

Reach Academy Trust

Complaints Policy 2023-24



The Academy seeks to resolve problems informally wherever possible. The Academy aims to be fair, open and honest when dealing with any complaint. We give careful consideration to all complaints and deal with them as swiftly as possible. We aim to resolve any complaint through dialogue and mutual understanding, and, in all cases, we put the interests of the child first.

Approved by:

Local Governing Body

Date: 26th September 2023

Last reviewed on:

29th September 2022

Next review due by:

September 2024

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1. Aims

Our school aims to meet its statutory obligations when responding to complaints from parents of pupils at the school, and others.

When responding to complaints, we aim to:

- Be impartial and non-adversarial
- Facilitate a full and fair investigation by an independent person or panel, where necessary
- Address all the points at issue and provide an effective and prompt response
- Respect complainants' desire for confidentiality
- Treat complainants with respect
- Keep complainants informed of the progress of the complaints process
- Consider how the complaint can feed into school improvement evaluation processes

We try to resolve concerns or complaints by informal means wherever possible. Where this is not possible, formal procedures will be followed.

The school will aim to give the complainant the opportunity to complete the complaints procedure in full.

To support this, we will ensure we publicise the existence of this policy and make it available on the school website.

2. Legislation and guidance

This document meets the requirements set out in part 7 of the schedule to [the Education \(Independent School Standards\) Regulations 2014](#), which states that we must have and make available a written procedure to deal with complaints from parents of pupils at the school.

It is also based on guidance published by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) on [creating a complaints procedure that complies with the above regulations](#), and refers to [good practice guidance on setting up complaints procedures](#) from the Department for Education (DfE).

In addition, it addresses duties set out in the [Early Years Foundation Stage statutory framework](#) with regards to dealing with complaints about the school's fulfilment of Early Years Foundation Stage requirements.

This policy complies with our funding agreement and articles of association.

3. Definitions and scope

The DfE guidance explains the difference between a concern and a complaint.

A concern is defined as "an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought".

The school will resolve concerns through day-to-day communication as far as possible.

A complaint is defined as "an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action".

The school intends to resolve complaints informally where possible, at the earliest possible stage.

There may be occasions when complainants would like to raise their concerns formally. This policy outlines the procedure relating to handling such complaints.

This policy does not cover complaints procedures relating to:

- Admissions

- Statutory assessments of special educational needs (SEN)
- Safeguarding matters
- Exclusion
- Whistle-blowing
- Staff grievances
- Staff discipline

Please see our separate policies for procedures relating to these types of complaint.

Arrangements for handling complaints from parents of children with SEN about the school's support are within the scope of this policy. Such complaints should first be made to the Phase SENDCO they will then be referred to this complaints policy. Our SEN policy and information report includes information about the rights of parents of pupils with disabilities who believe that our school has discriminated against their child.

Complaints about services provided by other providers who use school premises or facilities should be directed to the provider concerned.

4. Principles for investigation

When investigating a complaint, we will try to clarify:

- What has happened
- Who was involved
- What the complainant feels would put things right

We also intend to address complaints as quickly as possible. To achieve this, realistic and reasonable time limits will be set for each action within each stage.

Where further investigations are necessary, new time limits will be set, and the complainant will be sent details of the new deadline with an explanation for the delay.

The school expects that complaints will be made as soon as possible after an incident arises and no later than 3 months afterwards. We will consider exceptions to this time frame in circumstances where there were valid reasons for not making a complaint at that time and the complaint can still be investigated in a fair manner for all involved.

Complaints about our fulfilment of early years requirements

We will investigate all written complaints relating to the school's fulfilment of the Early Years Foundation Stage requirements, and notify the complainant of the outcome within 28 days of receiving the complaint. The school will keep a record of the complaint (see section 9) and make this available to Ofsted on request.

Parents and carers can notify Ofsted if they believe that the school is not meeting Early Years Foundation Stage requirements, by calling 0300 123 4234 or 0300 123 4666, or by emailing enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk. An online contact form is also available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted#org-contacts>.

We will notify parents and carers if we become aware that the school is to be inspected by Ofsted. We will also supply a copy of the inspection report to parents and carers of children attending the setting via our website.

5. Stages of complaint (not complaints against the Co-Headteachers or a governor)

There are 3 stages to their complaints procedure: an informal stage, a formal stage and review by a panel.

Stage 1: informal

The school will take informal concerns seriously and make every effort to resolve the matter quickly. It may be the case that the provision or clarification of information will resolve the issue.

