



COMPLAINTS POLICY

Mount St Mary's Catholic High School Complaints Policy

Adopted by Mount St Marys' Governing Body on 26 February 2023

Signed

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Joe R...', is written over a horizontal line.

Chair of Governors

Review date: 26 February 2026

This policy has been written in accordance with The Education Act 2002: Section 29.

Mount St Mary's (MSM) values good home/school relations and consequently does everything reasonably possible to establish and maintain them. This includes seeking to resolve any concerns or complaints promptly, and to the satisfaction of all parties concerned.

For MSM to continue to be a success it needs to evolve and develop as do its policies. All members of the MSM community have a role to play in this so we invite and welcome feedback on what parents feel MSM does well, or not so well, as a school. MSM always carefully considers all feedback, whether positive or negative, and review our policies and practices accordingly.

MSM treats all concerns and complaints seriously and courteously and will advise parents and others of the school's procedures for dealing with their concerns. In return, MSM expects parents and other complainants to behave respectfully towards all members of the school community; in particular, any disagreement with the school should not be expressed inappropriately or in front of students.

All school staff and Governors are advised on where to locate a copy of this and all MSM policies and that they ensure they are familiar with the school's procedures for dealing with parental concerns and complaints, as this is an important part of school development. This and other policies are available on the MSM website for anyone to look at and download, hard copies are available on request.

All MSM policies and procedures are reviewed regularly and updated as necessary.

Whilst MSM will seek to resolve concerns and complaints to the satisfaction of all parties, it may not be possible to achieve this in every case. MSM will, therefore, reserve its right to use the option to close a complaint before all the stages of the school's procedures have been exhausted if this appears to be appropriate, however the complainant will still retain the right to appeal this decision at Formal Stage 3 and with the Department for Education (DfE) - see later.

The government advocates resolution of parental concerns and complaints at school level wherever possible, in the interests of maintaining good home/school relations.

Whilst MSM Governing Body has overall responsibility for the school and for ensuring that all students receive an appropriate and high standard of education at all times, it is the Headteacher that is responsible for making decisions on a daily basis about the school's internal management and organisation. With this in mind, all complaints should initially be directed to the school via the complaints coordinator and not the MSM Governing Body. The Local Authority cannot investigate school matters on behalf of parents, nor can it review how MSM has dealt with a complaint. If, at the end of the process, the complainant is still dissatisfied with the manner in which the complaint was dealt with, be it perceived as unreasonable action or not following published procedures, they are advised they can write to the Secretary of State for Education whose address can be found at the end of this document.

MSM respects the views and opinions of any complainant, will always take complaints seriously and will always conduct detailed investigations. However, MSM reserves the right to refuse to consider complaints that:

- Are malicious
- Use obscenities, racist or homophobic language
- Contain personally offensive remarks about members of MSM staff
- Are repeatedly submitted with only minor differences after the complaint has been deemed by MSM as fully addressed
- Have been fully answered in previous correspondence.

Informal complaints

Rapid resolution of issues raised or complaints made is very important for all parties involved. MSM would hope that the vast majority of all issues raised can be resolved informally at the first point of contact, which should usually be the student's Form Tutor or Student Support Worker (SSW) for the student's year group. If the neither of these are unable to resolve the issue immediately, they would then seek guidance from the Year Leader who may investigate further before advising the SSW prior to contacting the complainant, contact the complainant directly or have a relevant member of staff contact the complainant directly. Who contacts the complainant would depend upon the nature of the complaint. Depending upon the severity and nature of the complaint, the complainant may be invited into MSM for a meeting to discuss the complaint with the aim of a mutually acceptable resolution. Contact would be made within 3 school days of the informal complaint having been made and received by MSM.

Formal Complaints

Where the complaint is directed towards a member of staff, and the informal approach has been unsuccessful or unsatisfactory, a formal approach can be taken. To ensure the most effective, most consistent and most efficient way of resolving a formal complaint, it is essential that all parties involved follow the procedure as laid out below:

Stage One

- Download the complaints form from the MSM website or request a hard copy from school
- Complete the complaints form in as much detail as possible and send to the MSM Complaints Coordinator. The Complaints Coordinator will then assess the complaint and decide who would be most appropriate to initially deal with it. Appropriate staff would be someone with no involvement in the particular issue, is happy to be involved and who, ideally, would have experience in being involved in the complaints process
- MSM guarantees that the person assigned to deal with the complaint will act impartially, if this could not be guaranteed this process would not work
- MSM guarantees that the complainant will be contacted within 3 school days of the complaint being received.

