



# COMPLAINTS POLICY



**TO BE REVIEWED BY NOVEMBER 2026**

## Contents

1. Aims
2. Legislation and guidance
3. Definitions and scope
4. Roles and responsibilities
5. Principles for investigation
6. Stages of complaint (not complaints against the headteacher or governors)
7. Complaints against the headteacher, a governor or the governing board
8. Referring complaints on completion of the school's procedure
9. Persistent complaints
10. Record keeping
11. Learning lessons
12. Monitoring arrangements
13. Links with other policies

Complaint form

Complaint flowchart

---

## 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

This complaints procedure is not limited to parents or carers of children that are registered at the school. Any person, including members of the public, may make a complaint to Elmley Castle First School about any provision of facilities or services that we provide.

We take concerns seriously and will make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible. 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 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 unreasonable complaints.

In addition, it addresses duties set out in the [Early Years Foundation Stage statutory framework](#) with regard 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".

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/conduct
- School re-organisation proposals
- Curriculum
- Collective worship

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

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
- Co-operate with the school throughout the process, and respond to deadlines and communication promptly
- 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 Chair of Governors
- 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
- Keep records

### 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

## 4.5 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

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. 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 next schoolday.

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

### 5.2 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](mailto: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 on a regular basis.

### 5.3 Resolving complaints

At each stage in the procedure we want 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 and an indication of the timescales within which any changes will be made;
  - an undertaking to review school policies in light of the complaint.
-

Complainants will be 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.

We will identify areas of agreement between the parties, clarify any misunderstandings that might have occurred and so create a positive atmosphere in which to discuss any outstanding issues.

If a complainant wants to withdraw their complaint, we will ask them to confirm this in writing.

## 6. Stages of complaint (not complaints against the headteacher or a governor)

### 6.1 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 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. Complainants **must not** approach individual governors to raise concerns or complaints. Governors have no power to act on an individual basis and it may also prevent the governor/governors from considering complaints at Stage 2 of the policy.

The school will acknowledge informal complaints within seven days, and investigate and provide a response within fourteen days.

The informal stage will involve a meeting between the complainant and the headteacher or the subject of the complaint, as appropriate.

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

### 6.2 Stage 2: formal

Formal complaints can be raised:

- By letter or email
- Over the phone  
In person
- By a third party acting on behalf of the complainant

The complainant 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. The school complaint form may be used and can be found in Annex A. If complainants need assistance raising a formal complaint, they can contact the school office or clerk to the governors. You can also ask third party organisations like the Citizens Advice to help you. We will not normally investigate anonymous complaints. However, the headteacher or Chair of Governors, if appropriate, will determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation.

In accordance with equality law, we will consider making reasonable adjustments if required, to enable complainants to access and complete this complaints procedure. For instance, providing information in alternative formats, assisting complainants in raising a formal complaint or holding meetings in accessible locations.

The headteacher will record the date the complaint is received and will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 5 school days.

The headteacher (or designated member of the senior leadership team) will call a meeting to clarify concerns, agree the specific focus of the complaint and seek a resolution – all parties should be clear on the focus of the complaint. 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 headteacher (or other person appointed by the headteacher for this purpose) will then conduct their own investigation. The written conclusion of this investigation will be sent to the complainant within twenty-one days.

If the complainant wishes to proceed to the next stage of the procedure, they should inform the clerk to the governors within twenty-eight days.

### **How to escalate a complaint**

Complaints can be escalated by contacting the clerk to the governing board:

- By letter or email
- Over the phone
- In person
- Through a third party acting on behalf of the complainant

The complainant 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 stage of the procedure has not addressed their complaint sufficiently.

The written conclusion of this investigation will be sent to the complainant within twenty-eight days.

If the complainant wishes to proceed to the next stage of the procedure, they should inform the chair of governors in writing within fourteen days. Requests received outside of this time frame will be considered in exceptional circumstances.

The clerk will acknowledge receipt of the request within 10 school days.

## **6.3 Stage 3: submit the complaint to the review panel**

### **Convening the panel**

The review panel consists of the first 3 members of the governing board available, who don't have direct knowledge of the complaint. These individuals will have access to the existing record of the complaint's progress (see section 10). The governors will select a panel chair from amongst themselves.

If not enough impartial governors are available, we will seek panel members from other schools, the local authority or the diocese. We will make sure the governors we source are suitably skilled and can demonstrate that they are independent and impartial.

The complainant must have reasonable notice of the date of the review panel. The clerk will aim to find a date within 20 school days of the request, where possible. If the complainant rejects the offer of 3 proposed dates without good reason, the clerk will set a date. The hearing will go ahead using written submissions from both parties.

Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least 5 school days before the date of the meeting.

