VERITAS

CARDINAL HEENAN
CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL

Complaints Policy and Procedures

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Document History

Version	Date	Notes
V1	January 2020	
V2	November 2020	Updated of layout and clarity of points in line with DfE guidance
V3	February 2023	Updated Mission Statement, addition of policy for managing serial and unreasonable complaints
V4	July 2024	Addition of *Appendix 1* and change to *Preamble*
V5	June 2026	Addition of Appendix 2 Parent guide to school complaints (DfE and Ofsted guidance). Complaints form now available in a more accessible format

Our Mission Statement

Our aim is to inspire excellence by encouraging every individual to be the person that God calls us to be.

As a Catholic community, our values and mission are rooted in Jesus' words in John 10:10, 'I have come that they may have life and have it to the full'.

We seek to help our students flourish in all areas of their lives.

The Catholic Christian community at Cardinal Heenan endeavours to help students to know and build a relationship with Jesus Christ and to live the Catholic faith through prayer, sacraments and service. We are committed to making learning challenging and enjoyable for all so that we will secure the best outcomes and remain lifelong learners who are committed to seeking truth.

We strive to help all to learn and grow, treating one another with respect and generosity, whilst supporting parents as the first and most important educators of our children. **Our aim is to inspire excellence by encouraging every individual to be the person that God calls us to be**, in preparation for this life and the life to come.

Preamble

We welcome both constructive and positive feedback from parents. We promote communication between home and school and your child's head of year or the assistant head of year 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.

Before deciding to proceed with a formal complaint (Stage 1 onwards), it is recommended that you consult with the *Operational and Strategic Decisions (see Appendix 1)*. This outlines decisions that all schools are reasonably and lawfully allowed to make without stakeholder approval. In the interests of transparency, it is likely that 'agreeing to disagree' may be the only outcome in situations where complaints are centred around areas covered within *Appendix 1*.

Who can make a complaint?

This complaints procedure is not limited to parents or carers of children that are registered at the school. Any person, including members of the public, may make a complaint to Cardinal Heenan Catholic High School about any provision of facilities or services that we provide. Unless complaints are dealt with under separate statutory procedures (such as appeals relating to exclusions or admissions), we will use this complaints procedure.

The difference between a concern and a complaint

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

A complaint may be defined as '*an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action*'.

It is in everyone's interest that concerns and complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. Many issues can be resolved informally, without the need to use the formal stages of the complaints procedure. Cardinal Heenan Catholic High School takes concerns seriously and will make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.

If you have difficulty discussing a concern with a particular member of staff, we will respect your views. In these cases, Mr Dominic Kelly (Headteacher) will refer you to another staff member. Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels unable to deal with a concern, Mr Dominic Kelly (Headteacher) will refer you to another staff member. The member of staff may be more senior but does not have to be. The ability to consider the concern objectively and impartially is more important.

We understand however, that there are occasions when people would like to raise their concerns formally. In this case, Cardinal Heenan Catholic High School will attempt to resolve the issue internally, through the stages outlined within this complaints procedure.

How to raise a concern or make a complaint

A concern or complaint can be made in person, in writing or by telephone. They may also be made by a third party acting on behalf on a complainant, as long as they have appropriate consent to do so.

Concerns should be raised with either the class teacher or headteacher. If the issue remains unresolved, the next step is to make a formal complaint.

Complainants should not approach individual governors to raise concerns or complaints. They have no power to act on an individual basis and it may also prevent them from considering complaints at Stage 2 of the procedure.

Complaints against school staff (except the headteacher) should be made in the first instance, to Mr Dominic Kelly (Headteacher) via the school office**.** Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Complaints that involve or are about the headteacher should be addressed to Mr Michael Gardner (the Chair of Governors), via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Complaints about the Chair of Governors, any individual governor or the whole governing body should be addressed to Mrs Angela Fieldhouse (the Clerk to the Governing Body) via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

For ease of use, a template complaint form is included at the end of this procedure. If you require help in completing the form, please contact the school office. You can also ask third party organisations like the Citizens Advice to help you.

In accordance with equality law, we will consider making reasonable adjustments if required, to enable complainants to access and complete this complaints procedure. For instance, providing information in alternative formats, assisting complainants in raising a formal complaint or holding meetings in accessible locations.

Anonymous complaints

We will not normally investigate anonymous complaints. However, the headteacher or Chair of Governors, if appropriate, will determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation.

Time scales

You must raise the complaint within three months of the incident or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within three months of the last of these incidents. We will consider complaints made outside of this time frame if exceptional circumstances apply.

Complaints received outside of term time

We will consider complaints made outside of term time to have been received on the first school day after the holiday period.

Scope of this Complaints Procedure

This procedure covers all complaints about any provision of community facilities or services by Cardinal Heenan Catholic High School, other than complaints that are dealt with under other statutory procedures, including those listed below.

Exceptions	Who to contact
• Admissions to schools • Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs • School re-organisation proposals	Concerns about admissions, statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs, or school re-organisation proposals should be raised with Leeds Local Authority. For further information please contact Mrs J Dodgson: Tel: 0113 887 3240 Email: info@cardinalheenan.com
• Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation	Complaints about child protection matters are handled under our child protection and safeguarding policy and in accordance with relevant statutory guidance. If you have serious concerns, you may wish to contact the local authority designated officer (LADO) who has local responsibility for safeguarding or the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH). Contact for Leeds LADO Tel: 0113 3789687
• Exclusion of children from school*	Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at: www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions. **complaints about the application of the behaviour policy can be made through the school's complaints procedure. The school's behaviour policy can be found in the policies and statutory information section of the school website.*
• Whistleblowing	We have an internal whistleblowing procedure for all our employees, including temporary staff and contractors. The Secretary of State for Education is the prescribed person for matters relating to education for whistleblowers in education who do not want to raise matters direct with their employer. Referrals can be made at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus. Volunteer staff who have concerns about our school should complain through the school's complaints procedure. You may also be able to complain direct to the LA or the Department for Education (see link above), depending on the substance of your complaint.
• Staff grievances	Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the school's internal grievance procedures.

• Staff conduct	Complaints about staff will be dealt with under the school's internal disciplinary procedures, if appropriate. Complainants will not be informed of any disciplinary action taken against a staff member as a result of a complaint. However, the complainant will be notified that the matter is being addressed.
• Complaints about services provided by other providers who may use school premises or facilities	Providers should have their own complaints procedure to deal with complaints about service. Please contact them direct.
• National Curriculum - content	Please contact the Department for Education at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus

If other bodies are investigating aspects of the complaint, for example the police, local authority (LA) safeguarding teams or Tribunals, this may impact on our ability to adhere to the timescales within this procedure or result in the procedure being suspended until those public bodies have completed their investigations.

If a complainant commences legal action against Cardinal Heenan Catholic High School in relation to their complaint, we will consider whether to suspend the complaints procedure in relation to their complaint until those legal proceedings have concluded.

Resolving complaints

At each stage in the procedure, Cardinal Heenan Catholic High School wants to resolve the complaint. If appropriate, we will acknowledge that the complaint is upheld in whole or in part. In addition, we may offer one or more of the following:

- an explanation
- an admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better
- an assurance that we will try to ensure the event complained of will not recur
- an explanation of the steps that have been or will be taken to help ensure that it will not happen again and an indication of the timescales within which any changes will be made
- an undertaking to review school policies in light of the complaint
- an apology.

Withdrawal of a Complaint

If a complainant wants to withdraw their complaint, we will ask them to confirm this in writing.

Informal stage: your initial contact with the school

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.

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.

Any actions or monitoring of the situation that has been agreed, will be communicated clearly, and we will confirm this in writing to you.

If necessary, we will contact appropriate people who may be able to assist us with our enquiries into your concern.

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.

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 complaints must be made to the headteacher (unless they are about the headteacher), via the school office. This may be done in person, in writing (preferably on the Complaint Form accessible as an attachment in the *Policies* section of the website), or by telephone.

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 3 school days.

Within this response, the headteacher will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, ask what remains unresolved and what outcome the complainant would like to see. The headteacher can consider whether a face to face meeting is the most appropriate way of doing this.

The Stage 1 request does not preclude a return to an informal resolution where appropriate. Indeed at this stage the Headteacher will seek to resolve the complaint informally if a mutually acceptable resolution appears achievable.

Note: The headteacher may delegate the investigation to another member of the school's senior leadership team but not the decision to be taken.

During the investigation, the headteacher (or investigator) will:

- if necessary, interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish
- keep a written record of any meetings/interviews in relation to their investigation.

