

The Priory School



Complaints Policy

Monitoring	Frame of engagement	Date
Member of Staff Responsible	MJB	November 2019
Consultation Parameters	SLT and CoLGB	November 2019
Governor Accountability	Local Governing Body	Approved by the LGB November 2019
Date of latest version		November 2019
Date for next review (and cycle)		November 2022 3 years
Uploaded to Website		

Statement of Intent

The Principal and the local governing body are fully committed to the sustained improvement of our school. Where concerns are raised by parents/carers, staff, students, the wider community, or simply through the continual and thorough self-evaluation process, we will investigate these matters thoroughly. We welcome feedback from parents/carers and will always try to resolve any concerns as quickly as possible.

This procedure is intended to allow a concern or complaint to be made relating to the school, or the services that it provides, in a formal manner; this enables the complainant to progress the level at which the complaint is made. It has been reviewed and agreed by the local governing body. Its existence does not automatically mean that the complainant will receive satisfaction according to the original reason for the complaint. Very frequently, a complaint will be addressed according whether the school's approach has been reasonable.

In considering any concern raised by a parent/carer/member of the local community, the school will use all reasonable options to find a solution – in some cases this may include seeking advice from professional associations, our legal advisers, the local authority, Ofsted, or the Education and Skills Funding Authority.

At any point in time, should the conduct of the complainant be judged as unacceptable, through vexatious conduct, or harassment, or where the parent pursues a complaint to an excessive level because they have not had a satisfactory outcome, then the school reserves the right to take action to prevent any further incidence of such conduct. It also reserves the right to close the complaint; see Appendix.

An anonymous concern or complaint will not be investigated under this procedure, unless there are exceptional circumstances. These would include concerns such as child protection issues or bullying allegations, where the school may either involve appropriate external agencies or else conduct its own internal review to test whether there is any corroborative evidence which might trigger a formal investigation.

1.0 Introduction

Records of any complaints made through this policy will be retained and reported to the local governing body.

Any concerns raised will be treated with a high degree of confidentiality and we ask the complainant does likewise. Any relevant parties will, however, be consulted to assist with any investigations being carried out.

2.0 Informal Stage

It is normally appropriate to communicate directly with the member of staff concerned. This may be by email, letter, by telephone or in person by appointment, requested via the school office. Many concerns can be resolved by simple clarification or the provision of information and it is anticipated that most complaints will be resolved by this informal stage. If the complainant is uncertain about whom to contact, please seek advice from the school office,

the Principal, or the Clerk to the local governing body. Where a parent wants to meet with a member of staff then that request should be made via the school office, in writing.

The request must include sufficient details to allow the school to decide whether a meeting is necessary, who should be asked to attend the meeting (and therefore to make any necessary preparations). Parents may request at this stage, but not insist, attendance of certain individuals from the school and therefore it will be the school to decide on the attendees. Equally, parents may request, but not insist, that they are accompanied. These individuals will be invited on the understanding that they are supporting the complainant, not joining in with their complaint. i.e. their role at the meeting is a passive one, unless invited to comment.

It is hoped that the procedure will stop at this informal stage if the concern has been explained satisfactorily, or a shared understanding has been reached of the issue being raised and actions, where appropriate, agreed.

3.0 Formal Stage

3.1 Stage One

If the complainant remain dissatisfied he/she should contact the relevant Head of House (for student welfare or matters relating to the House tutor) or Head of Department (for academic issues that relate to the teacher), setting out the details of the complaint, in writing, and making it clear that the complainant is invoking the Complaints Procedure. It is very important that a clear statement is included of the actions that the complainant would like the school to take to resolve the concern. The Head of House or Head of Department will respond to the complaint as soon as possible, usually within 5 school days, and may arrange a meeting to explain the outcome, or to discuss the matter further, if necessary and practical.

3.2 Stage Two

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of the complaint to the Head of House or Head of Department they may write to the Assistant Principal (House System) if the initial contact is about student welfare or the Deputy Principal Learning and Teaching for matters relating to learning and teaching. (The same written submission as for Stage 1 may be used, with additions following Stage 1 if the complainant is concerned with the manner by which it has been managed.) They will respond to the complaint as soon as possible, usually within 5 school days, and again may arrange a meeting to explain the outcome, or to discuss the matter further, if necessary and practical.

3.3 Stage Three

If the complainant is still dissatisfied, or if the complaint is of a very serious nature, the complaint should be addressed to The Principal. Complaints to the Principal must be made in writing, be accompanied by any appropriate documentation which also makes it clear that the complainant is invoking Stage Three of the Complaints Procedure. If this is the first approach to the school, the Principal reserves the right to pass the complaint to the relevant member of staff through the system of delegation of The Priory School (and within this, use Stages 1 or 2 above if and as appropriate), or to deal with it themselves. In any case, The

Principal will acknowledge the complaint as soon as possible and will explain how it will be investigated and by whom. At this stage it may be recommended to have a meeting with a representative of the local governing body, to ascertain if there is a way forward to finding a solution.

Investigations may involve other senior staff. Complaints will normally be investigated within 20 school days. When the investigation is complete, the Principal will write to the complainant to explain the outcome of the investigation or may invite them to a meeting to discuss the matter further.

3.4 Stage Four

If the complainant is not satisfied with the manner in which the process has been followed or it is felt that the reasons given for the decision were erroneous, or the matter refers to the Principal, then the complainant may request that the local governing body reviews the process followed by the school, or receives representation from the complainant. Again, the complaint should be in writing, be accompanied by any appropriate documentation and include a statement specifying any perceived failures to follow the procedure. It must make clear that the complainant is invoking Stage Four of the Complaints Procedure. This must reach the Clerk to the local governing body within 10 working days of the Principal's decision and response to Stage 3 (this time schedule does not apply if the complaint is about the Principal).

The Chair and Vice Chair of the local governing body may invite the complainant to a meeting to clarify concerns and to explore the possibility of a resolution. If this invitation is accepted the complainant may be accompanied by a friend, to assist in explaining the nature of the concern(s). Should this not lead to an acceptable and agreed solution, arrangements will be made for the matter to be presented to local governors formally. In any case, the complainant should learn in writing, usually within 10 school days of the school receiving the formal complaint, of how the school intends to proceed. This notification should include an indication of the anticipated timescale.

4.0 Local Governors Complaints Panel

Any review of the process followed, or the reasons given for the decision by the school will be conducted by a panel of 3 people; 2 local governors from the Priory School and one panel member who is independent of the management and running of The Priory School. This will usually take place within 20 school days of receipt of the request.

Having received details of the complaint in writing, the Clerk to local governing body will seek similar written responses from the school, where this is necessary.

A meeting of the panel will take place, usually within 20 school days, to consider the matter.

4.1 Process

The complainant (who may be accompanied by a friend if they wish) and representative(s) from the school (who may also be accompanied by workplace colleagues or representatives from their professional associations) may be invited to attend this meeting in order to clarify

the matter. As the panel meeting is intended to be investigatory, rather than adversarial, the persons giving evidence or making representations to the panel will normally attend separately.

When the panel has collected sufficient information, it will deliberate and then inform the complainant, the Principal and the local governing body (through either a separate note or the next local governing body meeting, depending on the nature of the complaint) of the outcome, in writing.

Consideration of the complaint by the local governing body and the school, save for any actions that are agreed, will terminate at this point.

Further Action: The decision of the local governing body is final but if the complainant remains dissatisfied, they have the right to register the complaint to the Education and Skills Funding Agency, or Ofsted, or the Local Authority (Shropshire Council): -

Department for Education/Education and Skills Funding Agency.
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD
www.gov.uk/complain-about-school/state-schools

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD
0300 123 4666
www.gov.uk/complain-about-school/state-schools

Shropshire Council (Children's Services)
Abbey Foregate
Shirehall
Shrewsbury
SY2 6ND
0345 678 9000

However, the responsibility for dealing with general complaints lies solely with the school. The procedures of the ESFA and other agencies are expected to reflect existing legislation and ensure that any complaint received by them, which does not fall to them by statute to resolve, will be redirected to the school immediately and that the complainant be informed accordingly.

Appendix: Dealing with Vexatious or Persistent Complaints/Harassment,

1.0 Introduction

The Principal and local governing body of The Priory School are fully committed to the sustained improvement of our school. Where concerns are raised by parents/carers, staff, students, the wider community, or simply through the continual and thorough self-evaluation process, we will investigate these matters thoroughly. We welcome feedback from parents/carers and will always try to resolve any concerns as quickly as possible. There is a procedure for parents to use if they wish to make a formal complaint.

However, in all matters relating to the school, as per the home-school agreement and the expectations we have of our community, parents are expected to conduct themselves with the same high standards the governing body expects of its staff and students.

The local governing body will therefore not tolerate any form of physical or verbal aggression against members of the school community, in any form, whether by telephone, letter, email or in face-to-face conversation. Whilst we recognise that some complaints may relate to serious and distressing incidents, we will not accept any form of threatening or harassing behaviour towards any members of staff, students, local governors or other parents. This is because the school values good relationships and wishes them to be built in civil and reasonable manner.

2.1 Parents/Carers/Members of the Community Expectations of the School

Parents/carers/members of the community who raise either formal complaints or informal concerns with the school can expect the school to:

- regularly communicate to parents/carers in writing in terms of:
 - how and when problems can be raised with school
 - the existence of the school's Complaints Policy
 - the existence of this policy (should it be needed);
- respond within a reasonable time;
- be available for consultation within reasonable time limits bearing in mind the needs of the students within the school and the nature of the complaint;
- respond with courtesy and respect;
- attempt to resolve problems using reasonable means in line with the Complaints Policy;
- keep complainants informed of progress towards the resolution of the issues raised.

2.2 The School's Expectations of Parents/Carers/Members of the Community

The school expects parents/carers/members of the community who wish to raise problems with the school to:

- treat all school staff with courtesy and respect;
- when reacting to certain matters, be mindful of approaching Reception staff calmly
- respect the needs and well-being of students and staff in the school;
- avoid any use, or threatened use, of violence to people or property;

- avoid any aggression or verbal abuse;
- avoid any litigious threats;
- recognise the time constraints under which members of staff in schools work and allow the school a reasonable time to respond;
- (in the case of a complainant) follow the school's Complaints Procedure;
- attend appointments to discuss the complaint when requested;
- not make complaints in public or via a social networking site such as Facebook or Twitter.

2.3 Definitions (If any of the below are judged to have been the case, see Paragraph 2.4)

2.3.1 Vexatious means: - where the parent raises their voice, uses threatening (or equally inappropriate) language, or is aggressive. This is not restricted to face-to-face conversation; the scope refers to e mails, letters, phone calls, or through third party contact (e.g. social media).

2.3.2 Persistent means: -

- actions which are prolific or repetitious;
- repeatedly pursuing a complaint where the outcome is not satisfactory to the complainant but has been investigated thoroughly – refer to Complaints policy
- an insistence upon pursuing complaints in an unreasonable manner;
- only dealing with a specific member of staff on all occasions irrespective of the issue and the level of delegation in school to deal with such matters;

2.3.3 Harassment means actions which:

- appear to be targeted over a significant period of time on one or more members of school staff and/or
- cause ongoing distress to the individual member of school staff and/or
- have a significant adverse effect on the whole/parts of the school community including individuals;
- are pursued in a manner which can be perceived as intimidation and oppressive by the recipient.

2.4 The School's Action in the Case of Persistent or Vexatious Complaints or Harassment:

If a member of the school community feels that a parent/carer has not observed the expectations above (2.2), they will report this, in writing, to The Principal. The Senior Leadership Team (SLT) will discuss this further and consider action or referral to the Chair of the local governing body. If, through discussion between the SLT and Chair of the local governing body (or another local governor if the Chair is unavailable) the conduct of the complainant is judged to be vexatious, persistent or harassing behaviour, then action will be taken to restrict the parent's access to staff or the school site. This could take the form of

- a) Being refused access to any part of the school site
- b) Being refused access to parents' meetings or to meet a member of staff/members of staff
- c) Being refused email access to member(s) of staff
- d) Being refused a phone conversation unless in extreme, emergency situations.

- e) Being recorded to ensure a contemporary record is made of phone conversations
- f) Only being permitted to speak to staff in the company of a senior member of staff

It could be that the parent(s) is(are) not only removed from the site by the police, but also prosecuted under Anti-Harassment legislation.

Legitimate new complaints will always be considered, even if the person making them is (or has been) subject to this Policy (and/or Appendix). The school nevertheless also reserves the right not to respond to communications from individuals subject to this policy if it is agreed that the complainant's behaviour will be inappropriate.