The Federation of
The Annunciation Catholic Schools

'Be who God meant you to be and you will set the world on fire'

St Catherine of Siena

Complaints Policy & Procedures

Approved by: Governing Board	**Date:** September 2027
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Introduction

No-one likes criticism but an open organisation will always be willing to listen to concerns and anxieties and be ready to learn from them if appropriate. In a school, most concerns are likely to be expressed by the parents or carers of its pupils, though some may come from pupils themselves, parishioners, or from other interested parties such as neighbours or users of the premises.

In a Catholic school, parental/carers' concerns are of particular importance. As the first educators of their children, parents/carers have a duty to take an active interest in their school. "Since parents have given children their life, they are bound by the most serious obligation to educate their offspring." (Gravissimum Educationis). To this end we believe, "there must be the closest co-operation between parents and the teachers to whom they entrust their children to be educated. In fulfilling their task, teachers are to collaborate closely with the parents and willingly listen to them." (Can.796) In our School, therefore, dealing with parental/carers' concerns will be an intrinsic part of our school's ethos and mission

Nearly all concerns or questions can be resolved very quickly and informally if parents/carers feel able to voice them as soon as they arise. We will aim to keep parents informed so that there is less scope for misunderstanding.

Feedback is always welcome and we warmly encourage parents to voice any concerns straightaway, preferably to the person concerned. In most cases, discussion, explanation, further information – or an apology, if appropriate – will resolve the issue. **Every effort will be made to allay concerns at this level and with the least possible formality. The ideal is that no concern should ever become a formal complaint.**

Occasionally, however, a concern will be too serious to be handled in this way, perhaps needing greater investigation; or the person concerned may not feel that the answers given so far have been acceptable or adequate. In such circumstances, the concern will become a complaint and the formal procedure will be rigorously followed. Even in these cases, however, every effort will be made to resolve the issue at the lowest possible level of the procedure.

THE FORMAL PROCEDURE

Principles

At every stage of the formal procedure, the handling of the complaint will be:

- Non-adversarial
- Swift (using agreed time limits)
- Fair (using independent investigation where necessary)
- Confidential

Throughout the process, the school will be willing:

- to listen

- to learn
- to admit mistakes
- to apologise if appropriate
- to address any issues raised
- to change school practice if appropriate

In using this procedure:

- staff are asked to be aware that complainants may feel intimidated by the school as an institution and unsure whether they will be treated fairly
- complainants are asked to be aware that those complained about, especially individual members of staff, may feel very vulnerable during this process

Throughout the procedure, therefore, the aim of all parties should be not only to resolve the complaint but also to develop and sustain good relationships between all members of the school community.

However formal or serious the complaint, or however dissatisfied the complainant, the aim will always be reconciliation between all parties and a renewed commitment to work together amicably. The gospel values of justice and forgiveness should always underpin the entire process.

This Complaints Procedure does not apply to:

- members of staff (who should use their own Grievance Procedure)
- procedures with their own appeal structure e.g. admissions and exclusions
- concerns about the delivery of the National Curriculum and about collective worship will be dealt with by the school in the first instance (stages 1 and 2) and if there is no satisfactory resolution, will be referred to the Secretary of State

It is also totally separate from any Disciplinary or Capability Procedures. If the investigation of any complaint were to lead to concerns on the part of the Headteacher or governors about the capability or conduct of a member of staff, these would not be discussed or dealt with within this procedure.

Outline of the Procedure

There are three stages to the formal procedure:

Stage 1
Complaint heard by a member of our staff (not the subject of the complaint). The Complaints Coordinator in our school are the Phase Leaders, to whom all complaints will be addressed in the first instance.

The complaints co-ordinator will either hear a complaint personally or, where appropriate, refer the matter to another member of staff. The co-ordinator will also keep records of each complaint and of action taken in regard to it (Appendix A) so that the senior managers and governors of the school can be kept informed of all issues that arise and as a result can change or develop school practices where necessary or appropriate. Thus complaints about the school can be used positively

as a self-evaluation tool.

Stage 2
Complaint heard by the Headteacher.

Stage 3
Complaint heard by Governing Body's Complaints Appeal Panel.
If unsatisfied at Stage 1 or 2, the complainant can take the complaint to the next stage.

THE FORMAL COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE IN DETAIL

Stage 1 – Complaint Heard by Staff Member
NB The aim is to resolve the complaint at this level.
1.1 The complaint should be addressed in the first instance to the designated member of staff (the complaints co-ordinator). This may be done in person, by telephone or in writing. In very small schools, the designated member of staff may have to be the Headteacher, in which case the procedure will start at Stage 2.

