



Reedness Primary School

Complaints Policy



The school encourages feedback and opinions from pupils and parents. These are always welcome and can be an important learning tool for teachers and staff. It may not always be possible to act immediately but pupils and the school always benefit so please raise your concerns with the school.

Concerns

It is natural that parents may be concerned about an aspect of their child's education or welfare at school. The school welcomes enquiries from parents about any matter. Teachers and staff will explain the school practices, policies, and how they affect pupils. Most concerns will be handled by the class teacher or senior leadership i.e. the head teacher.

The usual format is to speak to the child's class teacher in the first instance, or to contact the school office to arrange an appointment to discuss your concern. At all times the staff will help to resolve a problem. If parents feel they must state their concern formally, the school has defined procedures for handling complaints.

Complaints

The procedure is to speak to the child's class teacher in the first instance, or contact the school office to arrange an appointment to discuss your complaint with whoever you wish. The school's complaint policy is based on the Local Authority and Department for Education guidelines when handling concerns and complaints and is outlined below. It would be unusual to deviate from these procedures but the school always retains discretion in these matters. If you would like a copy of Local Authority or Department for Education guidelines, or further advice, please ask at the school office.

If the school is unable to resolve your complaint, then you may refer it to the School Complaints Unit at the Department for Education (details below).

Complaints procedures

Our procedures for dealing with general concerns

Most concerns from parents, carers and others are handled under the following general procedures.

The procedure is divided into three stages:

Stage 1 aims to resolve the concern through informal contact at the appropriate level in school (as described on pages 2 and 3 of this guidance).

Stage 2 is the first formal stage at which written complaints are considered by the headteacher (or a designated governor, if the complaint is about the headteacher), who has responsibility for dealing with complaints.

Stage 3 is the next stage once Stage 2 has been worked through. It involves a review by the Chair of governors, who may then convene a complaints review panel of governors.

How each of these stages operates is explained below:

Stage 1 – Your initial contact with the school

1. Many concerns will be dealt with informally when you make them known to us. The first point of contact should be your child's class teacher.
2. We will see you, or contact you by telephone or in writing, as soon as possible after your concern is made known to us. All members of staff know how to refer, if necessary, to the appropriate person with responsibility for issues raised by you, and the school retains the right to involve any/all relevant staff at any stage of the process. Your contact will make a clear note of the details and will check later to make sure that the matter has been followed up.
3. We will ensure that you are clear what action or monitoring of the situation, if any, has been agreed. We will confirm this in writing to you.
4. We will ensure that we speak directly to all appropriate persons who may be able to assist us with our enquiries into your concern.
5. We will discuss with you (normally within ten school days) the progress of our enquiries. You will have the opportunity of asking for the matter to be considered further, once we have responded to your concern.
6. If you are still dissatisfied following this informal approach, your concern will become a formal complaint and we will deal with it at the next stage.

Stage 2 – Formal consideration of your complaint

This stage in our procedures deals with written complaints. It applies where you are not happy with the informal approach to dealing with your concern, as outlined under Stage 1 above.

1. Normally, your written complaint should be addressed to the headteacher. If, however, your complaint concerns the headteacher personally, it should be sent to the school marked "For the attention of the Chair of Governors".
2. We will acknowledge your complaint in writing as soon as possible after receiving it. This will be within three school days.
3. We will enclose a copy of these procedures with the acknowledgement.
4. Normally we would expect to respond in full within ten school days but if this is not possible we will write to explain the reason for the delay and let you know when we hope to be able to provide a full response.

5. As part of our consideration of your complaint, we may invite you to a meeting to discuss the complaint and fill in any details required. If you wish, you can ask someone to accompany you to help you explain the reasons for your complaint.
6. The headteacher, or Chair of Governors may also be accompanied by a suitable person if they wish.
7. Following the meeting, the headteacher or Chair of Governors will, where necessary, talk to witnesses and take statements from others involved. If the complaint centres on a pupil, we will talk to the pupil concerned and, where appropriate, others present at the time of the incident in question.
8. We will normally talk to pupils with a parent or carer present, unless this would delay the investigation of a serious or urgent complaint, or where a pupil has specifically said that he or she would prefer the parent or carer not to be involved. In such circumstances, we will ensure that another member of staff, with whom the pupil feels comfortable, is present.
9. If the complaint is against a member of staff, it will be dealt with under the school's internal confidential procedures, as required by law.
10. The headteacher or Chair of Governors will keep written/typed, signed and dated records of all meetings and telephone conversations, and other related documentation.
11. Once we have established all the relevant facts, we will send you a written response to your complaint. This will give a full explanation of the headteacher's and/or Chair of Governors' decision and the reasons for it. If follow-up action is needed, we will indicate what we are proposing to do. We may invite you to a meeting to discuss the outcome as part of our commitment to building and maintaining good relations with you.
12. If you are not satisfied with the outcome of the Stage 2 investigation and the schools findings, you may wish to proceed to Stage 3, as described below.

