

Complaints

- a Statement of Policy -

*"This above all: to thine own self be true,
And it must follow, as night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man."*

Polonius (Hamlet, Act 1, Scene 3)

Any difficulties, concerns or complaints are dealt with by the school & centre. Practitioners, the head teacher and senior staff will always attempt to resolve the matter informally. If the complaint cannot be resolved in this way, a formal procedure is followed.

Legal Requirements

Under section 29 of the Education Act 2002, with effect from 1st September, 2003, governing bodies are required to have procedures in place to deal with complaints relating to the school and to any community facilities or services that the school provides.

The Act requires the complaints procedure to be publicised.

The DfES have also recommended that governing bodies ensure that any third party providers offering community facilities or services through the school premises or using the school facilities have their own complaints procedures in place.

Approach to Complaints

St. John Vianney School & Children's Centre recognises the difference between a concern and a complaint. By taking informal concerns seriously at the earliest stage, we hope to reduce the numbers that develop into formal complaints.

The requirement to have a complaints procedure does not undermine our efforts to resolve any concern informally. In most cases the class teacher or the individual delivering the service, in the case of children's centre services and extended school provision, will receive the first approach. It is helpful if staff are able to resolve issues on the spot, including apologising where necessary.

At St. John Vianney School & Children's Centre, the underlying principle to our approach to complaints is that concerns ought to be handled, if at all possible, without the need for formal procedures

Aims of Complaints

At St. John Vianney School & Children's Centre we aim to resolve problems by informal means wherever possible. Where formal procedures become necessary, then the complaints protocol is:

- To be easily accessible and publicised and simple to understand and use, allowing swift handling within established time limits for action and keeping people informed of the progress;
- To be impartial and non-adversarial, ensuring a full and fair investigation by an independent person, while respecting people's desire for confidentiality;
- To address all the points at issue and provide an effective response and appropriate redress, where necessary;
- To provide information to the school's leadership team so that services can be improved.

Experiencing Complaints

The formal complaints procedure will only need to be invoked when initial attempts to resolve the issue are unsuccessful and the person raising the concern remains dissatisfied and wishes to take the matter further.

At each stage, the person investigating the complaint makes sure that they:

- establish what has happened so far, and who has been involved;
- clarify the nature of the complaint and what remains unresolved;
- meet with or contact the complainant if further information is required;
- clarify what the complainant feels would put things right;
- interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish;
- conduct the interview with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning;
- keep notes of the interview;
- complete investigations and reach a determination;
- notify complainant of the decision and any remedial action to be taken within specified time;
- explain any further rights of appeal and, if so, to whom they need to be addressed.

At each stage in the procedure consideration is given to ways in which a complaint can be resolved. It might be sufficient to acknowledge that the complaint is valid in whole or in part. In addition, it may be appropriate to offer one or more of the following:

- an apology;
- an explanation;
- an admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better;
- an assurance that every effort will be made so 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 the light of the complaint.

Complainants are encouraged to state what actions they feel might resolve the problem at any stage. It is important to recognise that an admission that the school could have handled the situation better is not the same as an admission of negligence.

Areas of agreement between parties are identified. It is also of equal importance to clarify any misunderstandings that might have occurred as this can create a positive atmosphere in which to discuss any outstanding issues.

Complaints are considered, and resolved, as quickly and efficiently as possible. Time limits are set for each stage of the procedure. However, where further investigations are necessary, new time limits can be set and the complainant sent details of the new deadline and an explanation for the delay.

By using our complaints procedure, the number of complaints that become protracted will be limited. However, there will be occasions when, despite all stages of the procedures having been followed, the complainant remains dissatisfied. If the complainant tries to reopen the same issue, the chair of the governing body is able to inform them in writing that the procedure has been exhausted and that the matter is now closed.

Structure of Complaints

There are three stages to the formal complaints procedure at St. John Vianney School & Children's Centre.

- Stage One: Complaint heard by staff member.
This stage will be completed within 7 days.
- Stage Two: Complaint heard by head teacher.
This stage will be completed within 28 days.
- Stage Three: Complaint heard by the complaints appeal panel of the governing body.
This stage will be completed within 28 days.

There may, on occasion, be the need for some flexibility with regard to time limits; for example, the possibility of further meetings between the complainant and the member of staff directly involved and/or further investigations may be required by the head teacher after a meeting with the complainant.

An unsatisfied complainant can always take a complaint to the next stage.

Where complaints remain unresolved by this procedure, complainants have recourse to a variety of other bodies to pursue their concern. [Information regarding such procedures is available from www.ofsted.gov.uk *Complaints to Ofsted about schools: guidance for parents and Building better childcare: concerns and complaints about childminders and childcare providers.*]

Staff and governors involved in dealing with complaints should refer to the Complaints protocol, which should also be shared with complainants undertaking the formal procedure. (Annex 1)

Publicising the Complaints Procedure

The Complaints Procedure will be publicised. The complete policy and procedures will be published and made available by the school. A summary of the procedure will be included in:

- The information given to new parents when their children join the school;
- School bulletins, periodically;
- Documents supplied to community users including course information or letting agreements;
- A complaints leaflet which includes a form on which a complaint can be made (Annex 2);
- Posters displayed in reception areas of the school and centre that will be used by the public (Annex 3);
- Our website.

Record Keeping

At St. John Vianney School & Children's Centre, a record is kept of every complaint, recording the progress of the complaint and the final outcome. A complaint may be made in person, by telephone, or in writing. An example of a complaint form can be found in Annex 4. At the end of a meeting or telephone call, the member of staff ensures that the complainant and the school have the same understanding of what was discussed and agreed. A brief note of meetings and telephone calls is kept and a copy of any written response added to the record.

Monitoring & Evaluation

The Evaluation committee of the governing body monitors the level and nature of complaints and reviews the outcomes on a regular basis to ensure the effectiveness of the procedure and make changes where necessary. The committee will make a report to a meeting of the full governing body in the Spring Term each year, taking care that no mention is made of specific complaints or individuals.

As well as addressing an individual's complaints, the process of listening to, and resolving complaints will contribute to school improvement. When individual complaints are heard, underlying issues may be identified that need to be addressed. The monitoring and review of complaints by the leadership team is a useful tool in evaluating performance.

Staffing & Resources

At St. John Vianney School & Children's Centre, the head teacher has responsibility for the operation and management of the school complaints procedure.

Implementation & Review

This policy is to be ratified by the Governors and Staff of St. John Vianney School in March, 2017 and will come into effect on 1st April, 2017.

The implementation of this policy is the responsibility of all staff at St. John Vianney School & Children's Centre.

Following the procedures of St. John Vianney School & Children's Centre, this policy is reviewed and evaluated, in order to:-

- Identify that practice is consistent;
- Ensure that the aims of St. John Vianney School & Children's Centre are met consistently.

The policy will be reviewed under the three year review-cycle plan.