

Complaints

Introduction

This document sets out the procedure for addressing complaints. It should be used only when informal attempts to resolve problems have been unsuccessful¹.

At Cross-Links we seek to model best Christian behaviour in all the different ways that we interact with others. We all do our best to respect and love each other, even though we may have different opinions and points of view.

Aims and Objectives

We will give careful consideration to all complaints and deal with them fairly and honestly. We will provide sufficient opportunity for any complaint to be fully discussed, and aim to resolve it through open dialogue and mutual understanding.

Our Procedure Aims to

- be easily accessible and publicised
- be simple to use and understand
- be impartial
- be non-adversarial
- allow swift handling with established time-limits for action and keeping people informed of the progress
- ensure a full and fair investigation by an independent person where necessary
- respect people's desire for confidentiality, wherever possible (some information sharing may be necessary to carry out a thorough investigation)
- address all points of issue, providing an effective response and appropriate redress, where necessary

Investigating Complaints

It is suggested that at each stage, the person investigating the complaint, makes sure that they:

- establish **what** has happened so far, and **who** has been involved;
- clarify the nature of the complaint and what remains unresolved;
- meet with the complainant or contact them (if unsure or further information is necessary);
- clarify what the complainant feels would put things right;
- interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish;
- conduct the interview with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning;
- keep notes of the interview.

¹ see Cross-Links Dover *Guidelines for communicating effectively in difficult situations*.

Resolving Complaints

At each stage in the procedure it is important to keep in mind ways in which a complaint can be resolved. It might be sufficient to acknowledge that the complaint is valid in whole or in part. In addition, it may be appropriate to offer one or more of the following:

- an apology;
- an explanation;
- an admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better;
- an assurance that the event complained of will not recur;
- an explanation of the steps that have been taken to ensure that it will not happen again;
- an undertaking to review Cross-Links Dover policies in light of the complaint.

It would be useful if complainants were encouraged to state what actions they feel might resolve the problem at any stage. An admission that the school could have handled the situation better is not the same as an admission of negligence.

An effective procedure will identify areas of agreement between the parties. It is also of equal importance to clarify any misunderstandings that might have occurred as this can create a positive atmosphere in which to discuss any outstanding issues.

Vexatious Complaints

If properly followed, a good complaints procedure will limit the number of complaints that become protracted. However, there will be occasions when, despite all stages of the procedures having been followed, the complainant remains dissatisfied. If the complainant tries to reopen the same issue, the chair of trustees is able to inform them in writing that the procedure has been exhausted and that the matter is now closed.

Time-Limits

Complaints need to be considered, and resolved, as quickly and efficiently as possible. An effective complaints procedure will have realistic time limits for each action within each stage. However, where further investigations are necessary, new time limits can be set and the complainant sent details of the new deadline and an explanation for the delay.

Formal Complaints Procedure

Stage 1

If you feel that a concern has not been addressed through informal discussion, and you wish to have the matter formally investigated, this process begins with the completion of a complaints form, which you will find at the end of this pack.

The completed form should be returned to (a) the Lay Minister (Team Leader) or (b) The Chair of Trustees if you are complaining about the Lay Minister (Team Leader).

The complaint form should be returned to the school office, marked Confidential, for the attention of either the Lay Minister (Team Leader) or Chair of Trustees as appropriate.

The Lay Minister/Chair of Trustees will acknowledge in writing receipt of the complaint form within **five working days** after receiving it and will enclose a copy of the full complaints procedure with the acknowledgement.

The complaint will then be investigated and the outcome notified to the complainant in writing within **10 working days**.

Stage 2 (Appeal)

If the complainant is unhappy about the outcome of stage 1 then they have a right to appeal against the decision.

The complainant is to write to the Chair of trustees explaining the grounds of their appeal within **5 working days** of receiving the letter informing them of the outcome of stage 1.

The Chair of trustees will convene an appeals panel from the management board and appoint a chair of the panel. If the chair of trustees was involved at stage 1 they are to appoint an independent chair of panel and should not be a member of the panel.

The Appeal panel will arrange for a meeting to be held with the complainant and Lay Minister (Team Leader)/Chair of trustees. This meeting should be convened as soon as possible, within **10 working days** of receipt of the letter requesting an appeal.

The outcome of the panel's decision will be put in writing to the complainant following the appeal meeting.

Annex A Complaint Form

Please complete and return to Cross-Links Dover, 9 Sheridan Road, Dover CT16 2BZ, marked for the confidential attention of the Lay Minister/Chair of Trustees.

Your name:

Address:

Postcode:

Day time telephone number:

Evening telephone number:

Please give details of your complaint.

**What action, if any, have you already taken to try and resolve your complaint.
(Who did you speak to and what was the response)?**

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

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

Signature:

Date:

Official use

Date acknowledgement sent:

By whom:

Complaint referred to:

Date: