



SOUTHWARK DIOCESAN BOARD OF EDUCATION  
BELONG SERVE THRIVE

# **POLICY STATEMENT**

## **PERSISTENT OR VEXATIOUS COMPLAINTS**

### **PROCEDURE**

Approved by: FGB  
Approval date: 17<sup>th</sup> December 2025  
Review date: December 2026



## Statement of Intent

Saint John the Divine Church of England Primary School is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, and to providing a high-quality service to those who complain.

The majority of complaints are handled in an informal manner and are resolved quickly, sensitively and to the satisfaction of the complainant.

However, persistent and/or vexatious complainants and unreasonable behaviour can be a problem for school staff and governors, placing a strain on time and resources. While the school endeavours to respond with patience and sympathy to the needs of all complainants there are times when there is nothing further which can reasonably be done to assist or to rectify a real or perceived problem.

This policy sets out how the school will manage complaints that are persistent or vexatious and behaviour that is unreasonable. It aims to ensure that staff, pupils, and parents/carers are treated with respect and that concerns are handled appropriately, while enabling the school to safeguard staff from unacceptable behaviour.

## Scope

This policy applies to:

- Parents, carers, former parents/carers, members of the public, and other individuals who raise complaints or concerns with the school.
- All staff involved in responding to complaints at any stage of the school's Complaints Procedure.

It covers all communication channels including email, telephone, meetings, written correspondence, and social media.

This policy should be read alongside the school's Complaints Policy, Safeguarding Procedures, and Staff Code of Conduct.

## Definitions

### Serial or Persistent Complaint

A complaint that continues despite:

- A thorough investigation at each stage of the Complaints Procedure,
- A clearly communicated final response,
- Repetitive raising of the same issue without new evidence.

### Vexatious Complaints

Complaints or behaviours which:

- Are obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific, repetitious
- Include unreasonable demands or expectations.
- Insist upon pursuing complaints that have no merit and/or demand unrealistic, unreasonable outcomes
- Insist upon pursuing complaints that have merit in an unreasonable manner
- Are malicious, knowingly false or designed to cause disruption or annoyance
- Make demands that lack any serious purpose or value



- Are communicated using abusive, aggressive, or intimidating language or behaviour.

### Unreasonable Behaviour

Saint John the Divine Church of England Primary School defines unreasonable behaviour as that which hinders our consideration of complaints, or hinders the core business of the school, because of the frequency or nature of the complainant's contact with the school. Examples include (but are not limited to):

- Refusing to articulate the complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcomes sought, despite offers of assistance
- Excessive or repeated correspondence that is disproportionate to the issue raised
- Continually contacting multiple staff members or governors about the same issue
- Refusal to follow the School's Complaints Procedure stages
- Refusal to co-operate with the complaints investigation process
- Refusal to accept certain issues cannot be dealt with under the complaints procedure
- Raising large numbers of detailed questions and insisting they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales
- Changing the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds
- Making unjustified complaints about staff or governors who are trying to deal with the issues, refusing to communicate with them or seeking to have them replaced
- Repeatedly making the same complaint, despite previous investigations or responses concluding that the complaint is groundless or has been addressed
- Refusing to accept the findings of the investigation where the school's complaint procedure has been fully and properly implemented, including referral to the Department of Education
- Seeking an unrealistic outcome
- Insistence on immediate responses
- Making unreasonable demands on staff or governor's time or resources by frequent, lengthy and complicated contact regarding the complaint, in person, in writing, by email and by telephone, whether the school is the primary addressee of the correspondence or not.
- Knowingly publishing falsified information
- Publishing unacceptable information on social media or other public forums
- Sharing complaints with press outlets during the complaints process
- Recording meetings or staff without permission
- Harassment, verbal abuse, threats, or intimidation of staff

### **Principles**

- All concerns and complaints are taken seriously and handled fairly, objectively, and respectfully.
- Staff and school leadership have the right to work free from unacceptable behaviour, harassment, or intimidation.
- No genuine complaint will ever be dismissed because of the complainant's manner alone.
- Actions under this policy will only be taken after careful consideration and, unless in extreme cases, after warnings have been issued.

### **Serial and Persistent Complaints**

Saint John the Divine Church of England Primary School has a 3-stage complaints process, available in the Complaints Policy on the school's website.



If, once all stages of the complaint procedure have been followed, a complainant tries to re-open the same issue, we will inform them that the procedure has been completed and that the matter is now closed.

If the complainant makes contact again on the same issue, the correspondence may then be viewed as 'serial' or 'persistent' and the school may choose not to respond. A complaint will not be marked as 'serial' before the complainant has completed the three stages of the complaints procedure (or up to stage 2 if the complainant chooses not to appeal to stage 3)

A complainant will not be marked as 'serial' for exercising their rights to refer their complaint to their MP, regardless of which stage the complaint has reached.

The application of a 'serial or persistent' will be placed against the subject or complaint itself rather than the complainant.

The decision to stop responding will never be taken lightly, Saint John the Divine Church of England Primary School will ensure that before such a decision is made the following are all true:

- They have taken every reasonable step to address the complainant's concerns
- The complainant has been given a clear statement of the school's position and their options
- The complainant contacts the school repeatedly, making substantially the same points each time

The case to stop responding is stronger if one or more of these statements is true:

- The complainant's letters, emails, or telephone calls are often or always abusive or aggressive
- They make insulting personal comments about or threats towards staff
- Saint John the Divine Church of England Primary School has reason to believe the individual is contacting with the intention of causing disruption or inconvenience

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

### **Duplicate complaints**

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

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

- Tell the new complainant that we have already investigated and responded to this issue, and that the local process is complete
- Direct them to the DfE if they are dissatisfied with our original handling of the complaint

If a duplicate complaint is raised, which in the view of the school, warrants further consideration, the appropriate stage of the school's complaint procedure will be enacted.

### **Complaint campaigns**

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

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

If complainants are not satisfied with the school's response, or wish to pursue the complaint further, the normal procedures will apply.

### **Vexatious Complaints and Unreasonable Behaviour**

We will not normally limit the contact complainants have with our school. However, we do not expect our staff or governors to tolerate unacceptable behaviour, or to spend unacceptable lengths of time responding to a single individual, and will take action to protect staff from that behaviour, including where it is abusive, offensive or threatening.

The definitions of vexatious complaints and unreasonable behaviour are above.

If an individual's behaviour matches the definitions of vexatious or unreasonable and is causing a significant level of disruption to staff or governors, and to the core purpose of the school, regardless of whether or not the individual has raised a formal complaint, the school will implement a tailored communication strategy and/or restrictions.

### **Initial Warning**

Before a strategy or restrictions are applied, the Headteacher (or delegated senior leader) will:

- a. Explain why the behaviour is considered unreasonable,
- b. Request that the individual moderates their conduct,
- c. Warn that restrictions may be imposed if behaviour does not improve.

### **Applying Restrictions**

If behaviour continues, the school may do one or more of the following:

- restrict the individual to a single point of contact via an email address
- limit communication channels
- adjust response times from those stated in policies
- limit the number of times the individual can make contact, such as a fixed number of contacts per term
- ask the complainant to engage a third party to act on their behalf, such as [Citizens Advice](#)
- refuse requests for meetings
- only accept meetings where a second person is present and the meeting is minuted
- impose restrictions on entering the school premises
- temporarily suspend communication, providing there is a single point of contact for statutory communication and safeguarding matters

If the school takes the decision to apply an 'unreasonable' marking and implement a communication strategy or restrictions, this will be communicated in writing to the individual concerned.

Any communication strategy or restrictions will be reviewed after three months.

This does not affect the individual's statutory right to information under The Education (Pupil Information) (England) Regulations 2005. The individual will always be provided with a single point of contact for routine communication with the school or safeguarding matters.



This also does not affect the individual's right to raise new complaints, but these must be done via the complaints process and in line with the communication restrictions.

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

If an individual persists to the point that may constitute harassment, the school will seek legal advice. In some cases, injunctions and other court orders have been issued to individuals preventing them from contacting schools direct.

### **Immediate Restrictions**

Where behaviour is threatening, abusive, or poses a risk, the school may:

- Ask the individual to leave the premises,
- Contact police or local authority security services,
- Ban the individual from School premises.

### **Barring from school premises**

Although fulfilling a public function, schools are private places. The public has no automatic right of entry. Headteachers and governing bodies therefore need to act to ensure they remain a safe place for pupils, staff and other members of their community.

In some cases, individuals can be barred from entering school premises. The school will tell the individual that they've been barred or they intend to bar them in writing.

The school will always give the individual the opportunity to formally express their views on a decision to bar. A school can either:

- bar an individual temporarily, until they have had the opportunity to formally present their side
- tell the individual they intend to bar them and invite them to present their side by a set deadline

The headteacher's decision to bar should then be reviewed by either:

- the chair of governors
- a committee of governors

They should take into account any representations made by the individual and decide whether to either confirm or lift the bar. If the decision is confirmed, the individual should be notified in writing, explaining how long the bar will be in place and when the decision will be reviewed.

### **Record Keeping**

The School will keep secure and accurate records of actions and decisions in line with GDPR and the Data Protection Policy.

### **Appeal Process**

Individuals may appeal in writing. An independent Governor will review the appeal. The decision is final.

### **Policy Review**

This policy will be reviewed every two years or sooner if required by legislation or DfE guidance.