1.2 The complaints co-ordinator will log the complaint (Appendix A) and either investigate the complaint personally or refer it to an appropriate member of staff. In making this decision, the co-ordinator will be sensitive to any indication that the complainant would have difficulty discussing the complaint with a particular member of staff.

1.3 If the complaint concerns the Headteacher, the co-ordinator should refer it to the chair of governors and, in courtesy, inform the Headteacher that this has been done. If the complaint concerns the chair of governors, the co-ordinator should refer it to the vice-chair.

1.4 Whoever investigates the complaint will:
- establish what has happened so far, and who has been involved;
- clarify the nature of the complaint and what remains unresolved;
- meet with the complainant or contact them (if unsure or further information is necessary);
- clarify what the complainant feels would put things right, clearing up any areas of misunderstanding, identifying areas of agreement and discussing what might be possible;
- interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish (- this should include adults and pupils as appropriate, whether main players or witnesses-);
- conduct each interview with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning;
- keep notes of each interview.

1.5 Timescales. Within ten school days of receiving the complaint, the investigator will complete the investigation and contact the complainant to arrange a meeting. (See 1.6). At any point in the process, the complaints co- ordinator may decide or agree to commission a further investigation, whether by a member of staff or an

independent person. If this occurs, the timescale may be extended and the complainant must be informed of the extension and the reason for it.

1.6 When the investigation is complete, the member of staff investigating will meet the complainant to try to resolve the complaint. **Every effort should be made to try to resolve the complaint at this meeting.** Any of the following may be appropriate at this point:

- an acknowledgement that the complaint is valid in whole or in part;
- an apology;
- an explanation;
- a clarification of misunderstandings;
- an admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better;
- an assurance 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 light of the complaint.

Some of the above may require that the investigator seek authority from the head teacher. Naturally, nothing should be offered or promised that cannot be justified or fulfilled.

1.7 If the complaint cannot be resolved, the complainant may refer it to Stage 2.

Stage 2 – Complaint Heard by Headteacher
(*In very small schools, this stage may be the start of the procedure – see 1.1)

2.1 Where a complaint has not been resolved at Stage 1, it will be referred to the Headteacher **unless** the original complaint concerned either the Headteacher or the chair of governors in which case the complainant may refer it straight to Stage 3.

2.2 The Headteacher will either investigate the complaint personally or refer it to another senior member of staff (who has not so far been involved) or arrange for an independent investigation if appropriate. At this point it is possible that the complaint will have escalated to include a complaint concerning the manner in which the original complaint has been handled. Both parts of the complaint would in this case need to be investigated.

2.3 In conducting the investigation, the investigator will operate in accordance with section **1.4.**

2.4 2.4 Timescales: Within ten school days of receiving the complaint, the investigator will report back to the Headteacher. Within a further three school days, the Headteacher will contact the complainant and arrange a meeting. (See **2.5)** At any point in the process, the Headteacher may decide or agree to commission a further investigation, whether by another senior member of staff or a governor or an independent person (eg from the diocese or the Local Authority or another appropriate agency depending on the nature of the complaint). If this occurs, the timescale may be extended and the complainant must be informed of the extension and the reason for it.

2.5 When the investigation is complete, the Headteacher will consider the

evidence and, whether or not he or she investigated the matter personally, will meet the complainant (with or without the person who conducted the investigation if different) to try to resolve the complaint. **Every effort should be made to resolve the complaint at this meeting.** Any of the suggestions in section **1.**
may be appropriate at this point.

2.6 If the complaint cannot be resolved, the complainant may refer it to Stage 3.

Stage 3

Complaint Heard by Governing Body's Complaints Appeal Panel

3.1 A Complaints Appeal Panel, consisting of three governors, should be appointed annually by the governing body. This panel will have delegated power to hear and finally determine complaints. Ideally, the make-up of the panel should reflect the make-up of the governing body and/or the profile of the pupils in the school. Any governor who has prior involvement in or detailed knowledge of a particular complaint or its investigation may not sit on the panel hearing that complaint. It would be advisable, therefore, for the governing body to agree alternative panel members in case of such a circumstance. In the event that there are insufficient numbers of governors available to participate in a Panel, the Chair of Governors or Vice-Chair of Governors as appropriate may appoint associate members, on the recommendation of the Diocese, to participate solely in the relevant complaints panel.

3.2 To trigger Stage 3, the complainant will have been dissatisfied with the school's approach to the complaint in the first two stages and must now put the complaint in writing to the Chair of governors. The Chair will check what has happened so far and, if the procedure has been properly followed and it is appropriate to move to Stage 3, he or she, or a nominated other governor, will - via the clerk - convene a Governing Body's Complaints Appeal Panel. If the original complaint concerned the Chair of Governors and was referred to the Vice-Chair at Stage 1, the Vice-Chair will tell the complainant the name of the nominated governor for a referral to Stage 3. (see section 3.1).

3.3 This is the final stage of the school procedure. It is, therefore, vital that, in the spirit of the procedure, the Appeal Panel should:

- be prepared to hear complaints without preconceptions;
- examine and discuss the matter fully so that they ensure that they have every piece of information or evidence that they require;
- be prepared to commission, organise or conduct further investigations if necessary;
- give the complainant the opportunity to express their dissatisfaction and worries and to suggest what might put things right;
- be prepared to take whatever action is required.

3.4 Timescales. The date of the Appeal Panel Meeting should be agreed by all parties within five school days of the receipt of the written referral of the complaint. The meeting itself should be held within fifteen school days of the receipt of the referral. If the complainant or the Headteacher wishes to submit information in writing to the panel, they should send it to the clerk to the governors at least five

school days before the meeting. As far as possible, the meeting should not be delayed if the referral comes at the end of a term, especially at the end of the summer term. Since the aim of the procedure is to resolve the issue and effect reconciliation if necessary, it will be best if the matter can come to the panel as quickly as possible, especially as the complainant will already have been engaged over a protracted period in attempts to put things right.

3.5 Failure to agree a date. If a party to the complaint fails to agree to attend a Complaints Panel meeting having been offered 2 or more alternative dates, within the 20 school day period, in an effort to accommodate their attendance, then the Complaints Panel may decide the meeting should take place in any event on the date last offered to the parties to the complaint. This particularly so if otherwise the complaint will not be heard within the school term or if the event giving rise to the complaint extends back sometime before the complaint was made. The complainant will be notified in writing of the time and date the Complaints Panel has agreed to meet to consider the complaint.

3.6 Failure to Attend. If a date is agreed or if pursuant to 3.5 above the complainant fails to agree a date and it is decided that the meeting should proceed and on the date and time notified to the parties the complainant fails to attend without reasonable excuse, notified to the Complaints Panel by the time of the meeting then the Complaints Panel will consider whether it is appropriate either to dismiss the complaint summarily for absence of the complainant or to proceed to conduct the meeting in the absence of the complainant using such evidence as was already before it on paper and as is available orally from the other party.

The Meeting of the Governing Body's Complaints Appeal Panel

3.7 Before the meeting: Members of the panel should consider carefully any documentation from the Headteacher or the complainant but **should not discuss the matter with anyone, including the other members of the panel, before the meeting.** This is in the interest of fairness and natural justice. The appeal panel must operate scrupulously as an independent arbiter of the complaint. The panel may however, liaise before the meeting in order to decide whether or not it is appropriate to exercise the powers set out in paragraph 3.5 above.

3.8 Conduct of the meeting – to be borne in mind:

- One of the panel must act as Chair and there should be a clerk for the meeting.
- A member of the Diocesan Education Service may be invited to advise and support the panel.

The meeting room should be private and as informally laid out as possible in order to encourage a spirit of partnership. It is very important that there should be nothing adversarial about the proceedings. The tone of the whole meeting will be set by the atmosphere of the room in which it is set and by the way people are greeted. Panel members should be sensitive to the vulnerabilities and sensitivities of all concerned. Parents/Carers may be emotional when talking about their child; the Headteacher and others involved in the earlier investigations may fear that their professionalism could be under attack. Everyone needs to remember that the aim and purpose of the meeting is to resolve the complaint and find ways of going forward together. It is possible that the complainant may not be satisfied with the outcome if the panel

does not find in their favour, but the conduct of the meeting can go a long way towards smoothing such dissatisfaction. At the very least, every complainant should feel at the end that their complaint has been taken seriously and examined impartially.

- If the complaint is about the Headteacher or Chair of governors and has been investigated by the Chair of governors or another governor at Stage 2 then that governor may present the case for the school.
- Very special care should be taken if the complainant is a child or if there are child witnesses.
- Children's views should be given equal consideration to those of adults. If a parent/carer has complained on behalf of a child, the parent/carer should be given the opportunity to say which parts of the meeting the child needs to attend.
- The parent/carer must be told that they are permitted to bring a friend or representative to the meeting.

3.9 Role of the Clerk The clerk will:

- confirm to all parties in writing the date, time and venue of the hearing;
- receive and distribute any documentation to be read before the hearing;
- meet and welcome all parties as they arrive at the hearing;
- record the proceedings;
- notify all parties of the panel's decision within 3 school days (or as decided by panel). The wording of any letters will be agreed with the chair of the panel.

3.10 Role of the Chair of the Panel

The Chair will ensure:

- that the procedure is properly followed (with the support of the Diocesan Education Service if requested);
- that the procedure for the hearing of the complaint is explained to all parties and that all parties have the opportunity to put their case without undue interruption;
- that the issues are addressed;
- that all parties are put at their ease, especially any who may not be accustomed to speaking at such a hearing;
- that the proceedings are kept as informal as possible and that everyone treats each other with respect and courtesy;
- that the panel operates in an open-minded and independent way;
- that time is given for all parties to consider any 'new' evidence.

Role of the Diocesan and Local Authority Representatives

- To advise the panel on procedure. The Diocesan and local authority officers are there in an advisory capacity only. They do not have a vote and do not participate in the panel's decision making process.

3.11 Order of Proceedings for the Hearing of the Complaint

- Welcome, introductions and explanations of the proceedings by the Chair.
- The complainant is invited to explain the complaint.
- The Headteacher may question the complainant.
- The panel may ask questions at any time.

- If there are any witnesses for the complainant, each one is invited into the hearing in turn and in each case the witness is invited to speak, then the Headteacher may question them.
- In each case, the witness will leave after their evidence.
- The Headteacher is invited to explain the school's actions.
- The complainant may question the Headteacher.
- If there are any witnesses for the school, they are treated in exactly the same way as the witnesses for the complainant.
- When the Chair is sure that all parties have asked all that they need to, the complainant is invited to sum up their complaint.
- The Headteacher is then invited to sum up the school's actions and response to the complaint.
- The Chair explains that both parties will hear from the panel within three school days following the day of the hearing.
- Both parties leave together while the panel decides on the issues (advised by the Diocesan Education Service member if there).

3.12 Options Open to the Panel The panel may:

- dismiss the complaint in whole or in part;
- uphold the complaint in whole or in part;
- decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint;
- recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not recur.

3.13 After the Hearing the following actions need to be taken.

- The Chair of the panel agrees with the clerk the wording of the letter to be sent to both parties. This must include reasons for the decision and the fact that appeals on points of law or procedure may be referred to the Secretary of State for Education at: The School Complaints Unit, Department for Education, Piccadilly Gate, Manchester M1 2WD. (In the case of Academies any appeal would be to the Education funding Agency). The clerk then ensures that the letter is sent out in accordance with the agreed timescale.
- The clerk writes up the notes of the meeting and gives a copy to the chair of the panel.
- The clerk ensures that any recommendation to change school procedures is put on the agenda for the next governing body meeting.

3.14 Serial or Persistent Complaints: If properly followed, a good complaints procedure will limit the number of complaints that become protracted.
However, there will be occasions when, despite all stages of the procedure having been followed, the complainant remains dissatisfied. If the complainant tries to reopen the same issue, the chair of governors is able to inform them in writing that the procedure has been exhausted and that the matter is now closed.

APPENDIX A: The Annunciation Junior School Complaint Record Form (Stage 1 and Stage 2)

PART A - RECORD OF COMPLAINT

Complainant's Name:

Address:

Telephone:

Details of the Complaint:

Date Complaint Made:

Action Already Taken to Resolve the Matter:

Complainant's View of what might resolve the issue:

PART B - ACTION TAKEN IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

Complaint Investigated By:

Action (with dates):

Date of formal meeting with complainant: Outcome

of the Meeting:

ORDER OF PROCEEDINGS

• Welcome, introductions and explanation of proceedings by the Chair;

• The Complainant (or representative) is invited to explain the complaint;

• The Headteacher (or representative) may question the Complainant;

• The Panel may ask questions at any time;

• If there are any witnesses for the Complainant they are invited individually into the room to make their points, the Headteacher and the Panel may question them and then the witness is invited to leave;

• The Headteacher is invited to explain the school's actions;

• The Complainant and the Panel may ask questions;

• Any witnesses for the school are invited in and treated in the same way as the Complainant's witnesses;

• The Chair checks that all parties have asked all they need to, then the Complainant, followed by the Headteacher is invited to sum up;

• The Chair explains that the decision will be issued within 3 school days and all parties leave together;

• The Panel makes its decision (advised on law and procedure by member of Diocesan Education Service, if present.)