At the conclusion of their investigation, the headteacher will provide a formal written response within 15 school days of the date of receipt of the complaint.

If the headteacher is unable to meet this deadline, they will provide the complainant with an update and revised response date.

The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions Cardinal Heenan Catholic High School will take to resolve the complaint.

The headteacher will advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 1.

If the complaint is about the headteacher, or a member of the governing body (including the Chair or Vice-Chair), a suitably skilled governor will be appointed to complete all the actions at Stage 1.

Complaints about the headteacher or member of the governing body must be made to the Clerk, via the school office.

If the complaint is:

- jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair or
- the entire governing body or
- the majority of the governing body

Stage 1 will be considered by an independent investigator appointed by the governing body or the Diocese of Leeds. At the conclusion of their investigation, the independent investigator will provide a formal written response.

Stage 2

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome at Stage 1 and wishes to take the matter further, they can escalate the complaint to Stage 2 – a meeting with members of the governing body's complaints committee, which will be formed of the first three, impartial, governors available. This is the final stage of the complaints procedure.

A request to escalate to Stage 2 must be made to the Clerk, via the school office, within 10 school days of receipt of the Stage 1 response.

The Clerk will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 3 school days.

Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.

The Clerk will write to the complainant to inform them of the date of the meeting. They will aim to convene a meeting within 20 school days of receipt of the Stage 2 request. If this is not possible, the Clerk will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed.

If the complainant rejects the offer of three proposed dates, without good reason, the Clerk will decide when to hold the meeting. It will then proceed in the complainant's absence on the basis of written submissions from both parties.

The complaints committee will consist of at least three governors with no prior involvement or knowledge of the complaint. Prior to the meeting, they will decide amongst themselves who will act as the Chair of the Complaints Committee. If there are fewer than three governors from Cardinal Heenan Catholic High School available, the Clerk will source any additional, independent governors through another local school, the Diocese of Leeds or through their LA's Governor Services team, in order to make up the committee. Alternatively, an entirely independent committee may be convened to hear the complaint at Stage 2.

The committee will decide whether to deal with the complaint by inviting parties to a meeting or through written representations, but in making their decision they will be sensitive to the complainant's needs.

If the complainant is invited to attend the meeting, they may bring someone along to provide support. This can be a relative or friend. Generally, we do not encourage either party to bring legal representatives to the committee meeting. However, there may be occasions when legal representation is appropriate.

For instance, if a school employee is called as a witness in a complaint meeting, they may wish to be supported by union and/or legal representation.

Note: Complaints about staff conduct will not generally be handled under this complaints procedure. Complainants will be advised that any staff conduct complaints will be considered under staff disciplinary procedures, if appropriate, but outcomes will not be shared with them.

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

At least 5 school days before the meeting, the Clerk will:

- confirm and notify the complainant of the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that, if the complainant is invited, the dates are convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible
- request copies of any further written material to be submitted to the committee at least 3 school days before the meeting.

Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least 2 school days before the date of the meeting. The committee will not normally accept, as evidence, recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.

The committee will also not review any new complaints at this stage or consider evidence unrelated to the initial complaint to be included. New complaints must be dealt with from Stage 1 of the procedure.

The meeting will be held in private. Electronic recordings of meetings or conversations are not normally permitted unless a complainant's own disability or special needs require it. Prior knowledge and consent of all parties attending must be sought before meetings or conversations take place. Consent will be recorded in any minutes taken.

The committee will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented. The committee can:

- uphold the complaint in whole or in part
- dismiss the complaint in whole or in part.

If the complaint is upheld in whole or in part, the committee 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 Chair of the Committee will provide the complainant and Cardinal Heenan Catholic High School with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within 3 school days.

The letter to the complainant will include details of how to contact the Department for Education if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled by Cardinal Heenan Catholic High School.

If the complaint is:

- jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair or
- the entire governing body or
- the majority of the governing body

Stage 2 will be heard by a committee of independent governors.

The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions Cardinal Heenan Catholic High School will take to resolve the complaint.

The response will also advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied.

Next Steps

If the complainant believes the school did not handle their complaint in accordance with the published complaints procedure or they acted unlawfully or unreasonably in the exercise of their duties under education law, they can contact the Department for Education after they have completed Stage 2.

The Department for Education will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by Cardinal Heenan Catholic High School. They will consider whether Cardinal Heenan Catholic High School has adhered to education legislation and any statutory policies connected with the complaint.

The complainant can refer their complaint to the Department for Education online at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus, by telephone on: 0370 000 2288 or by writing to:

Department for Education
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD.

Complaint Form

Please complete and return to Mr Dominic Kelly (Headteacher) who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

Your name:
Pupil's name (if relevant):
Your relationship to the pupil (if relevant):
Address: **Postcode:** **Day time telephone number:** **Evening telephone number:**
Please give details of your complaint, including whether you have spoken to anybody at the school about it.

What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?
Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details.
Signature: **Date:**
Official use
Date acknowledgement sent:
By who:
Complaint referred to:
Date:

Roles and Responsibilities

Complainant

The complainant will receive a more effective response to the complaint if they:

- explain the complaint in full as early as possible
- co-operate with the school in seeking a solution to the complaint
- respond promptly to requests for information or meetings or in agreeing the details of the complaint
- ask for assistance as needed
- treat all those involved in the complaint with respect
- refrain from publicising the details of their complaint on social media and respect confidentiality.

Investigator

The investigator's role is to establish the facts relevant to the complaint by:

- providing a comprehensive, open, transparent and fair consideration of the complaint through:
  - sensitive and thorough interviewing of the complainant to establish what has happened and who has been involved
  - interviewing staff and children/young people and other people relevant to the complaint
  - consideration of records and other relevant information
  - analysing information
- liaising with the complainant and the complaints co-ordinator as appropriate to clarify what the complainant feels would put things right.

The investigator should:

- conduct interviews with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning
- keep notes of interviews or arrange for an independent note taker to record minutes of the meeting
- ensure that any papers produced during the investigation are kept securely pending any appeal
- be mindful of the timescales to respond
- prepare a comprehensive report for the headteacher or complaints committee that sets out the facts, identifies solutions and recommends courses of action to resolve problems.

  The headteacher or complaints committee will then determine whether to uphold or dismiss the complaint and communicate that decision to the complainant, providing the appropriate escalation details.

Complaints Co-ordinator (this could be the headteacher / designated complaints governor or other staff member providing administrative support)

The complaints co-ordinator should:

- ensure that the complainant is fully updated at each stage of the procedure
- liaise with staff members, headteacher, Chair of Governors, Clerk and LAs (if appropriate) to ensure the smooth running of the complaints procedure
- be aware of issues regarding:
  - sharing third party information
  - additional support. This may be needed by complainants when making a complaint including interpretation support or where the complainant is a child or young person
- keep records.

Clerk to the Governing Body

The Clerk is the contact point for the complainant and the committee and should:

- ensure that all people involved in the complaint procedure are aware of their legal rights and duties, including any under legislation relating to school complaints, education law, the Equality Act 2010, the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act (DPA) 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)
- set the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that the dates are convenient to all parties (if they are invited to attend) and that the venue and proceedings are accessible
- collate any written material relevant to the complaint (for example; stage 1 paperwork, school and complainant submissions) and send it to the parties in advance of the meeting within an agreed timescale
- record the proceedings
- circulate the minutes of the meeting
- notify all parties of the committee's decision.

Committee Chair

The committee's chair, who is nominated in advance of the complaint meeting, should ensure that:

- both parties are asked (via the Clerk) to provide any additional information relating to the complaint by a specified date in advance of the meeting
- the meeting is conducted in an informal manner, is not adversarial, and that, if all parties are invited to attend, everyone is treated with respect and courtesy
- complainants who may not be used to speaking at such a meeting are put at ease. This is particularly important if the complainant is a child/young person
- the remit of the committee is explained to the complainant
- written material is seen by everyone in attendance, provided it does not breach confidentiality or any individual's rights to privacy under the DPA 2018 or GDPR.

  If a new issue arises it would be useful to give everyone the opportunity to consider and comment upon it; this may require a short adjournment of the meeting

- both the complainant and the school are given the opportunity to make their case and seek clarity, either through written submissions ahead of the meeting or verbally in the meeting itself
- the issues are addressed
- key findings of fact are made
- the committee is open-minded and acts independently
- no member of the committee has an external interest in the outcome of the proceedings or any involvement in an earlier stage of the procedure
- the meeting is minuted
- they liaise with the Clerk (and complaints co-ordinator, if the school has one).

Committee Member

Committee members should be aware that:

- the meeting must be independent and impartial, and should be seen to be so

  No governor may sit on the committee if they have had a prior involvement in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it.

- the aim of the meeting should be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant

  We recognise that the complainant might not be satisfied with the outcome if the meeting does not find in their favour. It may only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations.

- many complainants will feel nervous and inhibited in a formal setting

  Parents/carers often feel emotional when discussing an issue that affects their child.

- extra care needs to be taken when the complainant is a child/young person and present during all or part of the meeting

  Careful consideration of the atmosphere and proceedings should ensure that the child/young person does not feel intimidated.

  The committee should respect the views of the child/young person and give them equal consideration to those of adults.

  If the child/young person is the complainant, the committee should ask in advance if any support is needed to help them present their complaint. Where the child/young person's parent is the complainant, the committee should give the parent the opportunity to say which parts of the meeting, if any, the child/young person needs to attend.

  However, the parent should be advised that agreement might not always be possible if the parent wishes the child/young person to attend a part of the meeting that the committee considers is not in the child/young person's best interests.

- the welfare of the child/young person is paramount.

Cardinal Heenan Catholic High School policy for managing serial and unreasonable complaints

Cardinal Heenan Catholic High 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.

Cardinal Heenan Catholic High School 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 co-operate 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.

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.

Whenever possible, the headteacher or Chair of Governors will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying an '*unreasonable'* marking.

If the behaviour continues, the headteacher will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and ask them to change it. For complainants who excessively contact Cardinal Heenan Catholic High School causing a significant level of disruption, we may specify methods of communication and limit the number of contacts in a communication plan. This will be reviewed after six months.

In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, we will immediately inform the police and communicate our actions in writing. This may include barring an individual from Cardinal Heenan Catholic High School.

Appendix 1

Operational and Strategic Decisions

At Cardinal Heenan Catholic High School we are committed to building strong relationships with parents and endeavour to support parents as the first and most important educators of our children. This relationship is fundamental to the continued success of our school.

Our children are exceptional and we have sky-high expectations of what they can achieve. As such, our lessons are challenging, requiring our pupils to think for themselves, to make connections and to apply their learning in novel situations. We support our pupils in becoming "*lifelong learners who are committed to seeking truth*" through creating an environment where we value knowledge for its own sake, but also as the vehicle for critical thinking, problem solving and evaluation.

We are proud of our rich and varied curriculum and extra-curricular offer which has been carefully constructed to meet the needs of our diverse school. We believe that it *"inspires excellence by encouraging every individual to be the person that God calls us to be, in preparation for this life and the life to come"*.

Cardinal Heenan Catholic High School is a happy, harmonious learning community, where pupils feel safe and secure. We are a school that encourages pupils to understand their role in creating good relationships and showing respect for everyone in our school community. School life is characterised by a calm, purposeful environment underpinned by relationships built upon mutual respect.

Our successes and continuous improvement as a school are in part down to the decisions that we have made in our policies and procedures and indeed in the consistency and thought in which these are applied. Our Governing Body are involved in the strategic decisions and indeed the approval of key policies in line with statutory and non-statutory guidance by the Department for Education. Where appropriate we have sought the views of our community in making these decisions and have often chosen to share the rationale for our decisions. Whilst there are other schools with shared values, policies and procedures to ours, we also recognise that we live in a world with many opinions and indeed there are schools with approaches to education that are different to ours. It is a sensible extension to this to assume that there are some members of any school community that will not agree with every decision that a school makes. We must accept that it is not always possible to secure agreement on all issues and it is also important to note that some decisions are not open to negotiation and that securing agreement is not necessary. In choosing to send your child to Cardinal Heenan Catholic High School, we ask that parents understand that all schools have the right to make key operational and strategic decisions without agreement from parents. This position is protected by law.

The following list is not exhaustive, but offers examples of such areas:

- Decisions around setting, choice of teacher, class group, teaching assistant, form tutor, tutor group or tier of entry for examinations.
- Decisions regarding Behaviour or Uniform Policy (parents cannot choose for their child to 'opt out' of either policy or any of the sanctions outlined within). Indeed, parental permission or approval is not required for the issuing of any level of sanction included in our behaviour policy, including detention.
- The nature of our rewards system and how we choose to implement it.
- Choice of curriculum content, resources or approaches to Teaching and Learning.
- Our Quality Assurance procedures, approaches to homework or marking.
- The nature of our extra-curricular offer.
- Timing of INSET / Training Days or other key events within the school calendar.

