



CARDINAL HEENAN  
CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL

# **CARDINAL HEENAN CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL**

## **Complaints Policy and Procedures**

## Mission Statement

### **Cardinal Heenan Catholic High School: *Putting our Faith in Education***

#### **Our Mission**

This school exists to serve the Catholic community in providing education of our young within a faith environment, grounded in the vision of Jesus Christ. Our school aims to ensure that all are able to realise their potential, take their responsibilities seriously, respect themselves and others, and grow in the love of God. We aim to serve each other, the Church, parents and the wider community.

We recognise that every person is created in God's image and we value every individual as an equal and with unconditional acceptance. We strive to create an atmosphere where each person is inspired, encouraged and supported to the highest levels of educational achievement.

#### **Our Goals**

##### *Worship*

To celebrate our faith by creating structures and encouraging attitudes that will make prayer and liturgy highly valued, with all members of our community becoming involved.

##### *Attitudes and Values*

To create within the school a caring community that respects the dignity, integrity and individual needs of all and to develop an understanding and pride in the diversity that is our school's and this country's heritage. In so doing, to ensure that this is a place of truth, honour and kindness where the values of the gospel are seen in all that is attempted and achieved, and where the love of God touches all who come into contact with the school.

##### *Achievement*

To provide all pupils with the means and opportunity to identify and develop their potential intellectually, physically, spiritually and socially, through a balance of self discovery and excellent teaching.

##### *Community*

To value the diversity of people's backgrounds and faiths in our global community and to promote equality of opportunity for all. In so doing, to work with partners, other schools and local businesses to develop life-long learning opportunities and to establish the school in the wider community.

##### *Using Our Talents*

To use the expertise and resources of the school's specialist language status in developing innovative practice and raising standards across the school.

## **Preamble**

If you're having a problem with your child at school whether it is about safety, learning or any other matter then your child's head of year or the year manager is usually the best person to talk to first. As teachers will often be in the classroom during school hours, we recommend calling and asking the school office to ask them to call you back.

If you feel that you've given the school the chance to look into the matter and you feel that they haven't acted or you are not happy about the way they have acted, then you can use our complaints procedure.

## **School's complaints procedures**

All schools are required by law to have and to publish a formal complaints procedure.

Usually the first stage in the complaints process is to write to the person appointed by the school to be the complaints investigator – this is often, but not always, the head teacher. You should put your complaint in writing and mark it 'formal complaint'. You may wish to get a receipt for your letter or send it recorded delivery.

The school's complaints procedure details the length of time it will take to investigate and respond to complaints. However, please remember that this will be working days and the school is closed through the holidays and at weekends and they may not be able to investigate and respond throughout these periods.

If you continue to be unhappy with the response you receive at formal stage one, then there is another stage that you can progress to. At this stage, your complaint and the initial investigation will usually be looked at by a panel of governors. This stage is about making sure that the person who looked at your complaint, took into account and investigated all the things that they had to in order to come to the decision. It isn't about investigating the complaint again or looking at other things that you are not happy about. If the panel decide that the correct process was not followed, then they may ask for another investigation of the complaint – either by the original investigator, themselves or another third party depending on the circumstances.

The Governing Body  
March 2015

## Cardinal Heenan Catholic High School Complaints Policy

1. This policy statement sets out the school's approach to dealing with parental concerns and complaints.
2. We value good home/school relations and will, therefore, do everything we can to establish and maintain them. This includes seeking to resolve any concerns or complaints promptly, and to the satisfaction of all concerned.
3. We welcome feedback on what parents feel we do well, or not so well, as a school. We will consider carefully all feedback, whether positive or negative, and will review our policies and practices accordingly.
4. We will treat all concerns and complaints seriously and courteously and will advise parents and others of the school's procedures for dealing with their concerns. In return, we expect parents and other complainants to behave respectfully towards all members of the school community. In particular, any disagreement with the school should not be expressed inappropriately or in front of pupils.
5. All school staff and members of the governing body will receive a copy of this policy statement, and will be familiar with the school's procedures for dealing with parental concerns and complaints, to which they will have access as required. The policy is available on request to parents.
6. The school's procedures will be reviewed regularly and updated as necessary.
7. Staff and governors will receive guidance in handling parental concerns and complaints as appropriate. This may be on an individual basis, as a group activity for all staff, or for specific groups, such as the office staff or members of the governing body.
8. Whilst we will seek to resolve concerns and complaints to the satisfaction of all parties, it may not be possible to achieve this in every case. We will, therefore, use our option to close a complaint before all the stages of the school's procedures have been exhausted if this appears to be appropriate.
9. The government and Education Leeds advocate resolution of parental concerns and complaints at school level wherever possible in the interests of maintaining good home/school relations. The role of Education Leeds in advising parents and schools on the handling of concerns and complaints is set out in the school's procedures

Governing Body March 2015

## Cardinal Heenan Catholic High School's Complaints Procedure

The majority of concerns from parents, carers and others are handled under the following general procedures. The procedure is divided into three stages;

- The **informal stage** aims to resolve the concern through informal contact at the appropriate level in school.
- **Stage 1** is the first formal stage at which written complaints are considered by the headteacher, who has special responsibility for dealing with complaints.
- **Stage 2** is the next stage once stage 1 has been worked through. It involves a complaints appeal panel of governors.

How each of these stages operates is explained below:

### **Informal stage: your initial contact with the school**

1. Many concerns will be dealt with informally when you make them known to us. The first point of contact should be your child's tutor, subject teacher or head of year.
2. Once your concern is made known to us, we will see you, or contact you by telephone or in writing, as soon as possible. If it is necessary, all members of staff know how to refer to the appropriate person with responsibility for your particular issues. He or she will make a clear note of the details, and will check later to make sure the matter has been followed up.
3. Any actions or monitoring of the situation that has been agreed, will be communicated clearly, and we will confirm this in writing to you.
4. If necessary, we will contact appropriate people who may be able to assist us with our enquiries into your concern.
5. We will normally update you on the progress of our enquiries within 10 school days. Once we have responded to your concern, you will have the opportunity to ask for the matter to be considered further.
6. If you are still dissatisfied following this informal approach, your concern will become a formal complaint and we will deal with it at the next stage.

### **Stage 1: formal consideration of your complaint**

This stage in our procedures deals with written complaints. It applies where you are not happy with the informal approach to dealing with your concern, as outlined above.

1. Normally, your written complaint should be addressed to the headteacher. If, however, your complaint concerns the headteacher personally, it should be sent to the school marked ***"For the attention of the Designated Governor re Complaints"***.

2. We will acknowledge your complaint in writing as soon as possible after receiving it. This will be within three school days.
3. We will enclose a copy of these procedures with the acknowledgement.
4. Normally we would expect to respond in full within 15 school days, but if this is not possible we will write to explain the reason for the delay, and let you know when we hope to be able to provide a full response.
5. As part of our consideration of your complaint, we may invite you to a meeting to discuss the complaint and fill in any details required. If you wish, you can ask someone to accompany you to help you explain the reasons for your complaint.
6. The headteacher, or designated governor may also be accompanied by a suitable person if they wish.
7. Following the meeting, the headteacher, investigating officer or designated governor will, where necessary, talk to witnesses and take statements from others involved. If the complaint centres on a pupil, we will talk to the pupil concerned and, where appropriate, others present at the time of the incident in question.
8. We will normally talk to pupils with a parent or carer present, unless this would delay the investigation of a serious or urgent complaint, or where a pupil has specifically said that he or she would prefer the parent or carer not to be involved. In such circumstances, we will ensure that another member of staff with whom the pupil feels comfortable, is present.
9. If the complaint is against a member of staff, it will be dealt with under the school's internal confidential procedures, as required by law.
10. The headteacher or designated governor will keep hand or typewritten, signed and dated records of all meetings and telephone conversations, and other related documentation.
11. Once we have established all the relevant facts, we will send you a written response to your complaint. This will give an explanation of the headteacher's or designated governor's decision and the reasons for it. If follow-up action is needed, we will indicate what we are proposing to do. We may invite you to a meeting to discuss the outcome as part of our commitment to building and maintaining good relations with you.
12. The person investigating your complaint may decide that we have done all we can to resolve the complaint, in which case we may use our discretion to close the complaint at this point.
13. If you are unhappy with the way in which we reached our conclusions, you may wish to proceed to stage 2.

## **Stage 2: consideration by a governors' appeal panel**

If the complaint has already been through stage 1 and you are not happy with the outcome as a result of the way in which the complaint has been handled, you can take it further to a governors' appeal panel. This is a formal process, and the ultimate recourse at school level.

The purpose of this arrangement is to give you the chance to present your arguments in front of a panel of governors, who have no prior knowledge of the details of the case and who can, therefore, consider it without prejudice.

However, the aim of this panel is not to re-hear the complaint. It is there to review how the complaint has been investigated and to determine whether this has been conducted fairly. It is there to establish facts and make recommendations, which will reassure you that we have taken the complaint seriously.

The governors' appeal panel operates according to the following formal procedures:

1. The governing body will convene a panel of three governors and will aim to arrange for the panel meeting to take place within **20 school days**.
2. You will be asked whether you wish to provide any further written documentation in support of your appeal.
3. The headteacher or complaint investigator will be asked to prepare a written report for the panel. The panel can request additional information from other sources if necessary.
4. You will be informed at least **five school days** in advance, of the date and the time and place of the meeting. We hope you will feel comfortable with the meeting taking place in the school, but we will do what we can to make alternative arrangements if you prefer.
5. With the letter, you will receive any relevant correspondence or reports regarding stage 1, and you will be asked whether you wish to submit further written evidence to the panel.
6. The letter will explain what will happen at the panel meeting and that you are entitled to be accompanied to the meeting. The choice of person to accompany you is your own, but it is usually best to involve someone in whom you have confidence but who is not directly connected with the school. They are there to give you support, but also to witness the proceedings and to speak on your behalf if you wish.
7. If it is necessary in the interests of ratifying the investigative process, the complaint investigator may, with the agreement of the chair of the panel, invite relevant witnesses directly involved in matters raised by you to attend the meeting.
8. The chair of the panel will bear in mind that the formal nature of the meeting can be intimidating for you, and will do his or her best to put you at your ease.
9. As a general rule, no evidence or witnesses previously undisclosed should be introduced into the meeting by any of the participants. If either party wishes to do so, the meeting will be adjourned so that the other party has a fair opportunity to consider and respond to the new evidence.
10. The chair of the panel will ensure that the meeting is properly minuted. Please understand that any decision to share the minutes with you, the complainant, is a matter for the panel's discretion and you do not have an automatic right to see or receive a copy as the minutes are the property of the governing body. Since such minutes usually name individuals, they are understandably of a sensitive and, therefore, confidential nature.

11. Normally, the written outcome of the panel meeting, which will be sent to you, should give you all the information you require. If, however, you feel that you would like to have a copy of the minutes it would be helpful if you could indicate this in advance. If the panel is happy for the minutes to be copied to you, the clerk can then be asked to maintain confidentiality in the minutes.
12. During the meeting, you can expect there to be opportunities for:
  - the panel to hear you explain your case and your argument for why it should be heard at stage 2;
  - the panel to hear the complaint investigator's case in response;
  - you to raise questions via the chair;
  - you to be questioned by the complaint investigator through the chair;
  - the panel members to be able to question you and the complaint investigator;
  - you and the headteacher to make a final statement.
13. In closing the meeting, the chair will explain that the panel will now consider its decision, and that written notice of the decision will be sent to you and the headteacher **within three school days**. All participants other than the panel and the clerk will then leave.
14. The panel will then consider the complaint and all the evidence presented in order to:
  - reach a unanimous, or at least a majority, decision on the case;
  - decide on the appropriate action to be taken, if necessary;
  - recommend, where appropriate, to the governing body, changes to the school's systems
  - or procedures to make sure similar problems do not happen again.
15. The clerk will send you and the headteacher a letter outlining the decision of the panel. The letter will also explain that you are entitled to have the handling of the complaint reviewed by Education Leeds. That process is not strictly an appeal, as the local authority cannot direct the governing body in most general complaints cases. It is, however, an opportunity to seek the view of an official third party. The outcome, including any recommendations, may be helpful to you in seeking resolution of the complaint through the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if necessary.
16. We will keep a copy of all correspondence and notes on file in the school's records, but separate from pupils' personal records.

### **Closure of complaints**

- Regrettably, and very occasionally, the school and Leeds Children's Services will need to close a complaint where the complainant is still dissatisfied.
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- Where appropriate, the local authority and the school will do all we can to help to resolve a complaint against the school, but sometimes it is simply not possible to meet all of the complainant's wishes. Sometimes it is simply a case of 'agreeing to disagree'.
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- If a complainant persists in making representations to the school this can be extremely time-consuming and can detract from our responsibility to look after the interests of all the children in our care.
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- For this reason, we are entitled to close correspondence on a complaint (including personal approaches, as well as letters and telephone calls), where we feel we have taken all reasonable

action to resolve the complaint, and that the complaint has exhausted our official process. The local authority will support us in this position, and especially where the complainant's action is causing distress to staff and pupils.

- In exceptional circumstances, closure may occur before a complaint has reached stage 2 of the procedures described in this document. This is because a complaints panel takes considerable time and effort to set up, and we must be sure it is likely to assist the process of investigating the complaint.
- The designated governor may decide, therefore, that every reasonable action has been undertaken to resolve the complaint, and that a complaints review panel would not help to move things forward.

Where you have been through the school's internal complaints procedures (with or without recourse to a complaints review panel) and are still unhappy with the outcome or decision from the governing body, you can write to the Secretary of State for Education via the DfE website – [www.education.gov.uk](http://www.education.gov.uk), by telephoning 0370 000 2288 or by writing to the address below:

He School Complaints Unit  
Department for Education  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

Please enclose with your letter to the DfE a copy of the complaint outcome. This will save time in that the DfE will not need to ask for our view of what has happened.

**We would advise parents that, unless the school is shown to have behaved unreasonably or not to have followed their own procedures, there is likely to be little further action that can be taken, as governing bodies are empowered to deal with many issues without reference to either the local authority or the secretary of state.**

#### **Other sources of information and advice**

If your concern is about an aspect of special educational needs provision, which might include information about relevant voluntary organisations and support groups in Leeds, you might like to talk to our parent partnership service on their helpline: 0113 395 1200.

# DEALING WITH COMPLAINTS ABOUT SCHOOLS - FLOWCHART

