

Policy Name:	Complaints Policy
Policy Number:	A5

Staff member responsible	Revision Date	Approved By	Approval Date	Reason
Jonathan Slot (Head)	October 2022	Board of Governors	October 2022	Annual update
Jonathan Slot (Head)	October 2023	Due for review by Safety and Well-being Committee	May 2023	Annual update
Jonathan Slot (Head)	August '24	Due for review by Safety and Well-being Committee in Spring 1		

This policy is applicable to the whole school including Early Years

Shaping Brighter Futures

We provide an inspiring and joyful education that will be remembered for a lifetime and which empowers our children with the confidence, knowledge, skills and character to thrive. We are shaping brighter futures.

School Aims:

At St Neot's education is full of fun and good humour. We want every child to enjoy their time at school, to feel part of a community that holds family values at the core. We are determined that our children not only learn outdoors but learn about the outdoors. We want to create well-rounded, independent thinkers that are not only confident in their academic ability but hold the soft skills necessary for Senior School and the world ahead.

The St Neot's Way is:

- *Where we promote a true sense of community, family values, a love of the outdoors and a commitment to having fun.*
- *Where every child comes into school feeling safe, valued and with a broad smile on their face; and who returns home with uplifting stories to tell.*
- *Where a first class, personalised, rigorous academic journey is matched by an enriching, broad and challenging co-curricular programme.*
- *Where the children's character, contribution and service is as valued as their academic success.*
- *Where the children's physical wellbeing is surpassed by their mental wellbeing.*
- *Where highly skilled, passionate and dedicated teachers, working in first class facilities, are full of ambition for themselves and the children in their care.*

St Neot's Values

Happiness Kindness Self-Belief Honesty Respect

This policy ensures that if any of the school aims are not met in an appropriate manner by the school, that a procedure is in place for the parents to voice their concerns.

Introduction

This policy applies to all members of the School community, including those in the Early Years Foundation Stage, and deals with the handling of complaints from parents. This policy does not apply in relation to matters concerning child protection or where a pupil has been expelled or removed.

The School aims to deliver the highest standards of teaching and pastoral care. However, if parents do have a complaint, they can expect it to be treated seriously by the School and in accordance with this Procedure. This document will explain how to use our complaints procedure.

This policy can be made available to parents on request or by contacting the school office during the school day. The complaints procedure can also be downloaded from the School's website. It can be made available in larger print or other accessible format if required.

The Nature of Complaints

- This policy document deals with procedures for parents of pupils, in line with CRR Part 7, Sept '24.
- While parents will often wish to raise issues on behalf of their children, there are others which pupils may choose to raise on their own behalf and which are best raised by them.
- Complaints by the staff are handled in accordance with the normal operating procedures of the School and staff contracts.

St Neot's : An Open Organisation: Climate and Culture

Problems are likely to arise if parents feel that the School is not open to their concerns. It is better to have a direct complaint to a member of staff than to have parents sharing their dissatisfaction with others. We aim for our parents to feel valued and involved with the School and they should be encouraged to voice their concerns. This is helped where the culture of the School is open and complaints are received in a positive manner. We take all concerns and complaints seriously.

An effective complaints procedure can defuse problems and provide the School with helpful information.

What constitutes a complaint?

Any matter about which a parent of a pupil is unhappy and seeks action by the school is a complaint, and in the scope of procedure, whatever the school labels it as. CRR Part7, Sept '24

A complaint may be made if a parent thinks that the School has, for example, done something wrong or failed to do something it should have done.

All complaints need to be handled seriously.

An unresolved problem may become a festering dispute or a confrontation. Procedures must therefore be in place for appropriate action when a matter remains unresolved or cannot be resolved quickly.

Procedures need to be flexible to handle both formal complaints and the informal raising of issues.

All complaints need to be recorded. Complaints about Early Years provision should be recorded on the Early Years Provider complaints record and kept for three years.

During a pandemic (COVID-19 for example) flexibility in time scales may need to be given should there be disruption to the process due to any person or staff member being unavailable to meet (or if there is staff absence that directly affects information gathering).

In the academic year September 2023 to August 2024, there were no formal complaints.

COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE - FOR PARENTS

Stage 1 – Informal Resolution

It is expected that most complaints and concerns will be resolved quickly and informally.

If parents have a complaint, they can talk directly to a member of staff, write a letter, send an email or make contact by telephone. Any member of staff will be happy to help, but a child's Form Teacher is often the first point of contact. Parents should be as clear as possible about what the complaint or problem is. In many cases, the matter will be resolved straightaway by this means and to the parents' satisfaction. If the Form teacher cannot resolve the matter alone, it may be necessary for them to consult a Head of Department, the Deputy Head or the Head. Complaints made directly to a Head of Department, the Deputy Head or the Head will usually be referred to the relevant Form teacher unless the Head deems it appropriate for the matter to be dealt with by the Head of Department, the Deputy Head or the Head personally. If the teacher cannot resolve the matter alone, he or she may refer it to the Head. A parent may raise the matter directly with the Head if this seems appropriate (for example if the matter concerns the conduct of the form teacher).

If the complaint is received in writing during term time, the school will endeavour to respond in writing within two days. If the letter is received during the school holidays, (and copied to the Operations Manager), the school will endeavour to respond in writing within ten working days. The school's working days are Monday to Friday.

The person handling the complaint will make a written record of all concerns and complaints and the date on which they were received. Should the matter not be resolved within ten working days or as soon as reasonably practicable during school holidays, or in the event that the Form teacher and the parent fail to reach a satisfactory resolution, then parents will be advised to proceed with their complaint in accordance with Stage 2 of this Procedure.

Stage 2 – Formal Resolution

If the complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis, then the parents should put their complaint in writing to the Head. The Head will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action to take. The Head will either meet with or speak to the parents concerned, within seven working days of receipt of the written complaint or as soon as reasonably practicable during school holidays, to discuss the matter. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage.

Although all formal complaints will be made in writing, this does not mean that the formal stage is automatically triggered whenever a concern is expressed in writing. Complaints will usually only progress to the formal stage after first being considered at the preliminary stage and only then if the complainant decides to escalate a matter to the formal stage.

It may be necessary for the Head to investigate further. A senior member of staff delegated by the Head will investigate all written complaints. The Head will keep written records of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint. Once the Head is satisfied that, so far as is practicable, all of the relevant facts have been established, a decision will be made. The parents will be informed of this decision in writing, reasons for the decision will be explained, within ten working days of having the initial previous meeting with the Head regarding the complaint, or as soon as reasonably practicable during school holidays.

The Head will keep written records of complaints made in writing under the formal procedure. In relation to these complaints, the Head will record whether the complaint has been resolved at this stage or if it is to proceed to a panel hearing.

If parents go straight to the Chair of Governors (Chair) without following the procedures suggested to them, the Chair will normally refer the matter to the Head in the first instance and tell the parents he/she has done so. However, should the complaint be against the Head or Operations Manager, the Chairman or Chief Operating Officer will handle the matter following stage 2 of this procedure.

Early Years Foundation Stage: Parents will be notified of the outcome of the investigation within ten working days of having received the complaint.

If the parents are still not satisfied with the decision, they should proceed to Stage 3 of this Procedure within ten working days of receipt of the written decision.

Stage 3 – Panel Hearing

If parents seek to take their complaint to Stage 3 (following a failure to reach an earlier resolution), they should write to the Chair setting out in full the details of the complaint within ten working days of receiving the Head's decision. A request for a hearing will normally only be considered if parents have invoked stage 1 and 2.

The Chair will acknowledge receipt of the complaint and schedule a hearing to take place as soon as practicable and normally within 28 working days or as soon as reasonably practicable during school holidays. The Chair will arrange for a Complaints Panel to be convened to consider the matter at the hearing.

The Panel will consist of at least three persons not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint, one of whom shall be independent of the management and running of the school. Each of the Panel members shall be appointed by the Chair. The independent panel member is likely to be appointed following a consultation with ISBA or IAPS.

If the Panel deems it necessary, it may require that further particulars of the complaint or any related matter be supplied in advance of the hearing. Copies of such particulars shall be supplied to all parties at least 3 days before the hearing is due to take place.

The parents may be accompanied to the hearing if they wish. This may be a relative, teacher or friend.

If possible, the Panel will resolve the parent's complaint immediately without the need for further investigation.

Where further investigation is required, the Panel will decide how it should be carried out. After due consideration of all facts the Panel considers relevant, the Panel will make findings and recommendations and a copy of those findings is provided to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about and, made available for inspection on the school premises by the proprietor and/or the Head. The panel cannot award financial compensation or order reinstatement of a pupil.

The Panel will write to the complainant and, if applicable, the person complained about informing them of its decision and the reasons for it within five working days. The decision of the Panel will be final. The Panel's findings and, if any, recommendations will be sent by electronic mail or otherwise confirmed in writing to the parents, the Head, the Governors and, where relevant, the person complained of.

A written record will be kept of all formal complaints and whether they were resolved at the preliminary stage or were referred to a panel hearing and the action taken by the school as a result of these complaints (regardless of whether they are upheld). The number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year will be published in the Annual Information Booklet issued to prospective and current parents.