- Curriculum option pathways or subject combinations that the school decides are either in the best interest of the pupil or in terms of timetable constraints.
- The content and delivery of our internal policies and protocols.

As stated in our *Complaints Policy and Procedures*, we will always listen to concerns that are shared with the school. Please note, however, that listening does not mean that a decision will necessarily change. Sometimes we may have to respectfully agree to disagree. This does not indicate that we do not care. Our decisions are made in good faith and on the basis of what we consider to be in the best interests of our pupils, our community or the effective running of the school. We will always use our professional judgement, expertise and experience and operate in line with DfE advice or statutory / legal frameworks.

We advise that should you be in a position where you feel a formal complaint is necessary that you first spend time considering in what way school have acted outside any agreed policy. Should the complaint be regarding key operational and strategic decisions it is likely that 'agreeing to disagree' may be the only outcome and it is also not always possible or necessary to share all decisions or enter into a dialogue about the rationale behind such decisions.

Finally, given the huge volume of complex decisions we make, we will not always get everything right, we are human and will always aim to operate with the best intentions.

Appendix 2

Parentkind | Department for Education | Ofsted raising standards improving lives | IET IMPROVING EDUCATION TOGETHER | Parent-friendly schools

Parent guide to school complaints

Your checklist to resolving concerns quickly, easily and positively with your school

2025/26

Working together to resolve issues

Parents and schools share the same goal: supporting children's education. Sometimes questions or concerns arise. This guide gives you clear steps to share your views and resolve issues quickly and positively.

Why this matters

We know you value clear communication and want your feedback to make a difference.

When the process feels unclear or slow, it can be frustrating and leave you feeling unsure about what to do next. By giving you simple, transparent steps for raising issues, we aim to help you feel heard and supported.

How this guide helps

Most issues can be resolved quickly when you know who to speak to and what to expect.

This guide will support you to follow your school's complaint procedure. Our goal is to keep the focus on your child's education while building positive, supportive partnerships between you and the school.

Five steps to making a school complaint

When issues come up, you need to know how to raise these with the school to get an outcome that supports you and your child.

Relationships between parents and schools last for several years. Ensuring mutual trust and respect is essential to making them work in the best interests of your child.

Let's build parent and school partnerships based on our shared commitment to a great education for all. We know these matters are incredibly important to parents, but everything is founded on good intentions.

The best way to resolve concerns is through clear, respectful communication.

1 2 3 4 5

1 What kind of issue is it?

Complaints come in different shapes and sizes. The best first step is to identify what kind of issue it is, to make sure you can get the quickest action with your school.

Is it feedback? *You need to be heard*

Sometimes you will want to share your voice with your school without needing them to respond, but you expect them to listen and take it on board. Feedback is often sought by schools who want to hear and adapt to parents' views.

Is it a concern? *You need an answer*

Sometimes you have a worry or doubt over an important issue and you are looking for reassurance. Schools should take informal concerns seriously and make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.

Is it a complaint? *You need action*

Sometimes you are dissatisfied with the school's actions or lack of action. Your school will have a formal complaints procedure that is available to you (likely published on their website) with the steps you need to take to complain.

2 Who in the school do I go to?

Often issues can be best resolved by the person closest to your child. Who is best to hear your view at your school?

Discuss with their teacher/form tutor

Go to them first for anything that directly involves your child's classroom experience. Teachers know your child best and can usually sort things quickly.

Examples: homework, friendships, behaviour, day-to-day concerns.

Raise to a middle or senior leader

Take it here if the issue is wider than just one lesson, or if it can't be resolved by the teacher. Leaders have oversight across classes and can coordinate support.

Examples: bullying, additional support, repeated behaviour issues.

Escalate it with the headteacher

Go here for whole-school issues, serious concerns, or if earlier steps haven't worked. The head is responsible for the school and final decisions before governors are involved.

Examples: safeguarding, school policies, staff conduct, health and safety.

Remember - always check your school's complaint policy.

3 How do I raise my complaint?

Concerns are best resolved in discussion with your school. Complaints are best resolved when documented with your school. Follow these tips as you raise your issue.

Follow one level at a time
Start with a query aimed at resolving things quickly with those closest to your child, and only escalate if you truly need to.