### **At the meeting**

The meeting will be held in private. Electronic recordings of meetings or conversations are not normally permitted unless a complainant's own disability or special needs require it. Prior knowledge and consent of all parties attending will be sought before meetings or conversations take place. Consent will be recorded in any minutes taken.

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. Please note that the accompanying person will not be able to contribute to the meeting.

We don't encourage either party to bring legal representation, but will consider it on a case-by-case basis. For instance, if a school employee is called as a witness in a complaint meeting, they may wish to be supported by their union.

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

---

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 **will not** accept, as evidence, recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being

---

recorded. The panel will also not review any new complaints at this stage or consider evidence unrelated to the initial complaint.

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 will 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 headteacher.

The school will inform those involved of the decision in writing within twenty-eight days.

### **The outcome**

The committee can:

- Uphold the complaint, in whole or in part
- Dismiss the complaint, in whole or in part
- If the complaint is upheld, the committee will:
  - Decide the appropriate action to resolve the complaint
  - Where appropriate, recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future

## **7. Complaints against the headteacher or a governor or the governing body**

### **7.1 Stage 1: informal**

Complaints made against the headteacher or any member of the governing board should be directed to the clerk to the governing board in the first instance.

If the complaint is about the headteacher or one member of the governing board (including the chair or vice-chair), a suitably-skilled and impartial governor will carry out the steps at stage 1 (set out in section 6 above).

### **7.2 Stage 2: formal**

If the complaint is jointly about the chair and vice-chair, the entire governing board or the majority of the governing board, an independent investigator will carry out the steps in stage 2 (set out in section 6 above). They will be appointed by the governing board or diocese, and will write a formal response at the end of their investigation.

### **7.3 Stage 3: review panel**

If the complaint is jointly about the chair and vice-chair, the entire governing board or the majority of the governing board, a committee of independent governors will hear the complaint. They will be sourced from local schools, the local authority or diocese and will carry out the steps at stage 3 (set out in section 6 above).

## **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 DfE.

The DfE will not re-investigate the matter of the complaint. It will look at whether the school's complaints policy and any other relevant statutory policies that the school holds were adhered to. The DfE also looks at whether the school's statutory policies adhere to education legislation.

The DfE will intervene where a school has:

- Failed to act in line with its duties under education law
  - Acted (or is proposing to act) unreasonably when exercising its functions
-

If the 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>

We will include this information in the outcome letter to complainants.

## 9. 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 (including on social media)

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.

### 9.1 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, refused to cooperate with this complaints procedure, or insists that the complaint is dealt with in ways that are incompatible with this procedure and the time frames 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 communication 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.

## 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 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.

## 9.4 Barring from the School Premises

Although fulfilling a public function, schools are private places. The public has no automatic right of entry. Schools will therefore act to ensure they remain a safe place for pupils, staff and other members of their community. If a parent's behaviour is a cause for concern, a school can ask him/her to leave school premises. In serious cases, the headteacher or the local authority can notify them in writing that their implied licence to be on school premises has been temporarily revoked subject to any representations that the parent may wish to make. Schools should always give the parent the opportunity to formally express their views on the decision to bar in writing. The decision to bar should then be reviewed, taking into account any representations made by the parent, and either confirmed or lifted. If the decision is confirmed the parent should be notified in writing, explaining how long the bar will be in place. Anyone wishing to complain about being barred can do so, by letter or email, to the headteacher or Chair of Governors. However, complaints about barring cannot be escalated to the Department for Education. Once the school's own complaints procedure has been completed, the only remaining avenue of appeal is through the Courts; independent legal advice must therefore be sought.

---

## 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 complaints will be kept for 6 years in line with data protection law and our privacy notices (unless there is another legal requirement).

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/senior leadership team, 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. The governing body will track the number and nature of complaints, and review underlying issues as stated in section 11.

The complaints records are logged and managed by the headteacher. This policy will be reviewed by the Headteacher every year.

At each review, the policy will be approved by the Business Management Committee.

## 13. Links with other policies

Policies dealing with other forms of complaints include:

- Child protection and safeguarding policy and procedures
  - Admissions policy
  - Behaviour, anti-bullying and exclusions policy
  - Staff grievance procedures
  - Staff disciplinary procedures
  - SEND policy and information report
  - Privacy notices
-

## Annex A – Complaint Form

*Please complete and return to The Head Teacher who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.*

Your Name:	
Pupil's name (if relevant):	
Your relationship to the pupil (if relevant):	
Address:	
Daytime 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. (Whom did you speak to, when, and what was the response)?	

What actions do you feel might resolve the problem?

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

Signature:

Date:

**Official use**

Date acknowledgement

sent:

Sent by whom:

Complaint referred to:

Date:

Complaints Flow Chart

