider the evidence and, whether or not he or she investigated the matter personally, will meet the complainant (with or without the person who conducted the investigation if different) to try to resolve the complaint. **Every effort should be made to resolve the complaint at this meeting.** Any of the suggestions in section 1.6 may be appropriate at this point.

**2.6** If the complaint cannot be resolved, the complainant may refer it to Stage 3.

### **Stage 3**

#### **Complaint heard by Governing Body's Complaints Appeal Panel.**

**3.1** A Complaints Appeal Panel, consisting of three governors, should be appointed annually by the governing body. This panel will have delegated power to hear and finally determine complaints. Ideally, the make-up of the panel should reflect the make-up of the governing body and/or the profile of the pupils in the school. Any governor who has prior involvement in or detailed knowledge of a particular complaint or its investigation may not sit on the panel hearing that complaint. It would be advisable, therefore, for the governing body to agree alternative panel members in case of such a circumstance.

**3.2** To trigger Stage 3, the complainant will have been dissatisfied with the school's approach to the complaint in the first two stages and must now put the complaint in writing to the chair of governors. The chair will check what has happened so far and, if the procedure has been properly followed and it is appropriate to move to Stage 3, he or she, or a nominated other governor, will - via the clerk - convene a Governing Body's Complaints Appeal Panel. If the original complaint concerned the chair of governors and was referred to the vice-chair at Stage 1, the vice-chair will tell the complainant the name of the nominated governor for a referral to Stage 3. (see section 3.1)

**3.3** This is the final stage of the procedure. There is no further redress or appeal. It is, therefore, vital that, in the spirit of the procedure, the Appeal Panel should:

- be prepared to hear complaints without preconceptions;
- examine and discuss the matter fully so that they ensure that they have every piece of information or evidence that they require;
- be prepared to commission, organise or conduct further investigations if necessary;
- give the complainant the opportunity to express their dissatisfaction and worries and to suggest what might put things right;
- be prepared to take whatever action is required.

**3.4** The date of the Appeal Panel Meeting should be agreed by all parties within five school days of the receipt of the written referral of the complaint. The meeting itself should be held within fifteen school days of the receipt of the referral. If the complainant or the Head Teacher wishes to submit information in writing to the panel, they should send it to the Clerk to the Governors at least five school days before the meeting. As far as possible, the meeting should not be delayed if the referral comes at the end of a term, especially at the end of the summer term. Since the aim of the procedure is to resolve the issue and effect reconciliation if necessary, it will be best if the matter can come to the panel as quickly as possible, especially as the complainant will already have been engaged over a protracted period in attempts to put things right.

#### **The Meeting of the Governing Body's Complaints Appeal Panel**

**3.5 Before the meeting:** Members of the panel should consider carefully any documentation from the Head Teacher or the complainant but should not discuss the matter with any one, including the other members of the panel, before the meeting. This is in the interest of fairness and natural justice. The appeal panel must operate scrupulously as an independent arbiter of the complaint.

#### **3.6 Conduct of the meeting – to be borne in mind:**

- One of the panel must act as chair and there should be a clerk for the meeting.
- A member of the Diocesan Department of Schools may be invited to advise and support the panel.

- The meeting room should be private and as informally laid out as possible in order to encourage a spirit of partnership. It is very important that there should be nothing adversarial about the proceedings.
- The tone of the whole meeting will be set by the atmosphere of the room in which it is set and by the way people are greeted. Panel members should be sensitive to the vulnerabilities and sensitivities of all concerned. Parents may be emotional when talking about their child; the Head Teacher and others involved in the earlier investigations may fear that their professionalism could be under attack.
- Everyone needs to remember that the aim and purpose of the meeting is to resolve the complaint and find ways of going forward together for the well being of the children at our school.
- It is possible that the complainant may not be satisfied with the outcome if the panel does not find in their favour, but the conduct of the meeting can go a long way towards smoothing such dissatisfaction.
- At the very least, every complainant should feel at the end that their complaint has been taken seriously and examined impartially.
- Very special care should be taken if the complainant is a child or if there are child witnesses. Children's views should be given equal consideration to those of adults. If a parent has complained on behalf of a child, the panel should agree with the parents which parts of the meeting the child needs to attend.

### **3.7 Role of the Clerk** The clerk will:

- confirm to all parties in writing the date, time and venue of the hearing;
- receive and distribute any documentation to be read before the hearing;
- meet and welcome all parties as they arrive at the hearing;
- record the proceedings;
- notify all parties of the panel's decision. (The wording of any letters will be agreed with the chair of the panel.)

### **3.8 Role of the Chair of the Panel** The chair will ensure :

- that the procedure is properly followed (with the support of the diocesan Department of Schools if requested);
- that the procedure for the hearing of the complaint is explained to all parties and that all parties have the opportunity to put their case without undue interruption;
- that the issues are addressed;
- that all parties are put at their ease, especially any who may not be accustomed to speaking at such a hearing;
- that the proceedings are kept as informal as possible and that everyone treats each other with respect and courtesy;
- that the panel operates in an open-minded and independent way;
- that time is given for all parties to consider any 'new' evidence.

### **3.9 Order of Proceedings for the Hearing of the Complaint**

- Welcome, introductions and explanations of the proceedings by the chair.
- The complainant is invited to explain the complaint.
- The Head Teacher may question the complainant.
- The panel may question the complainant.
- If there are any witnesses for the complainant, each one is invited into the hearing in turn and in each case the witness is invited to speak, then the Head Teacher may question them, and then the panel may question them. In each case, the witness may leave after their 'evidence'.
- The Head Teacher is invited to explain the school's actions.
- If there are any witnesses for the school, they are treated in exactly the same way as the witnesses for the complainant.
- When the chair is sure that all parties have asked all that they need to, the complainant is invited to sum up their complaint.
- The Head Teacher is then invited to sum up the school's actions and response to the complaint.
- The chair explains that both parties will hear from the panel within three school days following the day of the hearing.
- Both parties leave together while the panel decides on the issues (advised by the diocesan Department of Schools member if there).

### **3.10 Options Open to the Panel** The panel may:

- 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 ensure that problems of a similar nature do not recur.

**3.11 After the Hearing** The following actions need to be taken.

- The chair of the panel agrees with the clerk the wording of the letter to be sent to both parties. The clerk then ensures that the letter is sent out in accordance with the agreed timescale.
- The clerk writes up the notes of the meeting and gives a copy to the chair of the panel.
- The clerk ensures that any recommendation to change school procedures is put on the agenda for the next governing body meeting.

**3.12 Vexatious Complaints:** If the complainant, still dissatisfied, tries to reopen the same issue, the chair of governors is able to inform them in writing that the procedure has been exhausted and that the matter is now closed.

**3.13** If the complaint is about denominational religious or collective worship in accordance with the trust deed or previous practice before St Albert's became a voluntary aided school complaint beyond the second stage may be made to the Diocese. Complainants should write to the Director of the Education Service, Diocese of Westminster, 46 Francis Street, London SW1P 1QN.

## **GENERAL POINTS**

### **Using and Publicising the Procedure**

The governing body has formally adopted this policy and it is reviewed and re-adopted annually. Governors also ensure that staff are confident in its use and that it is appropriately publicised to all interested parties, especially parents.

### **Recording and Reporting Complaints**

In order to turn complaints to positive effect, records are kept so that each term the senior leaders of the school and the Governing Body can reflect on issues that have arisen and on the way in which they have been handled. The complaints are held in the Head Teacher's office and each term the DHT / AHT records and collates them into a report for the Head Teacher and the governing body. The governing body may also wish to consider reporting to parents any changes which have been made to the school's procedures as a result of parental feedback.

### **Complaints Made Other Than in Accordance with the Procedure**

Sometimes a complainant may be unfamiliar with, or unaware of, the complaints procedure; sometimes they may choose to take their complaint straight to governors or to other parties, such as the diocese or the LEA. In every such case, the procedure must be strictly adhered to, and the complaint redirected to its proper stage in the procedure. It is, therefore, important that all members of staff and all governors are fully aware of the procedure and that it is publicly available. It is particularly important that governors know that they must not attempt to deal with complaints themselves, but should tell complainants to take their complaint to the DHT / AHT

### **Complaints Made to the DfES**

In unusual cases the Secretary of State may have the power to intervene if the governing body of the school has acted as no reasonable governing body would act. This is very unlikely to be the case unless the whole of the school's own complaints procedure has been exhausted.

**Appendix B**



**St Albert the Great Catholic Primary School**  
*"The more I learn about the world in which I live the closer I grow to God"*



**Formal Complaint Form: Stage 2**

(To be completed by parent / member of the school community)

Complainant's Name:	DATE:
Address:	Telephone:

What do you want to complain about? (Please be as specific as possible and include dates, times and members of staff involved)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Please provide any additional background information that may help us deal with your complaint.

What would you like us to do to put things right? (Please be as specific as possible)

Signed:..... Date:.....

Please return this form to the Headteacher

**Appendix C**



**St Albert the Great Catholic Primary School**  
*"The more I learn about the world in which I live the closer I grow to God"*



**Record of Complaint: Stage 2**

(To be completed by Head teacher)

Complainant's Name:	DATE:
Address:	Telephone:

**Details of the Complaint:**

**Action Already Taken to Resolve the Matter:**

**Appendix D**



**St Albert the Great Catholic Primary School**  
*"The more I learn about the world in which I live the closer I grow to God"*



**Action Taken in Accordance with the  
Complaints Procedure Stage 2**

(To be completed by Head teacher)

To be attached to Appendices B and C

**Complaint Investigated By:**

**Action (with dates):**

**Date of formal meeting with complainant:**

**Outcome of the meeting:**

Signed:.....  
(Parent / Member of school community)

.....  
(Headteacher)

Date: .....