Start with the facts
Write down what happened, when, and who was involved. Be clear, relevant and avoid long stories.

Keep a record
Note when you've spoken to a teacher or leader, so you can show you have followed the right steps.

Stay objective
Avoid accusations against individuals, direct your issue toward the processes or decisions that led to the issue.

Suggest a clear outcome
Be clear on what you are looking for from the school and ensure it is realistic, so they can see if it is possible.

Be positive
Make your complaint constructive, focused on solutions, and trust your school to listen.

4 When to expect a response?

Different schools have different policies for handling complaints. You can trust that they are following their policy as they look into your complaint.

Check the school's policy for timescales

Your school's complaints policy will be published on their website. Schools will normally outline how long they expect an outcome to take in that policy. Your school's policy should always be the best guidance to follow.

Ask for a written acknowledgement

If you have written a formal complaint to your school, they will usually acknowledge it quickly. Normally they will detail the timescales for investigating and responding to you and may ask for more details.

Complaint resolution times will vary

Complex complaints may take weeks of investigation. You may not always get updates, but trust that the school is following their policy, investigating and deciding the best action. You should always get a response to your complaint.

5 Where to escalate a complaint?

Once you have fully followed your school's complaint procedure, you may still feel you need action from your school and there are a few ways that may apply to you. It's best to check who it should be escalated with to get it resolved quickly: contacting several people at once could slow things down.

Is it for your school's governing body or trustees?

To be considered if you are unhappy with the school's response. Schools will normally have an escalation process that allows parents to seek a further review of their complaint by a panel which may involve governors or trustees.

Is it for the Department for Education (DfE)?

To be considered if you are unhappy with the way your complaint has been handled or the school is preventing you from following the complaints process. In some circumstances, DfE can consider if the school has followed relevant statutory guidance and education law.

Is it for Ofsted?

Ofsted do not resolve disputes between parents and schools. They may keep your complaint on file for their next inspection but don't always provide a response to parents.

How complaints go wrong

Tensions can run high when you're concerned about your child, but some approaches make matters worse.

Using social media
Sharing your complaint on social media can be harmful to those involved and will not lead to a quicker resolution.

Building a crowd
Other parents may share your views, but your complaint should be specific to you and your child.

Targeting people
Making it personal to individual school staff members can take things too far, keep it to challenging school policy.

Behaving aggressively
Abusive and aggressive behaviour will never be tolerated by a school and can lead to consequences for you.

Only use AI with caution
AI doesn't always get it right when citing laws and can make a complaint more complex than necessary.

Lacking partnership
Having a good relationship with your school is important and it benefits all to move on after complaints are resolved.

The outcome of a formal complaint is often a resolution, where parents and the school have worked together to listen and take action to support the child's education.

Where parents act unreasonably

In extreme circumstances, there can be consequences for parents where there is bullying and harassing behaviour towards the school. If parents use abusive language, are threatening or use intimidation, the school could:

Pause complaints

Typically the first step is for the school to pause the complaints process until the unacceptable behaviour stops, and the school can resume the process.

Issue a verbal or written warning

This sets clear expectations for future conduct and the school may issue a communications plan to reduce risk of confrontation.

Ban parents from school grounds

In persistent or extreme cases of abusive behaviour, a school may take action by placing a ban on parents. The ban is usually issued in writing by the headteacher, though in some cases the local authority, academy trust or governing body may write one instead. Parents will have the right to appeal.

Powering positive partnerships between families and schools

This guide has been created to further support parents. Built with wisdom, research and care by expert partners and members of the Improving Education Together board (IET), led by the Secretary of State for Education.

- Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL)
- The Catholic Education Service
- The Confederation of School Trusts (CST)
- GMB Union
- The Local Government Association (LGA)
- The National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT)
- The National Education Union (NEU)
- National Governance Association (NGA)
- The Sixth Form Colleges Association (SFCA)
- Unison
- Community Trade Union
- NASUWT
- The Department for Education
- Ofsted

Get more insights, resources and support

Parentkind is on a mission to enrich the educational experience for every child - both at home and at school. We empower anyone with parental or educational responsibility with the knowledge, ideas and resources to give young people the very best start in life. As one of the largest federated charities in the UK, Parentkind has a network of 23,500 Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs), parent councils and schools, and mobilises more than 100,000 volunteers to raise vital funds for schools.

www.parentkind.org

This guide is not legal advice and is subject to future change.

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