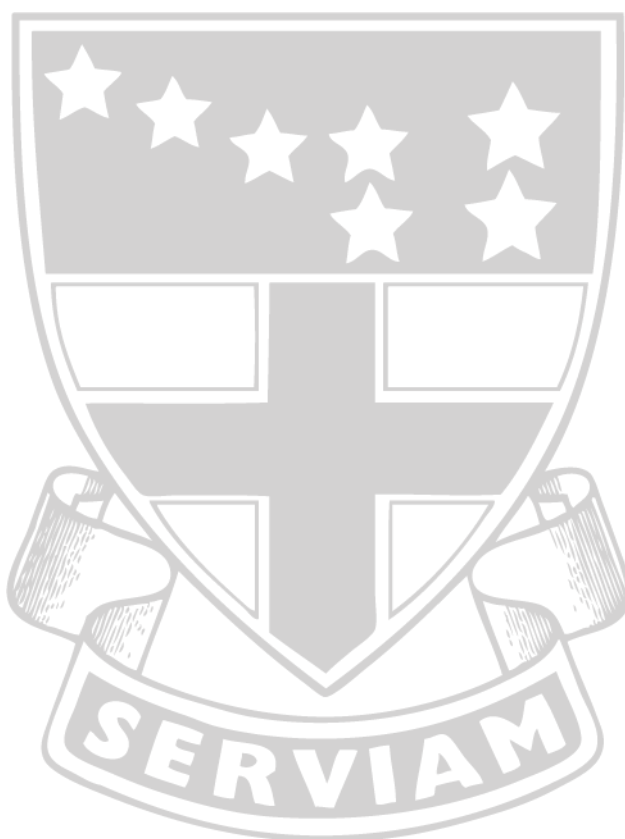




## **COMPLAINTS POLICY**



**Date of Review:** June 2026

**Date of Next Review:** June 2027

## Definitions and aims

### Definitions

Department for Education (DfE) guidance explains 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 or statement of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action”

In most cases, a concern can be resolved through informal means. A complaint will follow formal procedures.

### Informal Concerns

The vast majority of any issues relating to the school are dealt with by this process. The school takes informal concerns seriously and makes every effort to resolve the matter quickly. It may be the case that the provision, or clarification of information will resolve the issue.

- The complainant should raise the concern as soon as possible.
- The concern should be addressed to the relevant member of school staff:

For concerns relating to students: The Head of Year

For concerns of any other nature: Mrs Siaw (Deputy Headteacher)

For serious concerns: refer to the complaints section of this policy

- The school will acknowledge informal concerns within 5 school days, which will confirm how the school intends to proceed, including an indication of the anticipated timescale.
- The informal stage will involve a meeting between the complainant and the school if deemed necessary by the school.
- If the school deems that the concern cannot be resolved informally, it will be escalated to a formal complaint.

This complaints policy is not limited to parents or carers of children that are registered at the school. Any person, including members of the public, may make a reasonable complaint to St Angela's Ursuline School about any provision of facilities or services that are provided.

### The Formal Complaints Procedure

#### Aims

Our school aims to meet its statutory obligations when responding to complaints from parents/carers of students at the school and others.

When responding to complaints, we aim to:

- Be impartial and non-adversarial
- Facilitate a full and fair investigation, where necessary
- Address all the points at issue and provide an effective and prompt response

- Respect confidentiality, (only when deemed absolutely necessary by the school)
- Treat complainants with respect and courtesy
- Make sure that decisions we make are lawful, rational, reasonable, fair and proportionate, in line with the principles of administrative law
- In complaints with an extended time period, keep complainants informed of the progress of their complaint
- Consider how the complaint can feed into school improvement evaluation processes

We always try to resolve concerns by informal means wherever possible. Where this is not possible, the formal complaints 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 make sure we publicise the existence of this policy and make it available on the school website.

Throughout the process, we will be sensitive to the needs of all parties involved, and make any reasonable adjustments needed to accommodate individuals.

### **The aims of this policy are underpinned by the St Angela's School Mission Statement**

#### **Principles for investigation**

When investigating a complaint, we will try to clarify:

- What has happened and why
- Who was involved
- What reasonable resolutions to the complaint are sought

#### **Timescales**

- The complainant must raise the complaint within 3 months of the incident. If the complaint is about a series of related incidents, they must raise the complaint within 3 months of the last incident.
- We will consider exceptions to this timeframe 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, however, this would be on a case-by-case basis.
- When complaints are made outside of term time, or on the last day of any half term or term, they will be deemed to have been received on the first school day after that holiday period.

