



Complaints procedure

Approved by:	T Bishop
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Last reviewed on:	November 2017
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Next review due by:	November 2019
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Aims

Bedford Catholic Schools always welcome meaningful communication with its parents, students and the wider community, and whilst we hope you are always happy with your child's progress or relationship with the schools we recognise there are occasions when you will want to bring questions or concerns to a school's attention.

When responding to complaints, we aim to:

- Be impartial and non-adversarial
- Facilitate a full and fair investigation by an independent person or panel, where necessary
- Address all the points at issue and provide an effective and prompt response
- Respect complainants' desire for confidentiality
- Treat complainants with respect
- Keep complainants informed of the progress of the complaints process
- Consider how the complaint can feed into school improvement evaluation processes

We try to resolve concerns or complaints by informal means wherever possible. Where this is not possible, formal procedures will be followed.

The school will aim to give the complainant the opportunity to complete the complaints procedure in full. To support this, we will ensure we publicise the existence of this policy and make it available on the school website.

Definitions and scope

The DfE guidance explains the difference between a concern and a complaint:

- A **concern** is defined as "an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought".
- A **complaint** is defined as "an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action".

The schools will resolve concerns through day-to-day communication as far as possible.

The schools intend to resolve complaints informally where possible, at the earliest possible stage. There may be occasions when complainants would like to raise their concerns formally. This policy outlines the procedure relating to handling such complaints.

This policy does not cover complaints procedures relating to: Admissions; Statutory assessments of special educational needs (SEN); Safeguarding matters; Exclusion; Whistle-blowing; Staff grievances and Staff discipline. Please see our separate policies for procedures relating to these types of complaint.

Complaints about services provided by other providers who use school premises or facilities should be directed to the provider concerned.

Principles for investigation

When investigating a complaint, we will try to clarify:

- What has happened
- Who was involved
- What the complainant feels would put things right

We also intend to address complaints as quickly as possible. To achieve this, realistic and reasonable time limits will be set for each action within each stage.

Where further investigations are necessary, new time limits will be set, and the complainant will be sent details of the new deadline with an explanation for the delay.

The school expects that complaints will be made as soon as possible after an incident arises and no later than 3 months afterwards. We will consider exceptions to this time frame in circumstances where there were valid reasons for not making a complaint at that time and the complaint can still be investigated in a fair manner for all involved.

Stages of complaint (not complaints against the headteacher or a governor)

Stage 1: informal

The school will take informal concerns seriously and make every effort to resolve the matter quickly. Many concerns may be settled by contacting your child's teacher because they work regularly with your child.

You should raise the complaint as soon as possible with the relevant member of staff – this may be your child's class or subject teacher, head of year or subject, or the headteacher. If the complaint is regarding the special needs provision provided by the school for your child you may wish to direct your complaint to the school SENCO. You can do so either in person or by letter, telephone or email. If you are unclear who to contact or how to contact them, please contact the school office.

The school will acknowledge informal complaints within five working days, and investigate and provide a response within fifteen working days.

If the complaint is not resolved informally, you can escalate it to a formal complaint.

Stage 2: formal

If the matter cannot be resolved informally, you (the complainant) should put the complaint in writing, addressed to the head teacher, setting out briefly the facts and stating what it is that you consider should have been done or where the school has not met reasonable expectations. A letter of acknowledgement will be sent to you within 5 school days.

The headteacher (or other person appointed by the headteacher for this purpose) will then conduct an investigation. You may be asked for further information and/or invited to a meeting to discuss your complaint. The written conclusion of this investigation will be sent to you within fifteen working days.

If you are not satisfied with the response and wish to proceed to the next stage of this procedure, you must inform the Chair of Governors in writing within fifteen working days.

Any complaint relating to a headteacher must be raised in the first instance with the Chair of Governors who will, if an informal resolution cannot be reached, designate a Governor to investigate in the same way as outlined above.

Stage 3: Academy Directors (Governors)

Complaints will be escalated to the Directors (Governors) of the Multi Academy Trust if you are not satisfied with the response to the complaint at the second, formal, stage, or if the complaint is about a headteacher. The Directors will conduct an investigation into the complaint on your behalf within fifteen working days. You may be asked for further information and/or invited to a meeting to discuss your complaint. You will receive a written response to your complaint within fifteen working days.

Stage 4: Independent Review

If you are not satisfied with the response of the Directors at stage 3 you may request that the complaint be considered by a panel convened by the Governing Body. This will comprise a minimum of 3 people, at least 2 of which will be Governors and which will include one person who is independent of the management and running of the school. Members of the Panel will be appointed on the basis that they have no prior knowledge of the complaint. The request must be in writing, addressed to the Clerk to the Governors, within ten working days of the response from stage 3 being sent to you and must set out briefly the reasons you are dissatisfied with the response.

Within fifteen working days of receipt of the complainant's letter the Clerk will convene a meeting of the panel of the Governing Body together with the complainant and relevant representatives of the school. That meeting will be held as quickly as practicable given the need to find a date that is reasonably convenient for the complainant, the school and the members of the Panel. At any meeting, the complainant will be entitled to be accompanied by a friend but legal representation will not be allowed. The complainant will have the opportunity to put their reasons for dissatisfaction and to enlarge on them but may not introduce reasons that were not previously put in writing.

The decision of the panel is final. If you are still not satisfied, you may wish to put your complaint to the Secretary of State for Education and Skills.

Complaints against the headteacher or a governor

Complaints made against the headteacher should be directed to the Chair of Governors.

Where a complaint is against the Chair of Governors or any member of the governing board, it should be made in writing to the clerk to the governing board in the first instance.

Referring complaints on completion of the school's procedure

If the complainant is unsatisfied with the outcome of the school's complaints procedure, they can refer their complaint to the ESFA. The ESFA will check whether the complaint has been dealt with properly by the school. The ESFA will not overturn a school's decision about a complaint. However, it will look into:

- Whether there was undue delay, or the school did not comply with its own complaints procedure
- Whether the school was in breach of its funding agreement with the secretary of state
- Whether the school has failed to comply with any other legal obligation

If the school did not deal with the complaint properly, it will be asked to re-investigate the complaint. If the school's complaints procedure is found to not meet regulations, the school will be asked to correct its procedure accordingly.

For more information or to refer a complaint, see the following webpage: <https://www.gov.uk/complain-about-school>

Persistent complaints

Where a complainant tries to re-open the issue with the school after the complaints procedure has been fully exhausted and the school has done everything it reasonably can in response to the complaint, the chair of governors (or other appropriate person in the case of a complaint about the chair) will inform the complainant that the matter is closed.

If the complainant subsequently contacts the school again about the same issue, the school can choose not to respond. The normal circumstance in which we will not respond is if:

- The school has taken every reasonable step to address the complainant's needs, *and*
- The complainant has been given a clear statement of the school's position and their options (if any), *and*
- The complainant is contacting the school repeatedly but making substantially the same points each time

However, this list is not intended to be exhaustive.

The school will be most likely to choose not to respond if:

- We have reason to believe the individual is contacting the school with the intention of causing disruption or inconvenience, and/or
- The individual's letters/emails/telephone calls are often or always abusive or aggressive, and/or
- The individual makes insulting personal comments about, or threats towards, school staff

Unreasonable behaviour which is abusive, offensive or threatening may constitute an unreasonably persistent complaint.

Once the school has decided that it is appropriate to stop responding, the complainant will be informed in writing, either by letter or email.

The school will ensure when making this decision that complainants making any new complaint are heard, and that the school acts reasonably.

Record-keeping

The school will record the progress of all complaints, including information about actions taken at all stages, the stage at which the complaint was resolved, and the final outcome. The records will also include copies of letters and emails, and notes relating to meetings and phone calls.

This material will be treated as confidential and held centrally, and will be viewed only by those involved in investigating the complaint or on the review panel.

This is except where the secretary of state (or someone acting on their behalf) or the complainant requests access to records of a complaint through a freedom of information (FOI) request or under the terms of the Data Protection Act, or where the material must be made available during a school inspection.

Monitoring arrangements

The Governing Body monitors the Complaints Procedure, in order to ensure that all complaints are handled properly. The headteacher will log all formal complaints received by the School and record how they were resolved. Governors will examine this log on an annual basis and consider the need for any changes to the procedure.