Stage 3 – Consideration by a complaints review panel

- If your concern has already been through Stages 1 and 2 and you are not happy with the outcome, then you can write to the Chair of Governors, who will review the complaint and undertake an investigation, unless this was previously carried out at Stage 2 in the case of a headteacher complaint. The Chair of Governors may then nominate and instruct a Clerk to set up a complaints review panel to consider it. This is a formal process, and your ultimate recourse at school level.
- The purpose of this arrangement is to give your complaint a hearing in front of a panel of governors who have no prior knowledge of the details of the complaint and who can, therefore, consider it without prejudice.
- The aim of a complaints review panel is to resolve the complaint and to achieve reconciliation between the school and the parent. We recognise, however, that it may sometimes only be possible to establish facts and make recommendations which will reassure you that we have taken your complaint seriously.
- Before escalating your complaint to Stage 3, it is important to consider the following points:
 - To ensure the process is fair for all parties, you must agree to keep details confidential until the complaint is resolved or closed. Failure to do so could compromise your complaint.

- Convening and carrying out a complaints review panel is a considerable undertaking for the school, which can impact upon class teaching and therefore other children. We ask that you are confident in proceeding with the complaint for the right reasons and have a clear, constructive outcome in mind.

The complaints review panel operates per the following formal procedures:

1. The Chair of Governors will ask for at least three members of the governing body to form a complaints panel and appoint one of the members as Panel Chair to act on their behalf (if the Chair of Governors' is unable to participate in the panel due to prior involvement in the complaint). It will be the Panel Chair's remit to chair the hearings and ensure the review process is fair, professional and compliant with policy.
2. The clerk to the complaints panel will aim to arrange for the panel meeting to take place **within 20 school days**.
3. The clerk will ask you whether you wish to provide any **further written documentation** in support of your complaint. You can include witness statements, or ask witnesses to give evidence in person, if you wish.
4. The headteacher will be asked to prepare a **written report** for the panel. Other members of staff directly involved in matters raised in your complaint will also be asked to prepare reports or statements.
5. The clerk will inform you, the headteacher and any relevant witnesses and members of the panel by letter, at least **five school days** in advance of the date, time and place of the meeting. We hope that you will feel comfortable with the meeting taking place in the school; but we will do what we can to make alternative arrangements if you prefer.
6. With the letter, the clerk will send you all relevant correspondence, reports and documentation about the complaint and ask whether you wish to submit **further written evidence** to the panel prior to the hearing.
7. The letter will explain what will happen at the panel hearing and the clerk will also inform you that **you are entitled to be accompanied** to the meeting. The choice of person to accompany you is your own, but it is usually best to involve someone in whom you have confidence but who is not directly connected with the school. They are there to give you support but also to witness the proceedings and to speak on your behalf if you wish.
8. With the agreement of the Panel Chair, the headteacher may invite **members of staff** directly involved in matters raised by you to attend the meeting.
9. The Panel Chair will bear in mind that the formal nature of the meeting can be intimidating for you and will do his or her best to **put you at your ease**.
10. As a general rule, no evidence or witnesses **previously undisclosed** should be introduced into the meeting by any of the participants. If either party wishes to do so, the meeting will be adjourned so that the other party has a fair opportunity to consider and respond to the new evidence.
11. The Panel Chair will ensure that the meeting is properly **minuted**. Please understand that any decision to share the minutes with you, the complainant, is a matter for the panel's discretion and you do not have an automatic right to see or receive a copy. Since such minutes usually name individuals, they are understandably of a sensitive and, therefore, confidential nature.

12. Normally, the written outcome of the panel meeting, which will be sent to you, should give you all the information you require. If, however, you feel that you would like to have a **copy of the minutes** it would be helpful if you could indicate this in advance. If the panel is happy for the minutes to be copied to you, the clerk can then be asked maintain confidentiality in the minutes.
13. During the meeting the panel will hear evidence from: you (the complainant), the head teacher, any relevant staff and any other nominated witnesses (subject to the chair's approval). In order to put everyone at ease and to avoid creating an emotionally charged atmosphere each party will be heard individually and will have **30 minutes** to present their evidence to the panel.
14. Once all submitted evidence has been reviewed and hearings have taken place, the complaints review panel will then begin to consider an outcome to the complaint in private.
15. The panel will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented in order to:
 1. reach a unanimous, or at least a majority, decision on the complaint;
 2. decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint;
 3. recommend, where appropriate, to the governing body changes to the school's systems or procedures to ensure that similar problems do not happen again.
16. The panel will, at the discretion of the Panel Chair, share its findings with the headteacher and Chair of Governors' if its decision would likely have an impact upon the school or governing body (e.g. to check legal/statutory compliance prior to making any recommendations).
17. Once a decision has been reached, the clerk will send you, the Chair of Governor's and the headteacher a written statement outlining the decision of the panel **within 10 school days**. The letter will explain what further recourse, beyond the governing body, is available to you. In rare cases, the complaints panel may request further evidence or statements necessary to reach a decision. In any event, it must provide a final decision within the allotted time frame unless all parties agree to an extension.
18. We will keep a copy of all correspondence and notes on file in the school's records but separate from pupils' personal records.

Closure of complaints

- Very occasionally, a school will feel that it needs, regretfully, to close a complaint where the complainant is still dissatisfied.
- We will do all we can to help to resolve a complaint against the school but sometimes it is simply not possible to meet all of the complainant's wishes. Sometimes it is simply a case of "agreeing to disagree".
- If a complainant persists in making representations to the school – to the headteacher, designated governor, chair of governors or anyone else – this can be extremely time-consuming and can detract from our responsibility to look after the interests of all the children in our care.
- For this reason, we are entitled to close correspondence (including personal approaches, as well as letters and telephone calls) on a complaint where we feel that we have taken all reasonable action to resolve the complaint.

Other sources of information and advice

The Department of Education has published guidance – Best practice Advice for School Complaints Procedures 2016 – which the school adheres to.

For more information go to <https://www.gov.uk/complain-about-school/state-schools>

What happens if you're not happy with the outcome?

The Role of the School Complaints Unit

If a complaint has completed the local procedures and the complainant remains dissatisfied, they have the right to refer their complaint to the Secretary of State. The Secretary of State has a duty to consider all complaints raised but will only intervene where the governing body has acted unlawfully or unreasonably and where it is expedient or practical to do so.

The School Complaints Unit (SCU) considers complaints relating to LA maintained schools in England on behalf of the Secretary of State. The SCU will look at whether the complaints policy and any other relevant statutory policies were adhered to. The SCU also looks at whether statutory policies adhere to education legislation. However, the SCU will not normally re-investigate the substance of the complaint. This remains the responsibility of schools.

The SCU will not overturn a school's decision about a complaint except in exceptional circumstances where it is clear the school has acted unlawfully or unreasonably. If the SCU finds that the school has not handled a complaint in accordance with its procedure, we may request that the complaint is looked at again.

If legislative or policy breaches are found, the SCU will report them to the school and the complainant, and where necessary, ask for corrective action to be taken. The SCU normally also seeks written assurances as to future conduct. Failure to carry out remedial actions or provide written assurances could ultimately result in a formal Direction being issued by the Secretary of State in accordance with her powers under sections 496 and 497 of the Education Act 1996.

If you are unhappy with the outcome or your complaint, or the way it has been handled at school level, you can contact the Secretary of State at the following address:

Department for Education,
School Complaints Unit,
2nd floor,
Piccadilly Gate,
Store Street,
Manchester,
M1 2WD

You should enclose a copy of any correspondence with the school or governing body. The School Complaints Unit (SCU) considers complaints relating to maintained school on behalf of the Secretary of State. The SCU will look at whether the complaints policy and other relevant statutory policies were adhered to. However, the SCU will not normally re-investigate the complaint and will not overturn the school's decision except in exceptional circumstances.

If you should need to refer to the full procedures and government guidance, please ask at the school office. All staff are familiar with the guidelines and have a duty to help parents needing advice. Please don't feel you are making a fuss. These procedures have been carefully compiled and their reference, however rare, is routine to help pupils, parents and the school.

Further information can be obtained from the SCU by calling the National Helpline on **0370 000 2288** or going online at: www.education.gov.uk/help/contactus.

Review and Monitoring:

This policy will be reviewed by the Governing Body.

Date: September 2023

Date to be reviewed: September, 2025

Approved by: Governing Body

Signed: M.Herbert

Appendix 1

Complaints not in scope of the procedure

The complaints procedure cover all complaints about any provision of facilities or services that the school provides with the **exceptions** listed below, for which there are separate (statutory) procedures.

Exceptions	Who to contact
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Admissions to schools• Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs (SEN)• School re-organisation proposals• Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation	Concerns should be raised direct with local authorities (LA). For school admissions, the admissions authority is the Local Authority Complaints about admission appeals for maintained schools are dealt with by the Local Government Ombudsman.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Exclusion of children from school	Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at: www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions .
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Whistleblowing	Schools have an internal whistleblowing procedure for their employees and voluntary staff. Other concerns can be raised direct with Ofsted by telephone on: 0300 123 3155, via email at: whistleblowing@ofsted.gov.uk or by writing to: WBHL, Ofsted Piccadilly Gate Store Street Manchester M1 2WD. The Department for Education is also a prescribed body for whistleblowing in education.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Staff grievances and disciplinary procedures	These matters will invoke the school's internal grievance procedures.

	Complainants will not be informed of the outcome of any investigation.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Complaints about services provided by other providers who may use school premises or facilities.	Providers should have their own complaints procedure to deal with complaints about service. They should be contacted direct.