If at any point we cannot meet the timescales we have set out in this policy, we will:

- Set new time limits
- Send the complainant details of the new deadline and explain the delay

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 policy or result in the procedure being suspended until those public bodies have completed their investigations.

If a complainant commences legal action against St Angela's Ursuline in relation to their complaint, then the school will suspend the complaints procedure in relation to their complaint until those legal proceedings have concluded.

## **The Stages of Complaints**

The Formal Complaints Procedure has two school-based stages:

- Stage 1: complaint heard by the Headteacher
- Stage 2: complaint heard by Governor's Complaints Committee

### **Who to address your complaint to:**

- For Stage 1 pastoral related complaints - Mrs Siaw (Deputy Headteacher)
- For Stage 1 academic related complaints - Ms Fontaine (Asst Headteacher - Lead T&L)

Stage 1 complaints are then investigated and reported to the Headteacher

- Governors Complaints Committee - for complaints at Stage 2 (addressed to the Clerk of the Governors)

### **Making a complaint**

The complainant should provide details such as relevant dates, times, and the names of witnesses of events, alongside copies of any relevant documents, and what they feel would resolve the complaint.

If complainants need assistance raising a formal complaint, they can contact the school office.

## **Withdrawing a complaint**

A complainant may withdraw their complaint at any point, but must do so in writing (by email or letter).

## **Roles and Responsibilities**

### *The complainant*

The complainant will get a more effective and timely response to their complaint if they:

- Follow these procedures
- Explain the complaint in full as early as possible
- Co-operate with the school throughout the process, and respond to deadlines and communication (for example, requests for information or meetings) promptly
- Ask for assistance as needed
- Treat all those involved with respect
- Respect confidentiality undertaking a 'need to know' approach to complaints, involving multiple agencies, delays the school's ability to address the complainant
- Do not approach individual governors about the complaint
- Do not publish details about the complaint on social media

### *The Investigator*

This is an individual appointed to investigate the complaint and establish the facts. They will:

- Interview all relevant parties, making clear notes and keeping these securely pending any appeal
- Carefully consider any relevant records, information or evidence
- Provide a comprehensive, open, transparent and fair consideration of the complaint
- Conduct interviews with an open mind and be prepared to persist in their questioning
- Be mindful of the timescales to respond
- Prepare comprehensive feedback to the Headteacher, which includes the facts and potential solutions through:
  - Ensure sensitive and thorough interviewing of the complainant to establish what has happened and who has been involved
  - Interview staff and children/young people (where necessary) and other people relevant to the complaint
  - Consider any records or other relevant information
  - Keep the complainant up to date at each formal stage in the procedure
  - Make sure the process runs smoothly by liaising with relevant staff and agencies

Be aware of issues relating to:

- Sharing third-party information
- Additional support needed by complainants; for example, interpretation support
- Complaints from a child or young person should be confirmed with their responsible adult
- Keeping records for future consideration

## Legislation and Guidance

This document meets the requirements of Section 29 of the [Education Act 2002](#), which states that schools must have and make available a procedure to deal with all complaints relating to the school and to any lettings that the school provides.

It is also based on [guidance for schools on complaints procedures](#) from the DfE, including the model procedures for complaints and for managing serial and unreasonable complaints.

## Scope

This policy does **not** cover complaints procedures relating to:

- Admissions
- Statutory assessments of special educational needs (SEN)
- Safeguarding matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation
- Suspension and permanent exclusion
- Whistleblowing
- Staff grievances
- Staff discipline and conduct outcomes
- School re-organisation proposals
- Collective worship

| Exceptions                                                                                       | Who to contact                                                                                                                                               |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Matters likely to require a Child Protection</li> </ul> | Complaints about child protection matters are handled under our child protection and safeguarding policy and in accordance with relevant statutory guidance. |

| Exceptions                                                                                                                                        | Who to contact                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Investigation                                                                                                                                     | 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).                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Exclusion of children from school*</li> </ul>                                                              | <p>Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at: <a href="http://www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions">www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions</a>.</p> <p>*complaints about the application of the behaviour policy can be made through the school's complaints procedure. Covered here and on our school website</p>                                                             |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Whistleblowing</li> </ul>                                                                                  | <p>We have an internal whistleblowing procedure for all our employees, including temporary staff and contractors.</p> <p>The Secretary of State for Education is the prescribed person for matters relating to education for whistleblowers in education who do not want to raise matters directly with their employer. Referrals can be made at: <a href="http://www.education.gov.uk/contactus">www.education.gov.uk/contactus</a>.</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Staff grievances</li> </ul>                                                                                | Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the school's internal grievance procedures.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Staff conduct</li> </ul>                                                                                   | <p>Complaints about staff will be dealt with under the school's internal disciplinary procedures, if appropriate.</p> <p>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.</p>                                                                                                          |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Complaints about services provided by other providers who may use school premises or facilities</li> </ul> | Providers should have their own complaints procedure to deal with complaints about service. Please contact them directly.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>National Curriculum - content</li> </ul>                                                                   | <p>Please contact the Department for Education at: <a href="http://www.education.gov.uk/contactus">www.education.gov.uk/contactus</a></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |

### How to escalate a complaint

If the complainant wishes to proceed to the next stage of the procedure, they should inform the clerk to the governing board via the school office within 10 school days of receipt of their original

complaint. Requests received outside of this timeframe will be considered in exceptional circumstances.

Complainants can do this:

- By letter or email to the Clerk of the Governors

The complainant should provide details of how they feel the previous stage of the procedure has not addressed their complaint sufficiently and what they feel would resolve the complaint.

The clerk will acknowledge receipt of the request within 5 school days.

## **Stage 2 - Complaints heard by The Governor's Complaints Committee**

### *Clerk to Governors*

The clerk will as appropriate:

- Be the contact point for the complainant and the complaints panel for Stage 2, including circulating the relevant papers and evidence before the complaints panel hearing
- 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 Regulation (GDPR)
- Arrange the complaint's panel hearing
- In the event that the Governor's Committee deems it necessary to hold a meeting beyond the written representations of all parties the Clerk will: set the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that the dates are convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible
- Collate any written material relevant to the complaint including Stage 1 paperwork where this occurred
- Notify all parties of the committee's decision including informing the complainant of their rights

*Where an in person meeting is deemed necessary the Panel Chair will 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 a professional manner, is not adversarial, and that, everyone is treated with respect and courtesy
- Complainants who may not be used to speaking at such a meeting are put at ease.
- 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 UK 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 a declared level of interest in the outcome of the proceedings or any involvement in an earlier stage of the procedure
- The meeting is minuted

### **Complaints against the Headteacher, a governor or the governing board**

As set out within this policy, complaints can be raised:

- By letter or email

### **Complaints against the Headteacher**

Complaints that involve or are about the Headteacher should be addressed to the clerk to the governing board via the school office, marked private and confidential.

- A suitably skilled member of the governing board (usually the Chair of Governors) will then carry out the steps of Stage 1.
- The complainant can escalate the complaint. The complaint will then be considered by the Governor's Complaints Committee.

### **Complaints against the Chair of Governors**

These complaints should be addressed to the clerk to the governing body via the school office, marked private and confidential.

- A suitably skilled independent investigator will report to the Director of Education of the Diocese of Brentwood.

### **Complaints against the any individual governors**

- A suitably skilled independent investigator will then carry out the steps of Stage 1 reporting to the Chair of Governors.
- The complainant can escalate the complaint. The complaint will then be considered by a Governor's Complaints Committee.

### **Complaints against the entire governing board or majority of the governing board or complaints involving both the Chair and Vice Chair**

These complaints should be addressed to the clerk to the governing board via the school office, marked as private and confidential.

- The clerk will then determine the most appropriate course of action, which will depend on the nature of the complaint.
- This may involve sourcing an independent investigator to complete Stage 1 and a committee of independent governors to complete Stage 2.
- The complainant can escalate the complaint.

### **Referring complaints on completion of the school's procedure**

If the complainant believes the school did not handle their complaint in accordance with this complaints procedure, or acted unlawfully or unreasonably, they can contact the DfE.

The DfE will not normally re-investigate the matter of the complaint or overturn any decisions made by St Angela's Ursuline School, the DfE will consider whether the school adhered to:

- Its complaints policy

- Any other relevant statutory policies
- Education legislation

The DfE will intervene where a school has:

- Failed to act in line with its duties under education legislation and any statutory policies connected with the complaint
- Acted (or is proposing to act) unreasonably when exercising its functions

The DfE can be contacted after the complainant has completed Stage 2.

If the 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:

[www.gov.uk/complain-about-school](http://www.gov.uk/complain-about-school) We will include this information in the outcome letter to complainants.

## **Unreasonable and Persistent Complaints**

### **Unreasonable complaints**

Most complaints raised will be valid and therefore we will treat them seriously. However, a complaint may become unreasonable if the person:

- Refuses to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds of 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 that they expect to be considered 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 concluding 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 DfE
- Seeks an unrealistic outcome
- Makes excessive demands on school time by frequent, lengthy and complicated contact with staff regarding the complaint in person (either in writing, by email, phone or text) while the complaint is being dealt with
- Uses threats to intimidate
- Uses abusive, offensive or discriminatory language or violence
- Knowingly provides falsified information
- Publishes unacceptable information on social media or other public forums

**Please note:** the above list is not intended to be exhaustive and is for guidance purposes only. It is at the discretion of the school what is deemed to be unreasonable.

Complainants should try to limit their communication with the school while the complaint is being progressed. It is not helpful if repeated correspondence is sent (either in writing, by email, phone or text) as it could delay the outcome being reached.

### **Steps the school will take**

We will take every reasonable step to address the complainant's comments and give them a clear statement of our position and their options. We will maintain our role as an objective arbiter throughout the process, including when we meet with individuals. We will follow our complaints procedure as normal (as outlined above), wherever possible.

Whenever possible, the Headteacher or Chair of Governors will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying an 'unreasonable' marking. If the behaviour continues, the Headteacher will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable, refer them to this policy and remind them to act in accordance with it. For complainants who excessively contact the school causing a significant level of disruption, we may:

- Give the complainant a single point of contact via an email address
- Limit the number of times the complainant can make contact, such as a fixed number per term
- Ask the complainant to engage a third party to act on their behalf, such as [Citizens Advice](#)
- Put any other strategy in place as necessary

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 school premises and ensuring appropriate measures of support are provided to staff where they are the subject of aggression and/or violence.

### **Serial/Persistent Complaints**

If the complainant contacts the school again on the same issue, the correspondence may then be viewed as 'serial' or 'persistent'. We may stop responding to the complainant when the following conditions are met:

We have taken every reasonable step to address the complainant's concerns

- The complainant has been given a clear statement of our position and their options
- The complainant contacts the school repeatedly, making substantially the same points each time

The case to stop responding is stronger if:

- The complainant's communications are often or always abusive or aggressive
- The complainant makes insulting personal comments about or threats towards staff
- We have reason to believe the individual is contacting the school with the intention of causing disruption or inconvenience

The schools will not refuse to accept further correspondence or complaints from an individual they have had repeat or excessive contact with. The application of a 'serial or persistent' marking will be against the subject or complaint itself rather than the complainant.

Where we decide to stop responding, we will inform the individual that we intend to do so. We will also explain that we will consider any new complaints they make provided the concerns raised are materially different to those raised previously and/or are unconnected to the previous concern.

### **Duplicate Complaints**

If we have resolved a complaint under this procedure and receive a duplicate complaint on the same subject from a partner, family member or other individual, we will assess whether there are aspects that we had not previously considered, or any new information we need to take into account.

If we are satisfied that there are no new aspects, we will:

- Tell the new complainant that we have already investigated and responded to this issue, and that the local process is complete
- Direct them to the DfE if they are dissatisfied with our original handling of the complaint
- If a duplicate complaint is raised which, in the view of the school, warrants further consideration, the procedure (as appropriate) will be repeated.

### **Complaint Campaigns**

Where the school receives a large volume of complaints about the same topic or subject, especially if these come from complainants unconnected with the school, we may respond to these complaints by:

- Publishing a single response on the school website
- Sending a template response to all of the complainants

If complainants are not satisfied with our handling of the situation, they can contact the DfE.

### **AI Generated Complaints**

Whilst the school understands that complainants may use AI to help support the presentation of their complaint, the use of AI to create unreasonable complaints of disproportionate length can result in severe addition to the time of response for a complaint.

### **Monitoring Arrangements**

The governing board will monitor the effectiveness of the complaints procedure in making sure that complaints are handled properly. The governing board will track the number and nature of complaints, and review underlying issues.

- The complaints records are logged and managed by the Data Manager.
- This policy will be reviewed by the Headteacher every year.
- At each review, the policy will be approved by the governing board.

**Monitoring**

This Policy is monitored by the Headteacher and Senior Leadership Team of St Angela's Ursuline School. Specialist staff related to the policy area also monitor its use and suitability making recommendations for development when the need arises.

**Evaluation**

The evaluation of the effectiveness of this policy is undertaken by the Governing Body of St Angela's Ursuline School as set at Governing Body meetings within a framework of annual/biannual compliance checks

