



POULTON ST CHAD'S

CHURCH OF ENGLAND PRIMARY SCHOOL

LOVE LEARNING. LOVE GOD. LOVE ONE ANOTHER.

COMPLAINTS POLICY & PROCEDURE

No	Date	Author	Approver	Changes	Review
1	March 2023	Matt Blackburn	Resources Committee	New policy	March 2025
2	September 2025	Matt Blackburn	Resources Committee	Added our Mission Statement. Added link to Best Practice Guidance from Gov.uk	September 2026
3	June 2026	Nicole Bitsakaki	Full Governing Board 30.6.26	Changes made to bring in line with DFE guidance	September 2028 or sooner if there are changes to DFE guidance/ relevant legislation

"Let all that you do be done in love." (1 Corinthians 16:14)

Our Mission Statement

At Poulton St Chad's, we believe every child is a gift from God, blessed with their own gifts and talents. It is our mission to ensure children are safe, happy and can thrive. We aim to give our children a love for learning through our engaging curriculum and enrichment opportunities; a love for God within our distinctly Christian setting and a love for one another through our nurturing environment and inclusive relationships.

Every day we are guided by our biblical root: "Let all that you do be done in love." (1 Corinthians 16:14) and by our school motto: **LOVE LEARNING. LOVE GOD. LOVE ONE ANOTHER.**

Introduction

At Poulton St Chad's School we work in partnership with parents/carers and the wider community. Therefore, any adult can make a complaint. We try our best for all our children and families and we like to know when things are going well. However, we also ask parents/carers to tell us about their concerns or complaints as soon as possible. It is much easier for us to sort out a recent problem than something that happened some time ago.

Our Commitment to You

- We will deal with your concern or complaint in a professional manner.
- It will be investigated thoroughly, fairly and as quickly as possible.
- We will keep you up to date with the process and timescales.
- We will apologise if the school has made a mistake.
- We will tell you what we are going to do to put things right.

Concern or Complaint?

A **concern**: an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought.

A **complaint**: an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action.

How to Raise a Concern or Make a Complaint

A concern or complaint can be made in person, in writing or by telephone. Complainants should not approach individual governors to raise concerns or complaints. They have no authority to act on an individual basis and it may also prevent them from considering complaints at Stage 2 of the procedure. In accordance with The Equality Act 2010, we will consider making reasonable adjustments if required.

Concerns should be raised with the class teacher or if more appropriate with the Key Stage Leader. If you feel the issue remains unresolved, the next step is to make a formal complaint. Please remember that the beginning or end of the school day can be a very busy time- staff may ask to see you/to ring you at a more convenient time.

Complaints that involve or are against school staff (except the Headteacher) should be made in the first instance, to the Headteacher. In the first instance, the Headteacher will seek to resolve your complaint informally, this may include a face-to-face meeting to discuss your dissatisfaction of actions taken, or lack of action. If possible, the Headteacher may be able to respond to your complaint with a written explanation.

If you feel your informal complaint is unable to be resolved at this stage, we will ask you to complete a complaints form (Appendix A) and Stage 1 of the procedures will commence from the date that the form is received. If we have not heard from you within 5 school days of this date, it will be assumed that you do not want to take things any further and the complaint will be closed due to non-engagement. Where your concern or complaint is considered sufficiently complex or serious, we may choose to investigate formally from the outset.

Complaints about the Headteacher should be addressed to The Chair of Governors, using the complaints form, 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 addressed to The Clerk to the Governing Body via the school office using the Complaints form (Appendix A). Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Unreasonable Complaints

Should the complainant contact us again with the same issue, this could be seen as unreasonable and we may choose not to respond. We will seek advice from Governor Services and our Legal Adviser, prior to taking the decision not to progress the complaint further. We will not stop responding to a complaint because a complainant is viewed as difficult to deal with or asks complex questions. We may refuse to respond to the subject matter but not the correspondent.

Anonymous Complaints

We will not normally investigate anonymous complaints. However, the Headteacher or Chair of Governors, if appropriate, will determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation.

Social Media

Whilst we accept that complainants have a right to share their opinion, we would like to remind you of our Unacceptable Parent Behaviour Policy. We ask you to follow the policy and not to share complaints or dissatisfaction on social media, this including identifying, naming and/or harassing school staff and governors.

Time Scales

You 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 only consider complaints made outside of this time frame if exceptional circumstances apply.

All references in this document to 'days' should be taken to mean school days and therefore will not include weekends, school holidays or INSET days. We will consider complaints made outside of term time to have been received on the first school day after the holiday period.

Scope of this Complaints Procedure

This procedure covers all complaints about any provision of community facilities or services by Poulton St Chad's School, other than complaints that are dealt with under other statutory procedures, including those listed below.

If other agencies 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 the other agencies have completed their investigations.

If a complainant commences legal action against Poulton St Chad's 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.

Exceptions	Who to contact
School Admissions Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs School re-organisation proposals	Concerns about admissions, statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs, or school re-organisation proposals should be raised with Lancashire County Council.

Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation	Complaints about child protection matters are handled under our child protection and safeguarding 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). Email: MASHeducation@lancashire.gov.uk
Exclusion of children from school*	Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at: www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions. <i>*complaints about the application of the behaviour policy can be made through the school's complaints procedure.</i>
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 whistleblowers 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 LA or the Department for Education (see link above), depending on the substance of your complaint.
Staff grievances	Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the school's internal grievance procedures.
Staff conduct	Complaints about staff will be dealt with under the school's internal disciplinary procedures, 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 about services provided by other providers who may use school premises or facilities	Providers should have their own complaints procedure to deal with complaints about service. Please contact them direct. Any complaints regarding Friends of St Chad's School, should be directed to the Chair of Friends of St Chad's School.
National Curriculum - content	Please contact the Department for Education at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus
Unauthorised absence fines	Please contact Lancashire County Council.
Freedom of Information Data Protection (GDPR)	Data Protection Officer at the school and if this remains unresolved the Information Commission Office
Functions of the County Council	Complaints and Appeals Team Legal and Democratic Services County Hall Preston PR1 8XJ Tel: 0300 1236701

Resolving Complaints

At each stage in the procedure, we would like 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 / procedures in light of the complaint
- An apology.

It is not the responsibility of Poulton St Chad's School to provide the complainant with a response from external agencies, this includes the Local Authority and Diocese of Blackburn. If contacted directly by the complainant, the Local Authority (LA) and Diocese of Blackburn will explain to the complainant:

- That schools are self-managing and are responsible for administering procedures that deal with complaints made against them.
- The appropriate procedures for their complaint and refer them to the Headteacher, Chair of Governors or Clerk, as appropriate.
- The school may seek advice and support from the appropriate Local Authority Officer or the School's Adviser (and/or the Diocesan/Church Authority).

The Procedure:

If the complaint is not able to be resolved informally the next step is Stage 1 as detailed below:

Stage 1- Formal Complaint Against Staff

Formal complaints must be made in writing to the Headteacher using the Complaint Form (Appendix A). The Headteacher will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing within **5 school days** and will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, what remains unresolved and what outcome the complainant would like to see. The Headteacher may delegate the investigation to another member of the school's senior leadership team but the final decision will be the Headteacher's.

The investigation may involve:

- An interview with those involved, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish.
- A meeting with the complainant.
- A written record of any meetings/interviews

At the conclusion of the investigation, the Headteacher will provide a formal written response within **25 school days** from the date the complaint was received. If the Headteacher is unable to meet this deadline, they will provide the complainant with an update and revised response date.

The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide an explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions school will take to resolve the complaint. The Headteacher will advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 1.

Stage 1- Formal Complaint Against Headteacher or Governor

If the complaint is about the Headteacher or a member of the governing body, a suitably skilled governor will be appointed to complete all the actions at Stage 1 and will provide a formal written response within **25 school days**.

If the complaint is about the Chair and Vice Chair jointly or about the majority of/ entire governing body, Stage 1 will be considered by an independent investigator appointed by the governing body or the Diocese of Blackburn. At the conclusion of their investigation, the independent investigator will provide a formal written response within **25 school days**. If no further correspondence is received from the complainant within 5 school days of receiving the written outcome of the investigation, the complaint will be closed.

Stage 2 – Formal Complaint to Complaint’s Committee

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. This means raising the complaint with members of the governing body’s Complaints Committee, which will be formed of three impartial governors. This is the final stage of the complaint’s procedure and there is no further scope to investigate and act at school level.

A request to escalate to Stage 2 must be made to the Clerk, via the school office, within 5 school days of receipt of the Stage 1 response. The Clerk will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing **within 5 school days**. Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.

The committee will normally invite parties to a meeting to discuss the complaint, as this is usually the most effective way to achieve resolution and ensure all parties have the opportunity to present their case. However, the committee may decide to handle the complaint through written representations if:

- The complainant requests this due to exceptional circumstances (e.g., disability, severe anxiety, work commitments that make attendance impossible)
- There are safeguarding concerns that make a face-to-face meeting inappropriate
- The complaint is of a nature that can be adequately addressed through written submissions
- All parties agree that written representations are preferable

In making this decision, the committee will be sensitive to the complainant's needs and will ensure that the chosen method does not disadvantage either party. If the Complaints Committee feel the most appropriate way to investigate the complaint is by written representations, they will investigate and provide a written outcome within **35 school days**.

If the Complaints Committee feel the most appropriate way to investigate the complaint is by face-to-face meetings, the following will apply:

The Clerk will write to the complainant to inform them of the date of the meeting. They will aim to convene a meeting within 25 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 based on 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 amongst themselves who will act as the Chair of the Complaints Committee. If there are fewer than three governors from Poulton St Chad’s School available, the Clerk will source any additional, independent governors through another local school or through their LA’s

Governor Services team, to make up the committee. Alternatively, an entirely independent committee may be convened to hear the complaint at Stage 2.

If the complainant is invited to attend the meeting, they may bring someone along to provide support. This can be a relative or friend. Generally, we do not encourage either party to bring legal representatives to the committee 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.

Note: Complaints about staff conduct will not generally be handled under this complaint's procedure. Complainants will be advised that any staff conduct complaints will be considered under staff disciplinary procedures, if appropriate, but outcomes will not be shared with them.

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

At least 15 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 10 school days before the meeting. Anything submitted within 9 days of the meeting, may not be considered.

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 to be included. New complaints must be dealt with by starting the procedure again.

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 Poulton St Chad's School with an explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within 10 school days. The letter to the complainant will include details of how to contact the Department for Education if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled by Poulton St Chad's School.

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 response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide an explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it in writing, **within 10 school days**. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions Poulton St Chad's School will take to resolve the complaint. The response will also advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied.

Complain to The DfE (Department for Education)

If you have followed all the steps in our school's complaints procedure and believe your complaint was not dealt with correctly, you can complain to the Department for Education. The DfE will not normally reinvestigate complaints or overturn any decisions made by Poulton St Chad's School. They will consider whether we have adhered to education legislation and any statutory policies connected with the complaint.

The DfE cannot deal with complaints about:

- fines for taking holidays in term time (sometimes known as a 'fixed penalty notice')
- lack of compensation or apologies from the school
- the behaviour of school staff

You can complain directly to the DfE, if one of the following applies:

- a child is not getting an education
- a child has been exposed to harm
- the school is stopping you from following its complaints procedure

The complainant can refer their complaint to the Department for Education online at: <https://www.gov.uk/complain-to-dfe> by telephone on: 0370 000 2288 or by writing to:

Department for Education
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD.

Complain to Ofsted

If you've complained to school and the problem has not been resolved, you can complain to Ofsted. This does not mean that Ofsted will then inspect school. They will record your complaint and may use the information you've provided to help them decide what areas to focus their next inspection on. Ofsted considers complaints about things that affect the **whole school** rather than individuals.

Ofsted cannot:

- resolve issues between you and school
- ask school to respond directly to your complaint or take action on it
- change the outcome of a complaint
- change the school's complaints process because of a complaint

VEXACIOUS, SERIAL AND UNREASONABLE COMPLAINTS

Managing Vexatious, Serial and Unreasonable Complaints

At Poulton St Chad's School we are 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 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.

Vexatious Complaints

A vexatious complaint is one that is pursued, regardless of its merits, solely to harass, annoy or cause distress to the school or staff members. This includes complaints that are:

- Obsessive
- Persistent
- Harassing
- Prolific
- Defamatory
- Repetitive or duplicative

The school reserves the right to refuse to investigate complaints that are deemed vexatious.

Unreasonable Behaviour

Poulton St Chad's 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. A complainant may be deemed to be acting unreasonably if they:

- Refuse to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds or outcomes sought, despite offers of assistance
- Refuse to co-operate with the complaints investigation process while still wishing their complaint to be resolved
- Refuse to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of the complaints procedure
- Insist on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the complaints procedure or with good practice
- Introduce trivial or irrelevant information which they expect to be considered and commented on, or raise large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions, and insist they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales
- Make unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues and seek to have them replaced
- Change the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds or after a conclusion is reached
- Repeatedly make the same complaint (despite previous investigations or responses concluding that the complaint is groundless or has been addressed)
- Refuse to accept information provided without a justified reason

- Seek an unrealistic outcome and/or state the intention of persisting until that outcome is reached
- Make 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
- Use threats to intimidate
- Use abusive, offensive or discriminatory language or violence
- Knowingly provide falsified information or other information the complainant knows is incorrect- this includes persuading others to do so
- Publish unacceptable information on social media or other public forums
- Electronically record meetings and conversations without consent
- Challenging a historical decision/action which cannot be change

Duplicate and Repeat Complaints

If a complainant raises an issue that has already been examined through the complaints procedure and school has:

- Conducted a thorough investigation
- Provided a detailed response
- Offered reasonable resolution
- Exhausted all stages of the complaints procedure, including Stage 2

School will inform the complainant in writing that:

- The complaint has been concluded and the matter is now closed
- The school has acted reasonably in its response to the original complaint
- Continuing to raise the same issue without significant new evidence will be treated as a serial or vexatious complaint
- No further responses will be provided unless genuinely new and material evidence emerges that was not previously available

If the complainant continues to raise the same complaint after being informed that it has been concluded, the school may:

- Mark future correspondence relating to this matter as 'serial' or 'unreasonable'
- Cease responding to correspondence on this matter
- Inform the complainant that their behaviour is now being managed under the vexatious complaints procedure

Managing Unreasonable Complainant Behaviour

Informal Approach

Wherever possible, the Headteacher or Chair of Governors will discuss any concerns about a complainant's behaviour informally before applying an 'unreasonable' or 'vexatious' marking. The aim will be to:

- Explain which aspects of their behaviour are causing concern
- Request that they modify their behaviour
- Explain the consequences if the behaviour continues

Formal Warning

If the unreasonable behaviour continues after informal discussion, the Headteacher or Chair of Governors will:

- Write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable
- Identify the specific behaviours of concern
- Request that they change their behaviour
- Explain what action the school may take if the behaviour does not change
- Provide a reasonable timeframe for improvement (normally 10 school days)

Implementation of Restrictions

If the unreasonable behaviour persists, the school may implement one or more of the following restrictions:

Communication Management:

- Limit the complainant to one medium of contact (e.g. email only)
- Require all contact to be through a single designated member of staff (Single Point of Contact)
- Restrict the number of contacts permitted (e.g. one email per week)
- Require contact to be made at specific times only
- Request that the complainant summarises their concerns in writing before any meeting

Any restrictions will be:

- Proportionate to the nature and frequency of the complainant's contact
- Documented in a communication plan
- Time-limited and reviewed after six months
- Applied in a way that does not disadvantage the complainant in pursuing their complaint through the appropriate stages

Barring from School Premises

In exceptional circumstances, where a complainant's behaviour poses a risk to the welfare of staff or pupils, or significantly disrupts the operation of the school, the Headteacher or Chair of Governors may:

1. Issue a warning that access to school premises may be restricted if the behaviour continues
2. Temporarily bar the complainant from school premises, which will:
 - Be confirmed in writing
 - Specify the duration of the bar (subject to review)
 - Explain the reasons for the decision
 - Outline alternative arrangements for necessary communication (e.g., regarding their child's education)
 - Advise of the right to appeal to the governing body within 10 school days
3. Report to the police if behaviour is threatening, abusive or violent

Where a parent/carer is barred from school premises, the school will ensure that:

- Alternative arrangements are in place for communication about their child's education and welfare
- The child is not disadvantaged by their parent's/carer's behaviour
- The decision is reviewed regularly (at least termly)

Right to Appeal

A complainant who has been deemed vexatious or unreasonable, or who has had restrictions placed on their contact with the school, may appeal the decision by writing to:

- The Chair of Governors (if the decision was made by the headteacher)

- The Clerk to the Governing Body (if the decision was made by the Chair of Governors)

The appeal must be submitted within 10 school days of receiving notification of the decision and should explain why the complainant believes the decision is unfair or disproportionate.

The appeal will be considered by a panel of three governors who have had no prior involvement in the matter. The panel will review:

- The evidence of unreasonable behaviour
- The steps taken to address it informally
- The proportionality of any restrictions imposed
- Any mitigating circumstances

The panel will respond to the appeal within 20 school days and their decision will be final.

Reporting Serious Incidents

In response to any serious incident of harassment, aggression or violence, the school will:

- Immediately inform the police
- Communicate actions taken in writing to the complainant
- Consider whether a risk assessment is required for future interactions
- Report the incident to the local authority

Review of Restrictions

Any restrictions or bars imposed will be reviewed:

- After six months for communication restrictions
- Termly for bars from premises
- Immediately if circumstances change significantly

The complainant will be notified in writing of the outcome of any review.

Appendix A Complaint Form



Complainant's Name:	
Child's name & class (if relevant): Relationship to child:	
Complainant's Contact Details:	
Details of your complaint, including dates:	
What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?	
Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details.	
Complainant's Signature:	Date:
OFFICE USE ONLY- Please file in Complaints Log	
Name:	Date received:
Role:	Date acknowledged:
What Stage is this complaint:	
Complaint Concluded on:	