St. Nicholas C of E Primary School

Complaints Policy & Procedure

Our vision

We prepare every pupil for their best future by ensuring they reach their full potential and attain the knowledge, skills and understanding required for success as we believe that 'With God, all things are possible'. Matthew 19:26

Date reviewed:	February 2026
Reviewed by:	R. Younger
Approved by Headteacher:	February 2026
Date of next review:	Spring 2027

1. Who can make a complaint?

This complaints procedure is mainly aimed at parents or carers of children who are registered at the school, but it is not limited to them. Any member of the public may make a complaint to St Nicholas Church of England Primary School about the provision of facilities or services that the school provides.

Unless complaints are dealt with under separate statutory procedures, such as appeals relating to exclusions or admissions (see Section 9), the school will use this complaints procedure.

2. 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 opportunity. Many issues can be resolved informally, without the need to use the formal stages of the complaints procedure. St Nicholas C of E Primary 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, the headteacher will refer you to another staff member. Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels unable to deal with a concern, the 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, the school will attempt to resolve the issue internally, through the stages outlined within this complaints procedure.

3. 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 the most relevant member of staff. For example, if a parent has a concern about their child's progress s/he should raise this with the class teacher. 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 the headteacher via the school office. Please mark them as 'private and confidential'.

Complaints that involve or are about the headteacher should be addressed to 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 marked 'private and confidential' and sent to the clerk to the governing body at the following address:

Governor Services
Blackpool Council
PO Box 4
Municipal Buildings
Blackpool
FY1 1NA

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 such as 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.

4. Anonymous complaints

The school will not normally investigate anonymous complaints. However, the headteacher or chair of governors, if appropriate, will determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation.

5. Duplicate complaints

If, after closing a complaint at the end of the complaints procedure, we receive a duplicate complaint from a spouse, a partner, a grandparent, a child not attending this school or another relative, we will remind them that we have already considered the complaint and the local process is complete. Complainants will be advised to contact the DfE if they are dissatisfied with our handling of the complaint.

6. Complaint campaigns

If we receive what we consider to be a large volume of complaints, all based on the same subject and possibly from complainants not connected to the school, then we will treat these complaints as being part of a campaign and respond in one of the following two ways, depending upon the nature and scale of the complaint:

- send the same response to all complainants; or
- publish a single response on the school's website.

7. Timescales

Complainants 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 timeframe if exceptional circumstances apply.

8. 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.

9, Scope of this complaints procedure

This procedure covers all complaints about any provision of services or community facilities by St Nicholas C of E Primary School, other than complaints that are dealt with under other statutory procedures, including those listed below.

Type of complaint:	These matters will be dealt with by:
• Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs (SEN) • School reorganisation proposals	Concerns relating to these matters should be raised with Blackpool Council.
Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation	Complaints about child protection matters are handled under our safeguarding and child protection 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 | Blackpool Safeguarding Boards
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 school's behaviour policy can be made through the school's complaints procedure.*
Admissions to school	Concerns relating to the school's admission procedures should be raised

	with the Office of the Schools Adjudicator.
Admissions appeals	Complaints about admissions appeals are dealt with by the Local Government Ombudsman.
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 whistle-blowers 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 local authority or the DfE (see link above), depending on the substance of your complaint.
Staff conduct	Complaints about staff will be dealt with under the school's internal disciplinary procedure, 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 by staff relating to grievances about their employment	Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the school's internal grievance procedure.
National Curriculum – content	Please contact the DfE at www.education.gov.uk/contactus
Complaints about services provided by other providers who use the school premises	Providers should have their own complaints procedure so should be contacted direct.

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 St Nicholas C of E Primary 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.

10. Resolving complaints

At each stage in the procedure, the 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.

11. Withdrawal of a complaint

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

12. Stages of the complaints procedure

a) Stage 1

Formal complaints must be made to the headteacher (unless they are about the headteacher), via the school office.

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 a member of the governing body must be made to the clerk, at the address given on page 4 of this document.

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 either the governing body or by Blackburn Diocese Board of Education. At the conclusion of its investigation, the independent investigator will provide a formal written response.

A formal complaint may be made in person, in writing (preferably on the complaint form) 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 5 school days. Within this response, the headteacher will seek, if necessary, 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.

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 20 school days of the date of receipt of the complaint. If the headteacher is unable to meet this deadline, s/he 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 that the school will take to resolve the complaint. The headteacher will also advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 1.

b) 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, at the address given on page 4 of this document, within 10 school days of receipt of the Stage 1 response. Requests received outside of this timeframe will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.

The clerk will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 5 school days.

The clerk will write to the complainant to inform them of the date of the meeting of the governing body's complaints committee. S/he 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 among themselves who will act as the chair of the complaints committee. If there are fewer than three governors from St Nicholas C of E Primary School available, the clerk will source any additional, independent governors through another local school or through their local authority'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.

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

If the complainant is invited to attend the meeting, s/he may bring someone along to provide support. This can be a relative or friend. Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend. Generally, we do not encourage either party to bring legal representatives to the 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.

At least 10 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 5 school days before the meeting.

Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least 5 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. 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 the headteacher with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within 5 school days.

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 that the school will take to resolve the complaint.

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

13. 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 DfE will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by St Nicholas C of E Primary School. They will consider whether the school has adhered to education legislation and any statutory policies connected with the complaint.

The complainant can refer their complaint to the DfE 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

14. Serial or unreasonable complaints

St Nicholas C of E Primary 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 that 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.

St Nicholas C of E Primary 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 for 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 from the school advising 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; and/or
- 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 any other means) 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 deeming them to be 'unreasonable'.

If the behaviour continues the headteacher will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and asking them to change it. For complainants who excessively contact the 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 6 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 the school premises.

15. Persistent correspondence

If complainants frequently contact the school, causing a significant level of disruption, but refuse to engage with the complaints procedure, St Nicholas C of E Primary School can:

- restrict the complainant to a single point of contact via an email address; and/or
- limit the number of times the complainant can make contact.

This restriction will be limited to the complainant's capacity to complain. For all other issues the complainant can contact the school as normal.

16. 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 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.

Appendix 1 – Complaint Form

Please complete this form and return it, via the school office, to the headteacher (or clerk to the governing body) who will acknowledge its receipt and explain what action will be taken.

Your name:

Your relationship to the school (e.g. a parent of a pupil on the school roll):

Pupil's name (if relevant to your complaint):

Your address:

Postcode:
Day time telephone number:

Evening telephone number:

Email address:

Please give concise details of your complaint (including dates, names of witnesses, etc.) to allow the matter to be fully investigated:

You may continue on separate paper or attach additional documents if you wish.
Number of pages attached =

What action, if any, have you already taken to try to resolve your complaint?
(i.e. who have you spoken with or written to and what was the outcome?)

What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?

Signature:

Date:

School use:

Date form received:	Received by:
Date acknowledgement sent:	Sent by:

Complaint referred to:

Date: