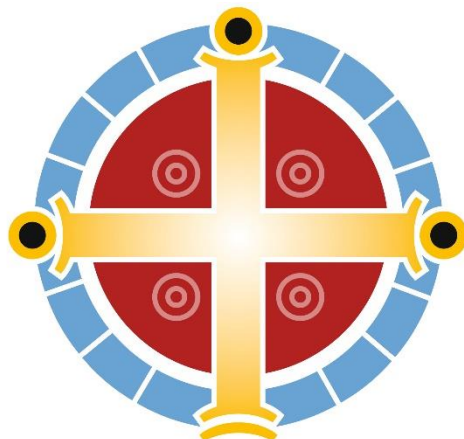


# Complaints Policy and Procedure



## St Benedict CATHOLIC ACADEMY TRUST

<b>Authors:</b>	CEO
<b>Date:</b>	March 2025
<b>Last Review Date:</b>	September 2024
<b>Next Review Date:</b>	April 2027

**ST BENEDICT CATHOLIC ACADEMY TRUST**  
**COMPLAINTS POLICY AND PROCEDURE**

The Complaint Policy and Procedure and the Complaints Form are available at the link below:

<https://www.sbcacat.co.uk/key-documents/item/33/complaints>

Our mission is inspired by our Patron St Benedict, to live, learn, pray and celebrate together. Our community of Catholic schools are committed to ensuring that each child realises their God given gifts. Our strong sense of community promotes Gospel values which inspire students to make a positive contribution to society. We provide the best possible opportunities for every child's education, with an overarching mission focused on delivering a strong Catholic education, firmly rooted in the belief that Christ should be at the core of all our endeavour.

## Contents

1. Aims .....	3
2. Legislation and Guidance .....	3
3. Definitions and Scope .....	4
3.1 Definitions – the difference between a concern and a complaint .....	4
3.2 How to raise a concern or complaint .....	4
4. Roles and Responsibilities .....	6
5. Principles for Investigation .....	6
Stage 1 – Informal Complaints .....	7
Stage 2 – Formal complaints .....	8
Stage 3 – Panel Hearing .....	11
5.1 Complaints about our Fulfilment of Early Years Requirements .....	14
5.2 Complaints escalated to/about the Trust, CEO or Trustee .....	14
6. Persistent Complaints.....	18
6.1 Unreasonably persistent complaints.....	18
6.2 Duplicate complaints .....	19
6.3 Complaint campaigns.....	19
7. Record Keeping .....	19
8. Learning Lessons .....	19
9. Monitoring Arrangements.....	20
10. Links with other policies.....	20
11. St Benedict Catholic Academy Trust - Complaint Form.....	20

## 1. Aims

The St Benedict Catholic Trust aims to meet its statutory obligations when responding to complaints from parents of pupils at our schools and others.

When responding to complaints, the Trust aims to:

- Be impartial and non-adversarial
- Facilitate a full and fair investigation by an independent person or panel, where necessary
- Address all the points at issue and provide an effective and prompt response
- Respect complainants' desire for confidentiality wherever possible
- Treat complainants with respect and courtesy
- Make sure that any decisions we make are lawful, rational, reasonable, fair, and proportionate, in line with the principles of administrative law
- Keep complainants informed of the progress of the complaints process
- Consider how the complaint can feed into school improvement evaluation processes.

The Trust will try to resolve concerns or complaints by informal means wherever possible. Where this is not possible, formal procedures will be followed. The Trust will aim to give the complainant the opportunity to complete the complaints procedure in full. To support this, the Trust will ensure that it publicises the existence of this Policy and make it available on the Trust and school website.

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

## 2. Legislation and Guidance

This document meets the requirements set out in part 7 of the schedule to [the Education \(Independent School Standards\) Regulations 2014](#), which states that the Trust must have and make available a written procedure to deal with complaints from parents of pupils at Trust schools.

It is also based on guidance published by the Department for Education (DfE) on complaints and refers to good practice guidance on setting up complaints procedures for academies <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/setting-up-an-academies-complaints-procedure>

In addition, where applicable, it addresses duties set out in the [Early Years Foundation Stage statutory framework](#) with regards to dealing with complaints about the Trust's fulfilment of Early Years Foundation Stage requirements.

### Who can make a complaint?

The complaints procedure 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 complaint about any provision of facilities or services that we provide. Unless complaints are dealt with under separate statutory procedures (such as appeals relating to exclusions or admissions, we will use this complaints procedure.

### 3. Definitions and Scope

#### 3.1 Definitions – the difference between a concern and a complaint

The DfE guidance explains the difference between a concern and a complaint:

- A **concern** is defined as “an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought”.
- A **complaint** is defined as “an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action”.
- References to **Headteacher** are taken also to refer to **Principal**.

It is in everyone’s interests that concerns and complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. Many issues can be resolved informally, without the need to use the formal stages of the Complaints Policy. We take concerns very seriously and will make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.

If you have difficulty discussing a concern with a particular member of staff, we will respect your views. In these cases, the Headteacher or Head of Governance will refer you to another staff member. Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels unable to deal with a concern, the Headteacher or Head of Governance will refer you to another staff member. The member of staff may be more senior but does not have to be. The ability to consider the concern objectively and impartially is more important.

The Trust intends to resolve complaints informally where possible, at the earliest possible stage. We understand, however, that there may be occasions when complainants would like to raise their concerns formally. This Policy outlines the procedure relating to handling such complaints.

#### 3.2 How to raise a concern or complaint

A concern or complaint can be made in person, in writing or by telephone. They may also be made by a third party acting on behalf of the complainant, as long as they have appropriate consent to do so.

Complaints against school staff (except the Headteacher) should be made in the first instance to the Headteacher via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Complaints that involve or are about the Headteacher should be addressed to the Chair of the Local Board, via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Complaints about the Chair of the Local Board, any individual governor, or the whole governing body should be addressed to the SBCAT Head of Governance via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Complaints about the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) or a Director of the Trust, should be addressed to the Chair of Trustees, via the Trust office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

A template form is included at the end of this procedure and is available as a Word document at the link below:

<https://www.sbcats.co.uk/key-documents/item/33/complaints>

If you require help in completing the form, please contact the school office. You can also ask a third-party organisation, for example. Citizens Advice, to help you.

If you are unsure who to submit your complaint to or how to submit it please email it to the Head of

Governance at [s.dossetter@sbcats.co.uk](mailto:s.dossetter@sbcats.co.uk)

In accordance with equality law, we will consider making reasonable adjustments if required, to enable complainants to access and complete this Complaints Policy. For instance, providing information in alternative formats, assisting complainants in raising a formal complaint, or holding meetings in accessible locations.

### Anonymous complaints

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

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

### Complaints received outside of term time

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 complaint procedure

This procedure covers all complaints about any provision of community facilities or services by the Trust, other than complaints that are dealt with under other statutory procedures, including those listed below:

Exceptions	Who to contact
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Admissions to schools</li></ul>	Concerns about admissions are handled through the appeals process or via the local authority.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation</li></ul>	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). Details of these for your local authority can be found online.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Exclusion of children from school*</li></ul>	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> .  <i>*complaints about the application of the behaviour policy can be made through the school's complaints procedure.</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Whistleblowing</li></ul>	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: <a href="http://www.education.gov.uk/contactus">www.education.gov.uk/contactus</a> .

	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.
<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>	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.

This Policy also does **not** cover complaints procedures relating to:

- Statutory assessments of special educational needs (SEN)
- Safeguarding matters
- Withdrawal from the curriculum (parents and carers can withdraw their child from any aspect of religious education, including the daily act of collective worship. They do not have to explain why).

Please see our separate policies for procedures relating to these types of complaint.

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).

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 procedure or result in the procedure being suspended until those public bodies have completed their investigations. If this happens, we will inform you of a new proposed timescale.

If a complainant commences legal action against the Trust in relation to their complaint, we will consider whether to suspend the complaints procedures until those legal proceedings have concluded.

Complaints about services provided by other providers who use school premises or facilities should be directed to the provider concerned.

## 4. Roles and Responsibilities

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

- Follow these procedures
- Co-operate with the Trust or the school throughout the process, and respond to deadlines and communication promptly
- Ask for assistance as needed
- Treat all those involved with respect
- Do not publish details about the complaint on social media.

## 5. Principles for Investigation

When investigating a complaint, we will try to clarify:

- What has happened

- Who was involved
- What the complainant feels would put things right.

### **Resolving complaints**

At each stage in the procedure the Trust wants 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 taken, 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 in light of the complaint
- An apology

### **Withdrawal of a complaint**

If a complainant wants to withdraw their complaint, we will ask them to confirm this in writing.

### **Stage 1 – Informal Complaints**

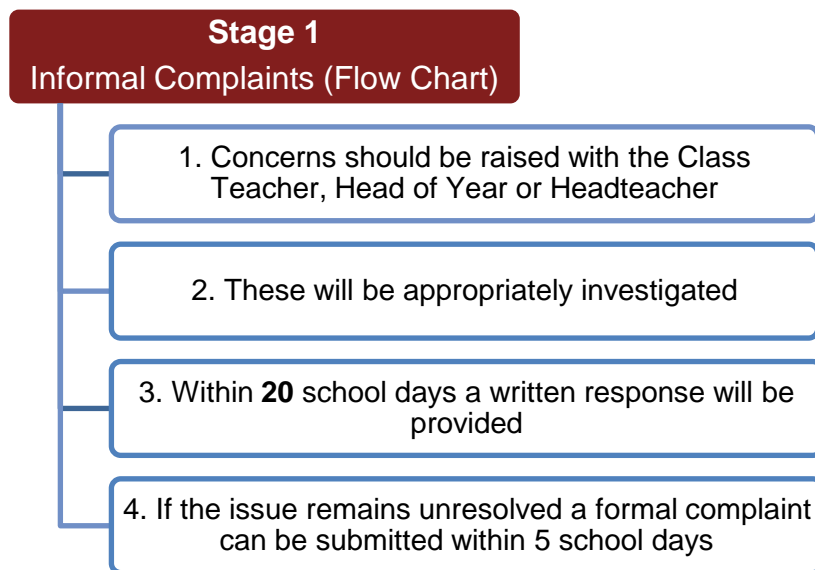
It is hoped that most concerns can be expressed and resolved on an informal basis.

Concerns should be raised with either the Class Teacher, Head of Year or Headteacher. Complainants should not approach individual governors to raise concerns or complaints. They have no power to act on an individual basis and it may also prevent them from considering complaints at Stage 3 of the procedure.

At the conclusion of their investigation, the appropriate person investigating the complaint will provide an informal written response within **20** school days of the receipt of the complaint.

If the issue remains unresolved, the next step is to make a formal complaint.

A formal complaint must be submitted within **5** school days of receipt of the informal stage response.



## Stage 2 – Formal complaints

Formal complaints must be made to the Headteacher (unless they are about the Headteacher), via the school office. This may be done in person or in writing (preferably on the Complaint Form).

The Headteacher will record the date the complaint is received and will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within **5** school days.

Within this response, the Headteacher will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, ask what remains unresolved and what outcome the complainant would like to see. The Headteacher can consider whether a face-to-face meeting is the most appropriate way of doing this.

The Headteacher may delegate the investigation to another member of the school's senior leadership team, but not the decision to be taken.

During the investigation, the Headteacher (or investigator) will:

- If necessary, interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish
- Keep a written record of any meetings/interviews in relation to their investigation

At the conclusion of their investigation, the Headteacher will provide a formal written response within **20** school days of the date of receipt of the complaint.

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 a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions the Trust or 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 2.