Stage Two

Where the complainant was dissatisfied with the Stage One process and resolution was not achieved, the complaint will then be formally heard by Headteacher, who will most likely already have been made aware of the complaint. The Headteacher's influence will have already shaped how complaints are handled at MSM. It may also be the case that the complainant was dissatisfied with how Stage One of the process was conducted and would like the Headteacher to consider this also. The Headteacher may delegate another member of staff to collate all of the information for him to consider before making a decision on the outcome. The Headteacher will write to the complainant within 15 school days of him receiving the complaint to inform the complainant of the outcome of his investigations and what actions will be taken, if any.

In the event of the complaint being made about the Headteacher, the complaint will be referred to the Chair of Governors but the Stage One process will proceed in the same way as laid out above.

Stage Three – complaint heard by a MSM Governing Body Complaints Appeal Panel.

In the event of the complainant being dissatisfied with both stages one and two, they can write to the Chair of Governors detailing their complaint and their dissatisfaction with how the complaint was dealt with in stages one and two. The Chair may then nominate a governor to lead the Stage Three Complaints Procedure.

A Governing Body Complaints Appeal Panel will be convened within 20 school days of receiving the written complaint and consideration of the complaint is the final school based

stage of the complaints procedure. The panel will comprise of 3 to 5 appropriate governing body members that have been nominated to serve on the panel by the governing body, and no members of the panel will have any knowledge of the complaint until the panel sits and the information is presented to them. This is to ensure impartiality and lack of prejudice.

Remit of the Complaints Appeal Panel

The panel can:

- 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;
- Consider the manner in which a complaint about how any decision was addressed and request that the decision be reviewed;
- Recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not recur.

The panel cannot:

- Overturn the decision;
- Expect the Headteacher to provide details about any confidential discussions;
- Expect the Headteacher to alter a decision following a panel requested review;
- Make any policy changes.

There are several points which any governor sitting on a complaints panel needs to remember:

- a. It is important that the appeal hearing is independent and impartial and that it is seen to be so. No governor may sit on the panel if they have had a prior involvement in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it. In deciding the make-up of the panel, governors need to try and ensure that it is a cross-section of the categories of governor and sensitive to the issues of race, gender and religious affiliation.
- b. The aim of the hearing, which needs to be held in private, will always be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant. However, it has to be recognised that the complainant might not be satisfied with the outcome if the hearing does not find in their favour. It may only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations which will satisfy the complainant that his or her complaint has been taken seriously.
- c. An effective panel will acknowledge that many complainants feel nervous and inhibited in a formal setting. Parents often feel emotional when discussing an issue that affects their child. The panel chair will ensure that the proceedings are as welcoming as possible. The layout of the room will set the tone and care is needed to ensure the setting is informal and not adversarial.
- d. Extra care needs to be taken when the complainant is a child. Careful consideration of the atmosphere and proceedings will ensure that the child does not feel intimidated. The panel needs to be aware of the views of the child and give them equal consideration to those of adults. Where the child's parent is the complainant, it would be helpful to give the parent the opportunity to say which parts of the hearing, if any, the child needs to attend.
- e. The governors sitting on the panel need to be aware of the complaints procedure.

Notes about the format of a Panel Hearing

- All reasonable efforts are made to ensure that the hearing is as informal as possible so as to make all those involved feel as at ease as possible.
- Witnesses are only required to attend for the part of the hearing in which they give their evidence.
- After introductions, the complainant is invited to explain their complaint, and be followed by their witnesses.

- The Headteacher may question both the complainant and the witnesses after each has spoken.
- The Headteacher is then invited to explain the school's actions and be followed by the school's witnesses.
- The complainant may question both the Headteacher and the witnesses after each has spoken.
- The panel may ask questions at any point.
- The complainant is then invited to sum up their complaint.
- The Headteacher is then invited to sum up the school's actions and response to the complaint.
- Both parties leave together while the panel decides on the issues.
- The chair explains that both parties will hear from the panel within a set time scale.

The chair of the panel will ensure that the complainant is notified in writing of the panel's decision and, or response within 3 school days.

The Secretary of State for Education
Department for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
20 Great Smith Street
London SW1 P 3BT

Complaint form

Please complete and return to Mrs A Stubbs (complaints co-ordinator) who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

Your name:

Student's name:

Your relationship to the student:

Address:

Postcode:

Day time telephone number:

Evening telephone number:

Please give details of your complaint.

What action, if any, have you already taken to try and resolve your complaint.
(Who did you speak to and what was the response)?

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

Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details.

Signature:

Date:

Official use

Date acknowledgement sent:

By who:

Complaint referred to:

Date: