



Eastbrook School

COMPLAINTS POLICY

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1. Aims

At Eastbrook School, we undertake to provide a friendly and safe environment in which students will be helped to achieve their potential, both academically and socially. 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 and courtesy
- Ensure that any decisions we make are lawful, rational, reasonable, fair and proportionate, in line with the principles of administrative law
- 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.

Throughout the process, we will be sensitive to the needs of all parties involved, and make any reasonable adjustments needed to accommodate individuals. This is in line with our school values of PROUD (Principled, Resilient, Open, Understanding and Disciplined). We aim to remove barriers to ensure that we are fair and inclusive.

2. Legislation and guidance:

This document meets the requirements of section 29 of the [Education Act 2002](#), which states that schools must have and make available a procedure to deal with all complaints relating to their school and to any community facilities or services that the school provides.

It is also based on [guidance for schools on complaints procedures](#) from the Department for Education (DfE), including the model procedure, and model procedure for dealing with serial and unreasonable complaints.

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.

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”.

3.2 Scope

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.
- School re-organisation proposals.
- Curriculum.
- Collective worship.

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

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 special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO), they will then be referred to this complaints policy. Our SEN policy 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. Roles and responsibilities

4.1 The complainant

The complainant will get a more effective and timely response to their complaint if they:

- Follow these procedures.
- Cooperate with the school throughout the process and respond to deadlines and communication promptly.
- Ask for assistance as needed.
- Treat all those involved with respect.
- Not publish details about the complaint on social media.

4.2 The investigator

An individual will be appointed to look into the complaint and establish the facts. They will:

- Interview all relevant parties, keeping notes
- Consider records and any written evidence and keep these securely

- Prepare a comprehensive report to the headteacher or complaints committee which includes the facts and potential solutions

4.3 The Complaints Co-ordinator

The complaints co-ordinator can be:

- The headteacher.
- The designated complaints governor.
- Any other staff member providing administrative support.

The complaints co-ordinator will:

- Keep the complainant up to date at each stage in the procedure.
- Make sure the process runs smoothly by liaising with staff members, the headteacher, chair of governors, clerk and Local Authority.
- Be aware of issues relating to:
 - Sharing third-party information.
 - Additional support needed by complainants; for example, interpretation support or where the complainant is a child or young person

4.4 Clerk to the governing board

The clerk will:

- Be the contact point for the complainant and the complaints committee, including circulating the relevant papers and evidence before complaints committee meetings
- Arrange the complaints hearing
- Record and circulate the minutes and outcome of the hearing

4.4 Committee chair

The committee chair will:

- Chair the meeting, ensuring that everyone is treated with respect throughout
- Make sure all parties see the relevant information, understand the purpose of the committee, and are allowed to present their case

5. 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.

5.1 Time scales

The complainant must raise the complaint within 3 months of the incident. If the complaint is about a series of related incidents, they must raise the complaint within 3 months of the last incident.

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.

When complaints are made out of term time, we will consider them to have been received on the first school day after the holiday period.

If at any point we cannot meet the time scales we have set out in this policy, we will:

- Set new time limits with the complainant
- Send the complainant details of the new deadline and explain the delay

6. Stages of complaint (not complaints against the Headteacher or a Governor)

Stage 1: Informal Concerns

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 concern as soon as possible with the relevant member of staff or the Headteacher.

Concerns can be raised via the school website and submitted by completing the form below.

[Parent Concern Form](#)

The school will acknowledge informal concerns within 5 working days and investigate and provide a response within 10 working days of the acknowledgement.

The informal stage will involve a meeting between the complainant and the relevant teacher e.g. subject teacher, form tutor, Head of Year or Curriculum Leader as appropriate.

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

Stage 2: Formal

Inform the Headteacher in writing within 10 working days of the informal meeting

This complaint should provide 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.

Complaints can be raised via the school website and submitted by completing the form below.

[Parental Complaint Form](#)

The Headteacher (or designated member of the senior leadership team) will call a meeting within 5 working days of receiving the written formal complaint to clarify concerns and seek a resolution. 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 accompaniment.

The Headteacher (or other person appointed by the Headteacher for this purpose) will then conduct their own investigation. The written conclusion and any actions taken (except where this would involve taking any formal

action against individual members of staff which would remain confidential of this investigation, will be sent to the complainant within 20 working days.

At this stage the complainant will be told that consideration of the complaint by the Headteacher is now concluded. The complainant will also be informed that if they are not satisfied with the manner in which the process has been followed, they may request that the Governors Complaints Review Panel (Stage 3) will review the process followed by the Headteacher in handling the complaint.

This request must be made to the Chair of Governors within 10 school days of receiving the outcome from the Headteacher and must include a statement specifying reasons for the request for the review and any perceived failures arising from the investigation process followed.

Stage 3: The Review Panel

Complaints will be escalated to the panel hearing stage if the complainant is not satisfied with the response to the complaint at the second, formal, stage.

The role of the Stage 3 Review Panel is to review the actions and supporting evidence of the Stage 2 investigation. The Panel is not permitted to do the following:

- To re-investigate the complaint.
- To reach a definite view on a point of law.
- To criticise the complaint for any “contributory negligence” that may have contributed to the difficulties.
- To be an alternative to a disciplinary hearing, as far as staff are concerned.
- To hear any new complaints (except if it relates to the length of time taken to deal with the substantive complaint).

Any review of the process followed by the Headteacher, Chair of Governors or the investigating governor shall be by a panel of at least three people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint. Where there is a panel hearing of a complaint, one panel member is to be independent of the management and running of the school.

The review will normally be conducted through a consideration of written evidence but any requests received from the complainant to make an oral representation should be considered sympathetically. The panel will consider the letter from the complainant and if needed request that the complainant submit in writing (within a reasonable timescale) any further information needed by them relating to their reasons for requesting a review and any perceived failures arising from the investigation process followed. The Headteacher or investigating governor will be required to make a written response to the complainant’s submissions.

The panel will have access to the existing record of the complaint’s progress.

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 if they wish.

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 Headteacher.

The panel will inform those involved of the decision in writing within 10 working days of receipt by the clerk of the complainant's letter requesting a review.

7. Complaints against the Headteacher or a Governor

Complaints made against the Headteacher should be directed to the Chair of Governors.

Where a complaint is against the Chair of Governors or any member of the governing board, it should be made in writing to the clerk to the governing board in the first instance.

8. 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 Department for Education (DfE) who will check whether the complaint has been dealt with properly by the school. The DfE 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>

9. Persistent complaints

9.1 Unreasonably persistent complaints

Most complaints raised will be valid, and therefore we will treat them seriously. However, a complaint may become unreasonable if the person:

- Has made the same complaint before, and it's already been resolved by following the school's complaints procedure
- Makes a complaint that is obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific, defamatory or repetitive
- Insists on pursuing a complaint that is unfounded, or out of scope of the complaints procedure, beyond all reason
- Pursues a valid complaint, but in an unreasonable manner, e.g. refuses to articulate the complaint, refuses to co-operate with this complaints procedure, or insists that the complaint is dealt with in ways that are incompatible with this procedure and the timeframes it sets out
- Makes a complaint designed to cause disruption, annoyance or excessive demands on school time

- Seeks unrealistic outcomes, or a solution that lacks any serious purpose or value

Steps we will take

We will take every reasonable step to address the complainant's concerns and give them a clear statement of our position and their options. We will maintain our role as an objective arbiter throughout the process, including when we meet with individuals. We will follow our complaints procedure as normal (as outlined above) wherever possible.

If the complainant continues to contact the school in a disruptive way, we may put communications strategies in place. We may:

- Give the complainant a single point of contact via an email address
- Limit the number of times the complainant can make contact, such as a fixed number per term
- Ask the complainant to engage a third party to act on their behalf, such as [Citizens Advice](#)
- Put any other strategy in place as necessary

Stopping responding

We may stop responding to the complainant when all of these factors are met:

- We believe we have taken all reasonable steps to help address their concerns
- We have provided a clear statement of our position and their options
- The complainant contacts us repeatedly, and we believe their intention is to cause disruption or inconvenience

Where we stop responding, we will inform the individual that we intend to do so. We will also explain that we will still consider any new complaints they make.

In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, we will immediately inform the police and communicate our actions in writing. This may include barring an individual from our school site.

Communication strategy for persistent correspondents

If an individual's behaviour is causing a significant level of disruption, regardless of whether or not they have raised a complaint, we will implement a tailored communication strategy.

For example, we will:

- restrict the individual to a single point of contact via an email address
- limit the number of times they can make contact, such as a fixed number of contacts per term

However, regardless of the application of any communication strategy, the school will provide parents and carers with the information they are entitled to under The Education (Pupil Information) (England) Regulations 2005, within the statutory time frame.

Different procedures apply to freedom of information (FOI) and data protection (DP) correspondence.

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.

If a decision is made to stop responding, the complainant will be informed.

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 will therefore need to act to ensure they remain a safe place for pupils, staff and other members of their community.

If an individual's behaviour is a cause for concern, the Headteacher may ask them to leave school premises. In some cases, individuals can be barred from entering school premises. In the rare case of the Headteacher deciding to bar an individual from the site, the individual has the opportunity to express formally their views on a decision to bar.

The Headteacher's decision to bar will be reviewed by the Chair of Governors. They will 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 will be notified in writing, explaining:

- how long the bar will be in place
- when the decision will be reviewed

Once the school's appeal process has been completed, individuals may be able to apply to the Courts. Individuals wishing to exercise this option should seek independent legal advice.

9.2 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 there are new aspects, we will follow this procedure again.

9.3 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.

10. 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.

Records of formal complaints will be kept for 6+ 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.

11. Learning lessons

The Governing Body will review any underlying issues raised by complaints with the Headteacher 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.

12. Monitoring arrangements

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

The complaints records are logged and managed by Headteachers PA

This policy will be reviewed by the Headteacher / Pay & Personnel committee every 3 years At each review, the policy will be approved by the Full Governing Body.

13. 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