



# Rossmere Primary School

## Complaints Policy

Approved by:

Date:

Role:

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## Introduction

At Rossmere Primary School we have a strong commitment towards working in positive partnership with the whole school community. A school is a busy place where there are many interactions between pupils, parents/carers and staff as part of the everyday life of the school. We have an ethos of respecting the rights of all members of the school community and as part of our curriculum teaching, we work to instil this in our pupils. From time to time something may go wrong, or you may think we can do something better. Where any concerns are raised, we aim to resolve these as quickly and as efficiently as possible. Usually concerns that are raised can be resolved very quickly through the school's day to day communication between parents and the school staff without anxiety and in the knowledge that concerns and complaints will be treated seriously, impartially and, except where disclosure is legally required, confidentially. Where a parent may feel that an issue has not been dealt with appropriately it is important, for all involved, that there is a clear and transparent process for a complaint to be looked into and followed up.

This procedure is available to all parents via the school's website. This policy can also be made available in a different language or more accessible format, on request. The school will make such reasonable adjustments as necessary to the complaints procedure to ensure it is readily accessible to those people with a disability.

The kinds of issues that might lead to a formal complaint being made may include:

- The school environment
- Staff conduct
- Bullying
- Discrimination on the grounds of race or gender

In each of these cases the responsibility for action lies with the school. In some cases, a complaint may lead to a disciplinary or an appeal against a decision in which case it may be appropriate for the issue to be dealt with separately from the complaints procedure.

The complaints procedure cannot deal with complaints for which procedures already exist for dealing with each of the following issues:

- Admissions
- Child Protection and Safeguarding matters
- Disciplinary issues relating to members of staff (although sometimes this may come about as a result of a complaint).
- Exclusions
- National Curriculum - content
- School re-organisation proposals
- Staff grievances
- Staff discipline
- Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs

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

## **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 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.

## **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 regards to dealing with complaints about the school's fulfilment of Early Years Foundation Stage requirements.

## **3. Definitions and scope**

### **3.1 Definitions**

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.

Arrangements for handling complaints from parents of children with special educational needs (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.

## **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 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 next school day.

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 10) 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.

## **6. Stages of complaint (not complaints against the headteacher or governors)**

### **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 on 01429 274608 or email [admin@rossmereschool.org.uk](mailto:admin@rossmereschool.org.uk)

The school will acknowledge informal complaints within 5 school days, and investigate and provide a response within 10 school days.

The informal stage will involve a meeting between the complainant and the headteacher. 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, and what they feel would resolve the complaint.

If complainants need assistance raising a formal complaint, they can contact the school office on 01429 274608 or by email [admin@rossmereschool.org.uk](mailto:admin@rossmereschool.org.uk)

The headteacher (or designated member of the senior leadership team) will call a meeting 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 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 10 school days.

If the complainant wishes to proceed to the next stage of the procedure, they should inform the clerk to the governing board within 5 school 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 clerk will need the details of the complaint as set out above, as well as details from the complainant on how they feel the previous stage of the procedure has not addressed their complaint sufficiently, and what they feel would resolve the complaint.

The written conclusion of this investigation will be sent to the complainant within 10 school days.

If the complainant wishes to proceed to the next stage of the procedure, they should inform the clerk to the governing board in writing within 10 school days. Requests received outside of this time frame will be considered in exceptional circumstances.

The clerk will acknowledge receipt of the request within 5 school days.

### **6.3 Stage 3: 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 panel will be appointed by or on behalf of the proprietor and must consist of at least 3 people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint. At least 1 panel member must be independent of the management and running of the school.

The panel cannot be made up solely of governing board members, as they are not independent of the management and running of the school.

The panel will have access to the existing record of the complaint's progress (see section 10).

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 will then put together its findings and recommendations from the case. The panel will also provide copies of the minutes of the hearing and 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 school will inform those involved of the decision in writing within 5 school days.



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

### **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 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 or the local authority 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 School Complaints Unit (SCU), which investigates complaints relating to maintained schools on behalf of the secretary of state.

The SCU 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 SCU also looks at whether the school's statutory policies adhere to education legislation. It may direct the school to re-investigate the complaint where it is clear the school has acted unlawfully or unreasonably.

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**

### **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

Knowingly provides false information

Insists on pursuing a complaint that is unfounded, or out of scope of the complaints procedure

Pursues a valid complaint, but in an unreasonable manner e.g. refuses to articulate the complaint, refused 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 time frames it sets out

Changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation goes on

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.

## **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.

## **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 through a subject access request 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 securely, only for as long as necessary and in line with data protection law, our privacy notices and records management policy.

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 and 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 HR & Data Manager

This policy will be reviewed and approved by the governing body every 2 years.

## **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 and information report
- Privacy notices