The complainant should raise the complaint as soon as possible with the relevant member of staff or the Co-Headteacher as appropriate, either in person or by letter, telephone or email. If the complainant is unclear who to contact or how to contact them, they should contact the school office.

The school will acknowledge informal complaints within 5 working days, and investigate and provide a response within 5 working days.

The informal stage will involve a meeting between the complainant and one of the Co-Headteachers or their delegated authority and/or the subject of the complaint as appropriate.

If the complaint is not resolved informally, it will be escalated to a formal complaint.

Stage 2: formal

2a) Inform the Co-Headteacher in writing

This letter should provide the Co-Headteacher with details of:

- the complaint;
- details such as relevant dates, times, and the names of witnesses of events, alongside copies of any relevant documents;
- the complainant should also state what they feel would resolve the complaint;
- any staff they would prefer not to discuss the issue with;
- they must also list attempts that they have made to raise/resolve the complaint already with details of their previous communication and the reason why they are still not satisfied.

The Co-Headteacher (or designated member of the senior leadership team) will call a meeting to clarify concerns, and seek a resolution within 10 days of the complaint being lodged. The complainant may be accompanied to this meeting, and should inform the school of the identity of their companion in advance.

In certain circumstances, the school may need to refuse a request for a particular individual to attend any such meeting – for example, if there is a conflict of interest. If this is the case, the school will notify the complainant as soon as they are aware, so that the complainant has the opportunity to arrange alternative accompaniment.

The Co-Headteacher (or other person appointed by the Co-Headteacher for this purpose) will then respond in writing to the complainant within 5 working days of a meeting being held.

If the complainant wishes to proceed to the next stage of the procedure, they should inform the Chair of Governors in writing within 5 working days.

2b) Inform the Chair of Governors in writing

This letter should set out the details of the complaint including evidence as set out above. The complainant should also specify what they feel would resolve the complaint, and how they feel the previous stages of the procedure has not addressed their complaint sufficiently. The Chair of Governors, or their delegated authority will investigate the issue. The written conclusion of this investigation will be sent to the complainant within 10 days. If the complainant wishes to proceed to the next stage of the procedure, they should inform the chair of governors in writing within 5 working days. The governors will convene a complaints panel within 21 working days.

Stage 3: review panel with an independent reviewer

Where a parent is not satisfied with the response to the complaint in Stage 2 there will be provision for a hearing before a panel appointed by the school consisting of at least three people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint. When there is a panel hearing one member will be independent of the management and running of the academy. The independent reviewer will convene a review meeting with the complainant and representatives from the school, as

appropriate. Each will have an opportunity to set out written or oral submissions prior to the meeting.

The complainant must have reasonable notice of the date of the review panel; however, the review panel reserves the right to convene at their convenience rather than that of the complainant. At the review panel meeting, the complainant and representatives from the school, as appropriate, will be present. Each will have an opportunity to set out written or oral submissions prior to the meeting.

The complainant must be allowed to attend the panel hearing and be accompanied by a suitable companion if they wish. The complainant should inform the school of the identity of their companion in advance.

In certain circumstances, the school may need to refuse a request for a particular individual to attend any such meeting – for example, if there is a conflict of interest. If this is the case, the school will notify the complainant as soon as they are aware, so that the complainant has the opportunity to arrange alternative accompaniment.

At the meeting, each individual will have the opportunity to give statements and present their evidence, and witnesses will be called as appropriate to present their evidence.

The panel, the complainant and the school representative will be given the chance to ask and reply to questions. Once the complainant and school representatives have completed presenting their cases, they will be asked to leave and evidence will then be considered. The panel must then put together its findings and recommendations from the case. The panel will also provide a copy of the findings and recommendations to the complainant and, where relevant, the subject of the complaint, and make a copy of the findings and recommendations available for inspection by the Co-Headteacher.

At the meeting, each individual will have the opportunity to give statements and present their evidence, and witnesses will be called as appropriate to present their evidence.

The panel, the complainant and the school representative(s) will be given the chance to ask and reply to questions. Once the complainant and school representative(s) have presented their cases, they will be asked to leave and evidence will then be considered.

The panel must then put together its findings and recommendations from the case. The panel will also provide a copy of the findings and recommendations to the complainant and, where relevant, the individual who is the subject of the complaint, and make a copy available for inspection by the proprietor and Co-Headteacher.

The school will inform those involved of the decision in writing within five working days.

6. Complaints against the Co-Headteacher and/or a Governor

Complaints made against one of the Co-Headteachers should be directed to the Chair of Governors in writing. The same process as above will apply with the Chair of Governors taking the role of the Co-Headteacher in stages 1-3.

If a complainant wishes to make a complaint against a Governor or the Chair of Governors it must be made in writing to the Clerk of the Governing body.

7. Referring complaints on completion of the school's procedure

If the complainant is unsatisfied with the outcome of the school's complaints procedure, they can refer their complaint to the ESFA. The ESFA will check whether the complaint has been dealt with properly by the school. The ESFA will not overturn a school's decision about a complaint. However, it will look into:

- Whether there was undue delay, or the school did not comply with its own complaints procedure
- Whether the school was in breach of its funding agreement with the secretary of state
- Whether the school has failed to comply with any other legal obligation

If the school did not deal with the complaint properly, it will be asked to re-investigate the complaint. If the school's complaints procedure is found to not meet regulations, the school will be asked to correct its procedure accordingly.

For more information or to refer a complaint, see the following webpage:

<https://www.gov.uk/complain-about-school>

8. Persistent complaints

Where a complainant tries to re-open the issue with the school after the complaints procedure has been fully exhausted and the school has done everything it reasonably can in response to the complaint, the Chair of Governors (or other appropriate person in the case of a complaint about the chair) will inform the complainant that the matter is closed.

If the complainant subsequently contacts the school again about the same issue, the school can choose not to respond. The normal circumstance in which we will not respond is if:

- The school has taken every reasonable step to address the complainant's needs, *and*
- The complainant has been given a clear statement of the school's position and their options (if any), *and*
- The complainant is contacting the school repeatedly but making substantially the same points each time.

However, this list is not intended to be exhaustive.

The school will be most likely to choose not to respond if:

- We have reason to believe the individual is contacting the school with the intention of causing disruption or inconvenience, *and/or*
- The individual's letters/emails/telephone calls are often or always abusive or aggressive, *and/or*
- The individual makes insulting personal comments about, or threats towards, school staff.

Unreasonable behaviour which is abusive, offensive or threatening may constitute an unreasonably persistent complaint.

Once the school has decided that it is appropriate to stop responding, the complainant will be informed in writing, either by letter or email.

The school will ensure when making this decision that complainants making any new complaint are heard, and that the school acts reasonably.

9. Record-keeping

The school will record the progress of all complaints, including information about actions taken at all stages, the stage at which the complaint was resolved, and the final outcome. The records will also include copies of letters and emails, and notes relating to meetings and phone calls.

This material will be treated as confidential and held centrally, and will be viewed only by those involved in investigating the complaint or on the review panel.

This is except where the Secretary of State (or someone acting on their behalf) or the complainant requests access to records of a complaint through a freedom of information (FOI) request or under the terms of the Data Protection Act, or where the material must be made available during a school inspection.

Where the complaint is from a parent of the child at the school records of complaints will be kept until their child reaches the age of 18, whether they continue to attend Reach Academy or not. Where the complaint is from someone other than a parent it will be kept for 3 years.

The details of the complaint, including the names of individuals involved, will not be shared with the whole governing board in case a review panel needs to be organised at a later point.

Where the governing board is aware of the substance of the complaint before the review panel stage, the school will (where reasonably practicable) arrange for an independent panel to hear the complaint.

Complainants also have the right to request an independent panel if they believe there is likely to be bias in the proceedings. The decision to approve this request is made by the governing board, who will not unreasonably withhold consent.

10. Learning lessons

The Chair of Governors will review any underlying issues raised by complaints with the Co-Headteachers where appropriate, and respecting confidentiality, to determine whether there are any improvements that the school can make to its procedures or practice to help prevent similar events in the future.

11. Monitoring arrangements

The Full Governing Body monitor the effectiveness of the complaints procedure in ensuring that complaints are handled properly. The Full Governing Body will track the number and nature of complaints, and review underlying issues as stated in section 10.

The complaints records are logged and managed by the Operations Director.

This policy will be reviewed by the Operations Director every year.

At each review, the policy will be approved by the Chair of Governors.

12. Links with other policies

Policies dealing with other forms of complaints include:

- Child protection and safeguarding policy and procedures
- Admissions policy
- Exclusions policy
- Staff grievance procedures
- Staff disciplinary procedures
- SEN policy and information report