If the complaint is about the Headteacher, or a member of the governing body (including the Chair or Vice-Chair), a suitably skilled governor will be appointed to complete all the actions at Stage 2.

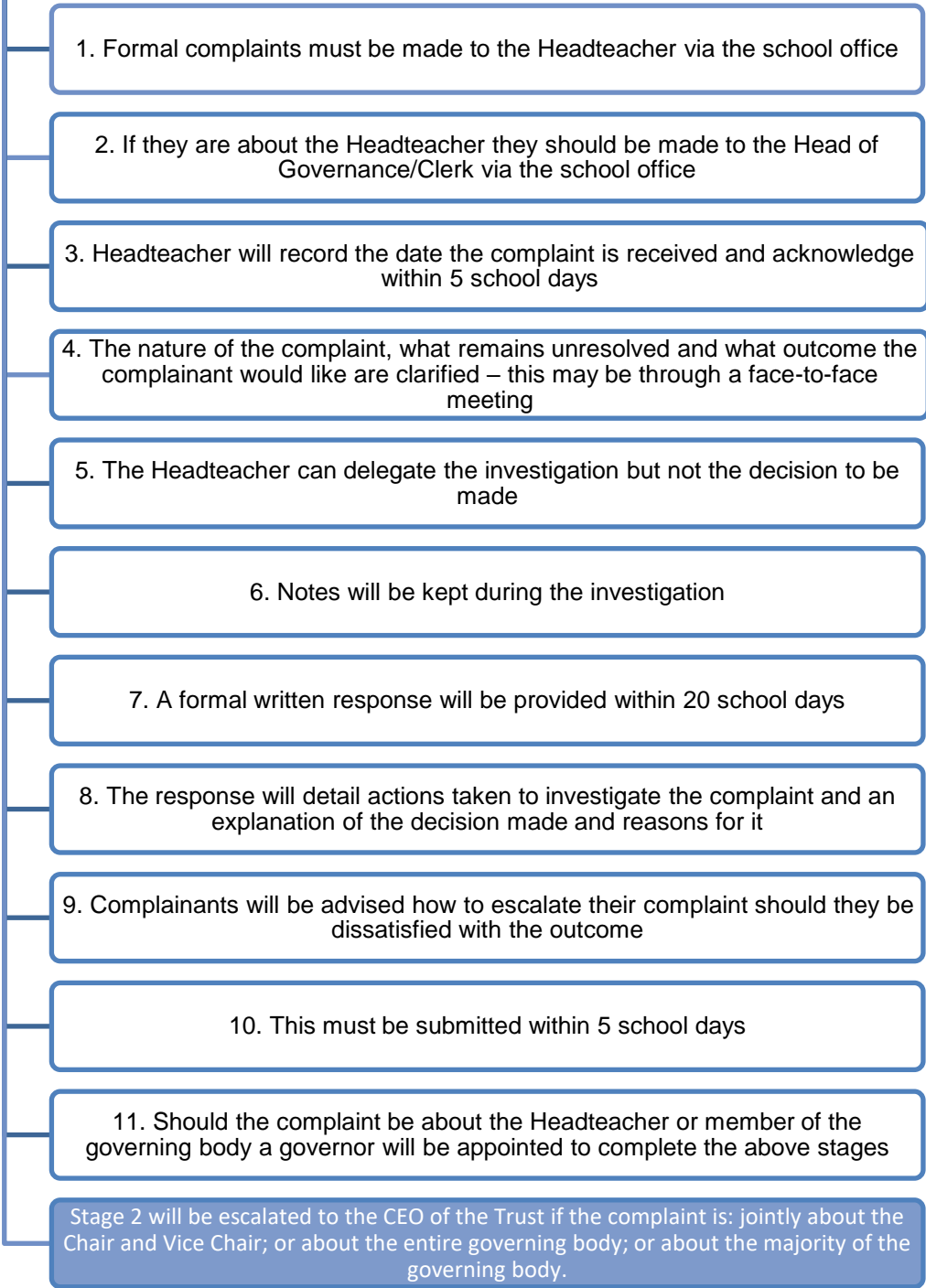
Complaints about the Headteacher or a member of the governing body must be made to the Head of Governance/Clerk to the Governing Body (Clerk) via the school office or to [s.dossetter@sbcats.co.uk](mailto:s.dossetter@sbcats.co.uk)

## **Stage 2 – Trust**

Stage 2 will be escalated to the CEO of the Trust 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**  
**Formal Complaints (Flow Chart)**



### Stage 3 – Panel Hearing

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome at Stage 2 and wishes to take the matter further, they can escalate the complaint to Stage 3 – a panel hearing consisting of at least three people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint with one panel member who is independent of the running and management of the school. This can be a governor from another school within the Trust. This is the final stage of the complaint's procedure.

A request to escalate to Stage 3 must be made to the Head of Governance/Clerk, via the school office, within **5** school days of receipt of the Stage 2 response.

The Head of Governance/Clerk will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within **5** school days.

Requests received outside of this timeframe will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.

The Head of Governance/Clerk, will write to the complainant to inform them of the date of the meeting. They will aim to convene a meeting within **20** school days of receipt of the Stage 2 request. If this is not possible, the Head of Governance/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 Head of Governance/Clerk, will decide when to hold the meeting. It will then proceed in the complainant's absence on the basis of written submissions from all parties.

A complainant may bring someone along to the panel meeting to provide support. This can be a relative or friend. Generally, the DfE do not encourage either party to bring legal representatives to the panel meeting. However, there may be occasions when legal representation is appropriate.

It is noted that 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 Human Resources procedures, if appropriate, but outcomes of these will not be shared with complainants.

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

At least **7** school days before the meeting, the Head of Governance/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 **5** school days before the meeting

Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least **3** school days before the date of the meeting. The panel will not normally accept, as evidence, recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.

The panel will 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 from Stage 1 of the procedure.

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 panel 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 panel 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 Panel will provide the complainant and the school with a full explanation of their decision and the reasons for it, in writing, within **10** school days.

The letter to the complainant will contain details of how to contact the DFE, or the appropriate body, if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled by the school.

The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions the school will take to resolve the complaint.

The panel will ensure that those findings and recommendations are sent by electronic mail or otherwise given to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about. Furthermore, they will be available for inspection on the school premises by the proprietor and the Headteacher.

A written record will be kept of all complaints, and of whether they are resolved at the preliminary stage or proceed to a panel hearing, along with what actions have been taken, regardless of the decision.

All correspondence statements and records relating to individuals' complaints will be kept confidential, except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the 2008 Act requests access to them.

### **Stage 3 - Trust Board**

It is anticipated that the majority of Stage 3 panels will take place at the local school level, however, the Stage 3 process will be heard by the Directors and an independent panel member if the complaint is:

- Jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair or
- The entire governing body or
- The majority of the governing body

**Stage 3**  
**Panel Hearing (Flow Chart)**

1. Request to escalate made to the Head of Governance/Clerk within 5 school days
  2. The Head of Governance/Clerk will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge within 5 school days
  3. Panel meeting to be convened within 20 school days (where possible)
  4. Panel to have 3 people, 1 of whom is independent
  5. Meeting details to be advised 7 school days before the meeting
  6. Papers to be submitted at least 5 school days before the meeting
  7. Written materials to be circulated at least 3 school days before the meeting
  8. Notes will be taken of the meeting
  9. A formal written response will be provided within 10 school days of the meeting
  10. The response will detail a full explanation of the decision and the reasons for it
  11. This is the final stage of the school complaints process
  12. The complainant can contact the DfE if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled
- Stage 3 will be heard by Directors and an independent panel member if the complaint is: jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair; or about the entire governing body; or about the majority of the governing body.

## 5.1 Complaints about our Fulfilment of Early Years Requirements

The Trust will investigate all written complaints relating to the Trust's fulfilment of the Early Years Foundation Stage requirements and notify the complainant of the outcome within 28 days of receiving the complaint.

The Trust will keep a record of the complaint (see section 13) and make this available to Ofsted on request.

Parents and carers can notify Ofsted if they believe that the Trust is not meeting Early Years Foundation Stage requirements, by calling 0300 123 4234 or 0300 123 4666, or by emailing [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk). An online contact form is also available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted#org-contacts>.

We will notify parents and carers if we become aware that the school is to be inspected by Ofsted. We will also supply a copy of the inspection report to parents and carers of children attending the setting on a regular basis.

## 5.2 Complaints escalated to/about the Trust, CEO or Trustee

If a complaint is escalated to St Benedict Catholic Academy Trust (SBCAT) 'the Trust' or if a complainant wishes to complain directly about the Trust, then the complaint should be sent to the CEO to be investigated. This should be sent to [office@sbcacat.co.uk](mailto:office@sbcacat.co.uk)

The CEO will write to the complainant acknowledging the complaint within **5** school days of the date that the written request was received. The acknowledgment will confirm that the complaint will now be investigated under Stage 1 or Stage 2 of this Complaints Policy and will confirm a date for providing a response to the complainant.

Following the investigation, the CEO will write to the complainant confirming the outcome within **20** school days of the date the letter was received. If this time limit cannot be met, the CEO will write to the complainant explaining the reason for the delay and providing a revised date.

If the complaint concerns the CEO or a Director, the complaint should be investigated by the Chair of the Trust Board. If a formal complaint is received about the Chair, the complaint will be referred to the Vice Chair for investigation.

Where the Chair of the Trust Board has investigated the complaint, they will write the letter or outcome to the complainant and provide a copy to the CEO.

If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of the previous stage, the complainant should write to the Head of Governance asking for the complaint to be heard before a Complaint Panel within **5** school days of receipt of the outcome letter.

The Head of Governance will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within **5** school days.

Requests received outside this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.

The Head of Governance will write to the complainant to inform them of the date of the meeting. They will aim to convene a meeting within **20** school days of the receipt of the Stage 2 request. If this is not possible, the Head of Governance will provide an anticipated date and keep the

complainant informed.

If the complainant rejects the offer of 3 proposed dates without good reason, the Head of Governance will decide when to hold the meeting. It will then proceed in the complainant's absence on the basis of written submissions from both parties.

The Complaint Panel will consist of three members. None of the three members of the Complaint Panel will have been involved in the incidents or events which led to the complaint, or have been involved in dealing with the complaint in the previous stages, or have any detailed prior knowledge of the complaint.

One of the Complaint Panel members will be independent of the running of the Academy Trust. This means that the independent Complaint Panel member will not be a Trustee or an employee of the Trust.

A complainant may bring someone along to the panel meeting to provide support. This can be a relative or friend. Generally, the DfE do not encourage either party to bring legal representatives to the panel meeting. However, there may be occasions when legal representation is appropriate.

For instance, if a Trust employee is called as a witness in a complaint meeting, they may wish to be supported by union and/or legal representation.

Complaints about staff conduct will not generally be handled under this Complaints Policy. 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 **7** school days before the meeting, the Head of Governance 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 panel at least **5** school days before the meeting.

Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least **3** school days before the date of the meeting. The panel will not normally accept, as evidence, recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.

The panel 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 from Stage 1 of the procedure.

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 for recording of all parties attending will be sought before meetings or conversations take place. Consent will be recorded in any minutes taken.

The panel will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented. The panel 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 panel 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 Panel will provide the complainant and St Benedict Catholic Academy Trust with a full 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 DFE if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled by St Benedict Catholic Academy Trust.

The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions St Benedict Catholic Academy Trust will take to resolve the complaint.

The panel will ensure that those findings and recommendations are sent by electronic mail or otherwise given to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about. Furthermore, they will be available for inspection on the school premises by the proprietor and the head teacher.

A written record will be kept of all complaints, and of whether they are resolved at the preliminary stage or proceed to a panel hearing, along with what actions have been taken, regardless of the decision.

All correspondence statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential, except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the 2008 Act requests access to them.

### **Independent Panel**

If the complaint is:

- Jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair or
- The entire Trust Board or
- The majority of the Trust Board

Stage 3 will be heard by a completely independent panel.

### **Next Steps**

If the complainant believes that the school or trust did not handle their complaint in accordance with the published complaints procedure or they acted unlawfully or unreasonably in the exercise of their duties under education law, they can contact the DFE after they have completed Stage 3.

The DFE will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by St Benedict Catholic Academy Trust. They will consider whether the school or trust have adhered to education legislation and any statutory policies connected with the complaint and whether they have followed [Part 7 of the Education \(Independent School Standards\) Regulations 2014](#).

The complainant can refer their complaint to the DFE online at: [www.education.gov.uk/contactus](http://www.education.gov.uk/contactus), by telephone on: 0370 000 2288 or by writing to:

Academy Complaints and Customer Insight Unit  
 Department for Education  
 Cheylesmore House  
 5 Quinton Road  
 Coventry  
 CV1 2WT

## Stage 4 Trust Complaints

1. Complaints escalated to the Trust to be sent to the CEO at office@sbcats.co.uk

2. The CEO will acknowledge the complaint within 5 school days

3. The CEO will confirm if this will be investigated under Stage 1 or Stage 2

4. An outcome will be provided within 20 school days

5. If the complaint is about the CEO or a Director the complaint should be investigated by the Chair of the Trust Board

6. If the complaint is about the Chair of the Trust Board it will be referred to the Vice Chair

7. If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome a request will be made to escalate via the Head of Governance within 5 school days of receipt of the outcome

8. The Head of Governance/Clerk will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge within 5 school days

9. Panel meeting to be convened within 20 school days (where possible)

10. Panel to have 3 people, 1 of whom is independent of the Trust

11. Meeting details to be advised 7 school days before the meeting

12. Papers to be submitted at least 5 school days before the meeting

13. Written materials to be circulated at least 3 school days before the meeting

14. Notes will be taken of the meeting

15. A formal written response will be provided within 10 school days of the meeting

16. The response will detail a full explanation of the decision and the reasons for it

17. This is the final stage of the Trust complaints process

18. The complainant can contact the DfE if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled

19. Should the complaint be about the Headteacher or member of the governing body a governor will be appointed to complete the above stages

Stage 3 will be heard by a completely independent panel if the complaint is: jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair; or about the entire Trust Board; or about the majority of the Trust Board.

## 6. Persistent Complaints

### 6.1 Unreasonably persistent complaints

Most complaints raised will be valid, and therefore the Trust and its schools will treat them seriously and in accordance with the Complaints Policy. However, a complaint may become unreasonable if the person:

- Has made the same complaint before, and it has already been considered under the Trust's Complaints Policy;
- Makes a complaint that is obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific, defamatory or repetitive;
- Knowingly provides false information;
- Insists on pursuing a complaint that is unfounded, or out of scope of the Complaints Policy;
- Pursues a valid complaint, but in an unreasonable manner e.g. refuses to articulate the complaint, refuses to co-operate with this Complaints Policy, or insists that the complaint is dealt with in ways that are incompatible with this procedure and the time frames it sets out;
- Changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation goes on;
- Makes a complaint designed to cause disruption, annoyance or excessive demands on school time;
- Seeks unrealistic outcomes, or a solution that lacks any serious purpose or value.

#### Steps that will be taken

The Trust and its schools will take every reasonable step to address the complainant's concerns 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 Policy as normal wherever possible.

If the complainant continues to contact the Trust in a disruptive way, we may put communications strategies in place. 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.

#### Stopping responding

The Trust or one of its schools may stop responding to the complainant when all of these factors are met:

- The Trust or the School believe we have taken all reasonable steps to help address their concerns
- The Trust or the School have provided a clear statement of our position and their options
- The complainant contacts us repeatedly, and the Trust or the School believe their intention is to cause disruption or inconvenience.

Where the Trust or the School stop responding, the Trust or the School will inform the individual of its intention to do so. The Trust or the School will also explain that any new complaints made will still be considered. In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, the Trust or the School will immediately inform the police and communicate our actions in writing. This may include barring an individual from our Trust/School site.

## 6.2 Duplicate complaints

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

If the Trust or the School are satisfied that there are no new aspects, it will:

- Tell the new complainant that the Trust or the School has already investigated and responded to this issue, and the local process is complete
- Direct them to the DFE if they are dissatisfied with our original handling of the complaint
- If there are new aspects, the Trust or the School will follow this procedure again.

## 6.3 Complaint campaigns

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

- Publishing a single response on the Trust/School website
- Sending a template response to all of the complainants.

If complainants are not satisfied with the response from the Trust or a School, or wish to pursue the complaint further, the normal procedures will apply.

## 7. Record Keeping

The Trust and its schools will record the progress of all complaints, including information about actions taken at all stages, the stage at which the complaint was resolved, and the final outcome. The records will also include copies of letters and emails, and notes relating to meetings and phone calls. This material will be treated as confidential, held at the School or Trust depending on the level of the complaint, and will be viewed only by those involved in investigating the complaint or on the review panel. This is except where the Secretary of State (or someone acting on their behalf) or the complainant requests access to records of a complaint through a freedom of information (FOI) request or through a subject access request (SAR) under the terms of the Data Protection Act, or where the material must be made available during a school inspection.

Records of complaints will be kept securely, only for as long as necessary and in line with data protection law, our privacy notices and the Trust Records Management Policy.

The details of the complaint, including the names of individuals involved, will not be shared with the whole Local Governing Board/Trust Board in case a review panel needs to be organised at a later point.

Complainants also have the right to request an independent panel if they believe there is likely to be bias in the proceedings. The decision to approve this request is made to the Head of Governance, or Trust Board of Directors (depending on the level of the complaint), who will not unreasonably withhold consent.

## 8. Learning Lessons

The Local Governing Board/Trust Board of Directors will review any underlying issues raised by complaints with Senior Leaders, where appropriate, and respecting confidentiality, to determine

whether there are any improvements that the Trust or a school can make to its procedures or practice to help prevent similar events in the future.

## 9. Monitoring Arrangements

The Local Governing Board and the Trust Board of Directors will monitor the effectiveness of the complaints procedure in ensuring that complaints are handled properly including tracking the number and nature of complaints, and review underlying issues.

## 10. Links with other policies

Policies dealing with other forms of complaints include:

- Child protection and safeguarding policy and procedures
- Admissions policy
- Behaviour, suspensions and permanent exclusions policy
- Staff grievance procedures
- Staff disciplinary procedures
- SEN policy and information report
- Whistleblowing Policy
- Privacy notices.

## 11. St Benedict Catholic Academy Trust - Complaint Form

This form is used by all schools within the St Benedict Catholic Academy Trust.

Please complete and return to the correct person as detailed in the Complaints Policy who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken. If you are unclear who to send your form to please send it to: [s.dossetter@sbcacat.co.uk](mailto:s.dossetter@sbcacat.co.uk)

The full policy and form is available at the link:

<https://www.sbcacat.co.uk/key-documents/item/33/complaints>

<b>Your name:</b>
<b>School:</b> <i>(the name of the school you are raising a concern or complaint about)</i>
<b>Pupil's name (if relevant):</b>
<b>Your relationship to the pupil (if relevant):</b>
<b>Address:</b>
<b>Postcode:</b>

**Day time telephone number:**

**Evening telephone number:**

**Please give details of your complaint, including whether you have spoken to anybody at the school about it.**

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

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

**Signature:**

**Date:**

**Date:**