

# Saint Mary's Catholic Primary School



*Headteacher*

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7th February 2018

RE: Complaint Letter of 6<sup>th</sup> February 2018

Dear Parents

I am writing to you to respond to your joint letter of the 6<sup>th</sup> February 2018. It is very clear to me that all the signatories feel strongly about the dire situation which we as a school find ourselves in and I can tell you that the Governors are very aware of the strength of feeling which has arisen since they put the proposal of the Friday afternoon close to you. I also want to reassure you that our Governors are a great group of people who constantly hold the good of the children as their highest priority. They are continuing to explore all the options for how the school week might be structured, in order that they can be confident that the school is able to continue to offer the best quality of education to all the children and they are currently consulting with the school staff in order to understand their views. You ask about the school's benchmarking information which is compiled by the DfE and can be accessed by clicking the link on the 'About Us, Key Info and Dates' dropdown on the school website.

In your letter you say that you wish to make a complaint using the first stage of the school's complaints policy. I am the school's complaints co-ordinator but I am unable to investigate a complaint against the Governors' actions because I am employed by them. I am, however, able to investigate your concerns regarding the curriculum under the section subtitled;

***'This Complaints Procedure does not apply to:***

- ***Concerns about the delivery of the National Curriculum and about collective worship will be dealt with by the school on the first instance (stages 1 and 2) and if there is no satisfactory resolution, will be referred to the Secretary of State.'***

*With Christ in our hearts we grow in love to help others.*

I aim to address your complaint under two separate headings:

**Firstly, the complaint as it pertains to the curriculum under the section of the Complaints Procedure indicated above.**

The original consultation document outlines the cuts to services which the Governors undertook to try to achieve sustainable provision for the children. In the last two years Governors have made savings of over £100,000 to balance the budget but despite these savings the school ended the financial year 16/17 £2523 overspent. The savings we made have come at a cost to the school's ability to offer all that it wants for the children. Measures taken since 2011 have sustained us in the medium term but in Spring 2017 the Governors realised that a longer term, more visionary change, would be needed to maintain the school's progress to outstanding. It is the hope of the school's Governing Board that upon making the proposed alteration to the school week, services which have been cut from the children, can be offered again and that the school's curriculum offer can be broadened and deepened.

You raise concerns about the length of the school day and the length of playtimes. I know that Governors have not yet made a decision on these. They are keen to keep children's contact time with teachers as near as possible to the current time and above the old recommended time limits. These time limits, of 21 hours for infants and 23 ½ hours a week for juniors, date from 2002 and were removed by the Coalition Government. Our current hours are 24 hours for infants and 25 hours for juniors.

All schools have had a legal responsibility to provide Planning, Preparation and Assessment time (PPA) to all teachers since 2005. In order that teachers can make the best use of this time we have always released parallel teachers at the same time and we now want to increase the effectiveness of PPA time by including TAs in the process wherever possible. The Governors' proposal would enable staff to work together in an even more effective way and this will enable the school to provide even better outcomes for all of the children.

I am confident that, with the classteacher teaching for 100% of the time, with teaching time the same as now or at least above the recommended hours and with TAs even more involved in the preparation of learning experiences, the school's curriculum and what we offer to the children will be improved on what we currently are able to offer. Enhancements to the curriculum such as the Enabling Enterprise projects and whole class music

tuition, together with an already planned increase in MFL time, will have a huge impact, meaning that I can ensure we offer a broad and balanced curriculum well into the future.

**Secondly, I will now make some observations regarding the consultation process:**

In this section I can give you my view as headteacher but as an employee of the Governing Board I am unable to formally investigate the Governing Board's actions. My aim here is to give you as much information as I can.

In my view, Governors have worked consistently and with great determination for the past 48 months to put into place a medium term plan and develop a long-term strategy to enable the school to continue to provide the best quality of education for all of our children despite the challenging times. When it became clear that a more visionary approach would be needed, the Governors looked at what other schools across the country were doing including schools in Scotland and read the guidance from the Government on the curriculum, the school week and year, to get a better understanding of what was possible. They read the Department for Education's November 2016 guidance, **School Attendance: Guidance for maintained schools, academies, independent schools and local authorities**, carefully.

From this document Governors noted:

*“Do schools need to consult parents if making changes to the school day?”*

*No. Although parents must be informed of the changes, there is no legal requirement to consult parents or to give an explanation as to why the decision has been made. Of course, schools can consult parents if they wish to, and where they have raised the expectation that they will consult, they should honour that commitment.”*  
**DfE November 2016 page 17.**

They also noted that:

*“Every school day must have two sessions divided by a break. The length of each session, break and the school day is determined by the school's governing body. The governing body has the power to revise the length of the school day as it sees fit. There is no requirement to consult parents on revisions to the school day but it can assist parents to do so.”* DfE November 2016 page 15.

Governors spoke at length to Governors of other schools and discussed options across many meetings. From the get go, they were aware that only drastic changes to the staffing of the school would achieve the required budget savings. Holding the educational interests of all the children at the forefront of their minds, Governors quickly decided that they wanted to keep the school's Teaching Assistants. They recognise that the school staff are its greatest resource and I agree with them. Governors then put the scenario of closing on a Friday afternoon to you to get your views on the proposal. Governing Board decisions are decided by majority vote and in this instance, Governors voted unanimously to consult with you, whilst being aware that they are not required to consult or give reasons, on Scenario B - the option of closing the school to children on Friday afternoons in order to provide PPA for teachers.

**Finally;** I know that Governors were keen to give the process time, therefore they started the process at an early stage in the year. They want to allow the Holy Spirit to guide their thoughts and enlighten their decisions.

Once Governors are in possession of all the information, including budget information for 2018/2019 (not yet given to us by Hounslow Council), they will present their findings to parents for consideration and hold a Q&A. This will most probably be towards the end of March and will include an afternoon and evening opportunity for you to meet with them.

I hope that this letter has helped put your minds at rest. At the current time so much is still unknown and Governors have been unable to share detail with you because it does not exist, but in time I am confident that we can work our way through together.

Please continue to pray for the children, the staff, the parents and the school Governors.

Yours sincerely

F Marsh