

# St. Michael's C of E Aided School



Back Lane, Aldbourne, Marlborough, Wiltshire SN8 2BP

Telephone: 01672 540434 Fax: 01672 541536

Email: [admin@stmichaelsaldbourne.co.uk](mailto:admin@stmichaelsaldbourne.co.uk)

Web: [www.stmichaelsaldbourne.co.uk](http://www.stmichaelsaldbourne.co.uk)

Policy: *Complaints*

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## Approach

At St. Michael's School we aim to deal with all worries and complaints in a positive and supportive manner. In most cases the class teacher is the first point of contact and we try to deal with all concerns quickly and effectively. If the parent / carer is not happy with the way the concern has been dealt with, the stages below offer clear guidance as to the action to be taken. The formal procedures (Stage 2 and beyond) will only need to be invoked when initial attempts to resolve the issue are unsuccessful and the person raising the concern remains dissatisfied and wishes to take the matter further.

### Stage 1 - Initial Contact with the School

Many concerns can be dealt with informally when they are first made known to the school. In most cases we would expect the class teacher to be the first point of contact. If the parent / carer wishes to meet with the class teacher we ask them to make an appointment to discuss the situation. This ensures that

We allocate sufficient time to listen carefully to your complaint  
Lessons can start on time and are uninterrupted.

An appointment should be made directly with the class teacher.

If for any reason the teacher is unable to meet with the parent, he / she will either  
arrange an alternative appointment

ask the head teacher or her representative to informally meet with the parent / carer

If the class teacher is the subject of the concern then an appointment should be made to discuss this informally with the head teacher. Please contact the school administrator to make this appointment.

If the head teacher is the subject of the concern then an appointment should be made to discuss this informally with the chair of governors.

Where the first approach is made to a governor ( by a parent /carer), the correct action would be to refer the complainant to the appropriate staff member and advise the parent /carer about the procedure and where they can get a copy of the procedure. It is important that the governors do not act unilaterally on an individual complaint, outside the formal procedure, or get involved in the



early stages in case they are needed to sit on a panel at a later stage of the procedure.

It is in everyone's interest that complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage and it is definitely preferable for concerns to be handled without the need for formal procedures. We believe in honest and genuine relationships within our school; such values extend to all relationships with children, parents and members of our wider school community.

We do appreciate that there may be times when satisfaction is not achieved in stage 1 and the concern becomes a formal complaint. We will treat all complaints with respect.

## **Stage 2 - Formal Consideration of a Complaint**

In order to formalise a complaint this must be done in writing within five working days of the initial meeting in Stage 1. The letter should be addressed to the head teacher, or chair of governors if the complaint is about the head teacher, and will be acknowledged in writing within 2 working days of receipt. Please accompany the letter with the form found in Appendix B. The recipient of the letter must record the date of receipt.

As part of the school's consideration of the complaint, the complainant may be invited to a meeting to discuss the complaint and any further details. The complainant may, if they wish, ask someone to accompany them, to help them explain the reasons for the complaint.

The head teacher or chair of governors will carry out a full investigation of all matters relating to the complaint. He / she, where necessary will talk to witnesses and take statements from others involved.

If the complaint centres on a pupil the school will talk to the pupil concerned and, where appropriate, others present at the time of the incident in question. The school will normally talk to a pupil with a parent or carer present.

If the complaint is against a member of staff, it will be dealt with under the school's internal, confidential procedures.

The head teacher or chair of governors will keep written / typed, signed and dated records of all meetings and telephone conversations, and other related documents.

Once the school has established all the relevant facts, a written response to the complaint will be sent. This will be no later than 10 working days after the date of receipt of the letter. This will give a full explanation of the head teacher's / chair of governor's decision and the reason for it. If follow-up action is needed, the school will indicate what they are proposing to do.

## **Stage 3 - Consideration by the Governing Body**

If the concern has already been through Stage 1 and 2 and still has not been resolved, the next

step is to make a formal complaint to the Governing Body.

A letter should be written to the school's chair of governors (no later than five working days after receipt of the written response at the end of Stage 2) enclosing a copy of the written complaint originally submitted, indicating which matters remain unresolved. No new complaint may be included. As a general rule, no evidence or witnesses previously undisclosed should be introduced into the meeting by any of the participants.

Letters should be sent to:

Chair of Governors  
% St. Michael's C of E (Aided) School  
Back Lane  
Aldbourn  
Marlborough  
Wiltshire  
SN8 2BP

The chair of governors has the discretion to agree to a complaint review panel (known hereafter as the Hearings Committee) if she / he feels it would be helpful in resolving the complaint.

For more details concerning the Hearings Committee, please see Appendix A.

## **Appendix A**

### **The Remit of the Hearings Committee**

The Committee can:

- dismiss the complaint in whole or in part;
- uphold the complaint in whole or in part;
- decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint;
- recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not recur.

### **The Hearings Committee needs to remember:**

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

### **The Role of the Clerk**

The Department strongly recommends that any panel or group of governors considering complaints be clerked. The clerk would be the contact point for the complainant and be required to:

- set the date, time and venue of the hearing, ensuring that the dates are convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible;
- collate any written material and send it to the parties in advance of the hearing;
- meet and welcome the parties as they arrive at the hearing;
- record the proceedings;
- notify all parties of the panel's decision, in writing within two weeks;
- explain if there are any further rights of appeal and, if so, to whom they need to be addressed;

### **The Role of the Chair of the Governing Body**

- check that the correct procedure has been followed;
- if a hearing is appropriate, notify the clerk to arrange the panel;

### **The Role of the Chair of the Hearings Committee**

The Chair of the Committee has a key role, ensuring that:

- the remit of the panel is explained to the parties and each party has the opportunity of putting their case without undue interruption;
- the issues are addressed;
- key findings of fact are made;
- parents and others who may not be used to speaking at such a hearing are put at ease;
- the hearing is conducted in an informal manner with each party treating the other with respect and courtesy;
- the panel is open minded and acting independently;
- no member of the panel has a vested interest in the outcome of the proceedings or any involvement in an earlier stage of the procedure;
- each side is given the opportunity to state their case and ask questions;
- written material is seen by all parties. If a new issue arises it would be useful to give all parties the opportunity to consider and comment on it.

## **Checklist for a Hearings Committee**

The panel needs to take the following points into account:

## **Appendix B**

### **Formal Complaint Form**

Please use this form to accompany your letter when instigating a formal complaint as in Stage 2.