Parents can be assured that all concerns and complaints will be treated seriously and confidentially. Correspondence, statements and records will be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 108 or 109 of the 2008 Act requests access to them

or where disclosure is required in the course of the school's inspection, or where any other legal obligation prevails.

Early Years Foundation Stage

In respect of children within the Early Years Foundation Stage: records of complaints will be kept for at least three years; and parents may make a complaint to Ofsted if they believe the provider is not meeting the EYFS requirements by telephoning or writing to the regional centre. Piccadilly Gate, Store Street, Manchester M1 2WD; general helpline 0300 123 1231;textphone number 0161 618 8524 and/or ISI: CAP House 9-12 Long Lane London EC1A 9HA (on 020 7600 0100) www.isi.net if they wish.

The School will provide Ofsted and / or ISI, upon request, with a written record of all complaints made during any specified period and the action taken and conclusion reached.

Recording and Retention

The School should keep an effective log of complaints and other parental concerns because:

- HM Inspectors or ISI Inspectors may wish to see the log as evidence of the School's attitude to complaints. Patterns in the record may indicate a need for action.
- Parents are entitled to request to see information from the record of complaints where appropriate.
- The Head should be able to check the log, to enable patterns of concern to be monitored, take appropriate action and report regularly to Governors. The log should contain the following information: the date when the issue was raised, name of parent, brief statement of issue, staff member handling the issue, to whom the issue was reported (as appropriate), brief statement of outcome (including date of reply sent) and location of more detailed information (as appropriate).
- See also 'Early years provider complaints record'
- The record would be handed in to the School Office as soon as possible after the outcome of the issue (normally by the last member of staff handling the issue) together with any supporting or additional information (as appropriate).
- Such additional information would typically include simple but clear notes of all conversations with parents (including informal chats and telephone conversations) as well as written communication.
- This log should be maintained and kept confidentially in the Head Teacher' PA's Office under the control of the Head, cross-referenced with other files as necessary.
- If staff are in doubt about what constitutes a complaint they should consult with a senior colleague.
- The DfE regulator has advised that complaints which do not have safeguarding implications should be retained for a minimum of 7 years. Records concerning allegations of abuse must be preserved for the term of the Independent inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse and at least until the accused has reached normal pension age or 10 years from the date of the allegation if it is longer.
- Where repeated attempts are made by a parent to raise the same complaint after it has been considered at all three stages, this can be regarded as vexatious and outside the scope of this policy.

Confidentiality

- Confidentiality is an important issue for pupils, parents and staff. It is essential that any complaint should be treated in a confidential manner and with respect.
- All correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a bona fide body conducting an inspection requests access to them. We cannot entirely rule out the need to make other third parties outside the School aware of the complaint and possibly also the identity of those involved. This would be likely to happen where, for example, a child's safety was at risk or it became necessary to inform police or seek legal advice.
- Parents often seek an assurance of confidentiality before expressing their concerns. If, for example, they wish to discuss a particular member of staff they may fear that their child will suffer in some way because they have complained.

- It should be made clear to all concerned that it is the School's policy that complaints made by parents should not rebound adversely on their children and similarly that complaints raised by pupils should not rebound on them or on other pupils.
- The question of confidentiality should be discussed sensitively and on an individual basis with the parents, and the School's policy should be carefully explained.
- It may be possible to deal with a problem without naming individuals. Even if no names are given, the source of the complaint may be clear. However, depending on the nature of the complaint and on the circumstances, it may be impractical to investigate without identifying the member of staff or the child - it may also be in the interest of the child to do so.
- Staff members are rightly concerned that they should know about complaints that might be damaging to their reputation. Such complaints will be known only to themselves and to those who have to be consulted. There is a need to provide support, as appropriate, for staff against whom a complaint is made; this should be provided by a colleague who is not otherwise involved.
- If there is a question of the child's safety or a possible situation involving the police, the Head Teacher will follow the guidance of the school's Child Protection Policy.
- Action which needed to be taken under staff disciplinary procedures as a result of complaints would be handled confidentially within the School.

COMPLAINTS RECORD for staff.

This record should be handed in to the P A's Office, with any additional information, as soon as possible after the outcome, normally by the person last handling the matter. An alternative Google Form will also be made available.

Date issue raised

Name of complainant (with further detail if necessary)

Name of pupil; Year; Form

Brief Statement of Issue

Staff member handling issue in first instance

Reported to (and any other action taken in the first instance)

Brief Statement of outcome including date of reply sent

Location of more detailed information, as appropriate

Signature

Name Date: