



Risby CEVC Primary School

Complaints Policy

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Approved by	Ben Ramsay, Chair of Governors
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Applies to	Risby CEVC Primary School

Inspired by the Parable of the Sower (Matthew 13), Risby CEVC Primary School provides the good soil where every child can Believe, Grow and Shine, flourishing in God's love.

1. Purpose and principles

Risby CEVC Primary School is committed to working in partnership with pupils, families and the wider community. We aim to deal with concerns and complaints fairly, promptly, respectfully and as close as possible to the point at which they arise.

Under section 29 of the Education Act 2002, the governing body of a maintained school must establish and publish procedures for dealing with complaints about the school and about community facilities or services provided by the school where no separate statutory procedure applies.

This procedure is intended to be simple to use, impartial and non-adversarial. It provides for a full and fair investigation, appropriate confidentiality, clear reasons for decisions and suitable redress where a complaint is upheld.

2. Definitions

A concern is an expression of worry or doubt about an issue for which reassurance or clarification is sought.

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about actions taken or a lack of action by the school.

Concerns should normally be resolved informally where possible. A complainant may, however, make a formal complaint where informal resolution is inappropriate or has not resolved the matter.

3. Who can complain?

This procedure is not limited to parents or carers of pupils currently registered at the school. Any person may complain about the provision of facilities or services by the school, unless a separate statutory procedure applies.

4. Matters outside the scope of this procedure

Some matters are dealt with under separate statutory or specialist procedures. Where that is the case, the school will explain the appropriate route. Examples include:

- school admissions and admission appeals;
- statutory assessments of special educational needs and certain SEND decisions made by the local authority;
- school suspensions and permanent exclusions, where statutory review arrangements apply;
- matters likely to require a child protection investigation or allegations of harm by a person working with children;
- staff grievances, disciplinary matters and capability procedures;
- whistleblowing by employees; and
- complaints about services provided by third parties using school premises, which should normally be made under the provider's own complaints procedure.

Where a complaint contains more than one issue, the school may use different procedures for different parts of the complaint and will explain this to the complainant.

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5. Accessibility, reasonable adjustments and support

The school will make reasonable adjustments where required so that complainants can access this procedure. This may include providing information in an alternative format, helping a complainant to set out their complaint, arranging an accessible meeting or permitting a companion or representative. Requests will be considered fairly and in accordance with equality law.

A complainant may be accompanied at meetings where this is reasonable. The school may decline a particular companion where there is a conflict of interest or another compelling reason, and will explain why.

6. Confidentiality and records

Complaints will be handled with an appropriate level of confidentiality. Information will be shared only where necessary to investigate or determine the complaint, meet legal obligations, safeguard children or enable appropriate governance oversight.

The school will keep an appropriate written record of formal complaints, decisions and actions taken, in accordance with its records management and data protection arrangements. Complaint records will normally be kept separately from a pupil's educational record unless information properly forms part of that record.

7. Time limits

Complaints should normally be raised within three months of the incident or, where a series of related incidents has occurred, within three months of the most recent incident. The school will consider complaints made outside this period where there are exceptional circumstances or another good reason to do so. It will not apply the time limit as a blanket bar.

Where the procedure gives a number of school days, school holidays and periods when the school is closed are not counted. If a published timescale cannot reasonably be met, the school will tell the complainant why and provide a revised deadline.

8. Overview of the procedure

The school encourages informal resolution before a formal complaint where appropriate. The formal procedure has two stages:

Step	Who deals with it	Outcome
Informal concern	Usually the class teacher or relevant member of staff	Attempt to resolve promptly
Stage 1 – formal complaint	Headteacher or other appropriate investigator	Written decision
Stage 2 – governing body complaints panel	Independent and impartial panel	Final school decision

Different arrangements apply where the complaint is about the Headteacher, a governor, the Chair/Vice-Chair, or the governing body. These are set out in section 12.

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9. Informal concerns

Concerns should normally be raised first with the class teacher or the member of staff most directly involved. Contact may be made by telephone, letter, email or by requesting a meeting. An appointment is recommended for matters that require discussion.

- The member of staff should establish the nature of the concern and what the person hopes will resolve it.
- A brief written note should be kept where appropriate, including any agreed actions.
- The school will try to resolve concerns promptly, while recognising that staff may need time to establish the facts.
- If the concern cannot be resolved informally, or informal resolution is inappropriate, the complainant may proceed to Stage 1.

Mediation or another informal resolution process may be offered where both sides consider it useful. It will not replace a proper investigation of a formal complaint and will not prevent a complainant progressing through the formal procedure.

10. Stage 1 – formal complaint

10.1 Making the complaint

A formal complaint should normally be made in writing to the Headteacher. The complaint form at Appendix 1 may be used, but its use is not compulsory. A complainant who has difficulty making a written complaint may ask the school for assistance.

The complaint should, as far as possible, state:

- what happened and when;
- who was involved;
- what has already been done to try to resolve the matter;
- any relevant evidence or witnesses; and
- what outcome or resolution is sought.

The school should acknowledge a formal complaint within five school days.

10.2 Investigation

The Headteacher may investigate personally or appoint an appropriate person to investigate. The investigator should:

- clarify the complaint and the issues that remain unresolved;
- establish what has happened and who has been involved;
- consider relevant documents and other evidence;
- speak to the complainant and other relevant people where necessary;
- conduct discussions with an open mind and give those complained about a fair opportunity to respond;
- keep an appropriate written record; and
- consider what action, if any, would provide a fair and proportionate resolution.

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10.3 Stage 1 outcome

The Headteacher will provide a written response normally within 15 school days of receiving the formal complaint. If this is not possible, the complainant will be told the reason for the delay and given a revised date.

The response will address the issues raised, give the conclusion and reasons, explain any action the school proposes to take where it is appropriate to disclose it, and explain how to request Stage 2 if the complainant remains dissatisfied.

Possible outcomes may include upholding the complaint in whole or in part, not upholding it, an apology, an explanation, an acknowledgement that something could have been handled differently, steps to prevent recurrence, or a review of practice or policy. An acknowledgement that something could have been handled better is not, by itself, an admission of negligence or unlawful action.

11. Stage 2 – governing body complaints panel

11.1 Requesting Stage 2

If the complainant remains dissatisfied after Stage 1, they may ask for the complaint to be considered by a complaints panel. The request should be sent in writing to the Clerk to the Governing Body within 10 school days of the Stage 1 decision and should explain why the complainant remains dissatisfied and the outcome sought.

The Clerk should acknowledge the request within five school days. A late request will be considered where there are exceptional circumstances or another good reason.

11.2 Panel composition and independence

The panel will normally consist of three governors or other suitably skilled people appointed in accordance with the law and applicable governance arrangements. No panel member may have had prior involvement in the complaint or circumstances that would give rise to a reasonable perception of bias. Where necessary, the school may seek suitably skilled independent governors from another school. The panel will select a Chair.

A complainant who believes there is likely to be bias may ask for an independent panel and should explain the reasons. The governing body will consider the request and whether the appearance of bias is sufficient to require different arrangements.

11.3 Arranging the meeting

The Clerk will seek to arrange the panel meeting within 20 school days of the Stage 2 request, subject to the availability of the parties and panel members. The Clerk will:

- agree a date, time and accessible venue or remote meeting arrangement as appropriate;
- set a reasonable deadline for submission of written evidence;
- circulate the complaint, Stage 1 response and relevant written material to the parties and panel, normally at least five school days before the meeting;
- ensure that any conflicts of interest are identified;

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- make an accurate written record of the proceedings; and
- communicate the panel's decision.

11.4 Conduct of the panel

The meeting will normally be held in private and conducted in a respectful, non-adversarial way. The purpose is to consider the complaint afresh, establish the relevant facts and reach a fair decision. It is not simply a review of whether Stage 1 followed the correct process.

The Chair will ensure that each party has a reasonable opportunity to explain their case, respond to the other party's case and answer questions. Witnesses may be invited where their evidence is relevant. New material raised at the meeting will be handled fairly; an adjournment may be offered if a party reasonably needs time to consider it.

If the school has made reasonable attempts to arrange a meeting and a complainant is unable or unwilling to attend, the panel may proceed in their absence where it is fair to do so.

11.5 Panel powers and decision

The panel may:

- dismiss the complaint in whole or in part;
- uphold the complaint in whole or in part;
- decide or recommend appropriate action to resolve the complaint; and
- recommend changes to systems, practice or policy to reduce the risk of similar problems recurring.

The panel will reach its decision in private. The complainant and the school will normally receive the panel's written decision, with reasons, within five school days of the meeting. The letter will explain that Stage 2 is the final stage of the school's complaints procedure and will provide information about further recourse to the Department for Education.

12. Complaints about the Headteacher or governors

To protect impartiality, the following arrangements apply:

Complaint about	Stage 1	Stage 2
Headteacher	A suitably skilled and impartial governor, normally the Chair or a governor nominated by the Chair	A panel of three impartial governors/eligible panel members with no prior involvement
Chair of Governors or an individual governor	The Clerk arranges consideration by a suitably skilled and impartial governor	A panel of three impartial governors/eligible panel members with no prior involvement
Chair and Vice-Chair together, or a majority of governors	The Clerk determines appropriate independent arrangements,	An appropriately independent panel, potentially including governors from other schools

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Complaint about	Stage 1	Stage 2
	which may include an independent investigator	
Entire governing body	The Clerk arranges an independent investigation	An appropriately independent panel, potentially including governors from other schools

Where the Chair has already been involved, correspondence should be addressed to the Clerk, who will make arrangements that preserve independence. Advice may be sought from the local authority governor services team or the Diocese where appropriate.

13. Safeguarding and allegations concerning adults working with children

Nothing in this procedure overrides the school's safeguarding duties. If information indicates that a child may be at risk of harm, the school will act under its safeguarding and child protection procedures and make any required referral without waiting for the complaints procedure to conclude.

Allegations that a member of staff or another adult working with children may have harmed a child, committed a criminal offence against or related to a child, behaved towards a child in a way that indicates they may pose a risk of harm, or behaved in a way that indicates they may not be suitable to work with children will be handled under the school's safeguarding procedures and the applicable local safeguarding/LADO arrangements. A complaint about the making of a safeguarding referral may consider whether the school acted appropriately on the information available at the time, but the complaints procedure will not be used to investigate suspected abuse or neglect.

14. Serial, persistent and unreasonable complaint behaviour

The school distinguishes between the merits of a complaint and the way in which a complaint is pursued. A person will not be treated as unreasonable simply because they are persistent, disagree with the school, or make a complaint that is not upheld.

Where behaviour becomes unreasonable, the school may take proportionate steps to manage contact. Examples may include:

- repeatedly raising substantially the same issue after the procedure has been completed and no material new evidence is provided;
- refusing to identify the substance of a complaint despite reasonable assistance;
- seeking outcomes that are unlawful or outside the school's power;
- excessive, repetitive or abusive communications that place an unreasonable demand on school resources;
- threatening, aggressive, discriminatory or harassing behaviour; or
- refusing to engage with reasonable arrangements designed to progress the complaint.

Before restricting contact, the school will normally explain the behaviour causing concern, ask for it to change and give notice of any proposed arrangements. Any restrictions will be proportionate, tailored to the circumstances, normally time-limited and subject to review. They may include using a single point of

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contact, limiting routine contact to a particular method or frequency, or requiring meetings to be arranged in advance with an additional member of staff present.

The school will not refuse to consider a legitimate new complaint merely because a person has previously displayed unreasonable behaviour. A complaint will not be labelled serial before the complainant has had a fair opportunity to complete the school's procedure, unless there is a compelling lawful reason to depart from it.

Threats, violence or conduct creating a safeguarding or security risk may be dealt with separately and immediately under the school's safety procedures and the law.

15. Complaints after the school procedure is complete

Once Stage 2 has concluded, the school's complaints procedure is exhausted. Suffolk County Council's published guidance states that complaints about individual schools are dealt with by the school rather than by the Council. The Council may provide general information about the process, but it is not an additional appeal stage in this policy.

A complainant who believes that a maintained school has not handled a complaint properly, is preventing completion of its procedure, or has acted unlawfully or unreasonably may be able to complain to the Department for Education. The Department for Education does not normally reinvestigate the underlying complaint simply because the complainant disagrees with the school's decision; its role includes considering whether relevant duties have been met and whether the complaint has been handled properly.

Current DfE service: [Complain about a school to the Department for Education](#)

16. Monitoring and review

The governing body will monitor themes and learning arising from complaints while respecting confidentiality. This policy will be reviewed by September 2027, or earlier if legislation, statutory guidance or relevant local arrangements change.

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Appendix 1 – Formal complaint form

You may use this form to make a Stage 1 formal complaint. You do not have to use the form. If you need help to make your complaint, please contact the school.

Your name:

Pupil's name (if relevant):

Your relationship to the pupil (if relevant):

Address:

Telephone number:

Email address:

Details of your complaint

Please describe what happened, including relevant dates, people and events.

Action already taken

Please explain who you have spoken to and what response you received.

Outcome sought

What action or resolution do you think would resolve the complaint?

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Evidence

Please list any documents or other evidence you are providing.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

School use

Date received: _____ Date acknowledged: _____

Complaint allocated to: _____

Appendix 2 – Stage 2 panel protocol

The following protocol supports section 11 and should be read with the main policy.

1. The Chair welcomes the parties, introduces everyone present, confirms the purpose of the meeting and checks that no panel member has a conflict of interest.
2. The complainant explains the complaint and the outcome sought. The panel and school representative may ask relevant questions.
3. The school representative explains the Stage 1 investigation, findings and response. The complainant and panel may ask relevant questions.
4. Relevant witnesses may be heard. Witnesses normally attend only for the part of the meeting in which they give evidence.
5. The Chair ensures that any remaining points are clarified and invites each party to make a brief closing statement.
6. All parties other than the panel and its adviser/Clerk withdraw. The panel considers the evidence and reaches its decision.
7. If the panel needs further clarification after retiring, both parties will normally be recalled so that the process remains fair.
8. The Clerk records the decision, reasons and any recommendations and sends the written outcome in accordance with section 11.5.

The Chair may vary the order where necessary to ensure fairness, accessibility and effective consideration of the issues. The meeting should remain inquisitorial rather than adversarial.

Appendix 3 – Managing unreasonable complaint behaviour

Where section 14 is engaged, the school should keep a written record of the reasons for any contact arrangements, the evidence relied upon, the duration of the arrangements and the date for review. The complainant should normally be told:

- what behaviour is considered unreasonable;
- what change is required;
- what contact arrangements will apply and for how long;
- how urgent or safeguarding matters can still be communicated;
- when the arrangements will be reviewed; and
- how they may make representations about the arrangements.

Model notification

Dear [name],

We are continuing to consider the issues you have raised under the school's Complaints Policy. We are writing separately about the way in which contact with the school is currently being managed.

Our concern is that [describe the specific behaviour factually, with dates/examples]. We have previously asked that [describe previous request or warning]. This behaviour is placing an unreasonable demand on the school / is affecting the wellbeing or safety of members of the school community [delete as appropriate].

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For the period from [date] to [review date], the following arrangements will apply: [set out proportionate arrangements]. These arrangements do not prevent you raising an urgent safeguarding matter or a legitimate new complaint.

We will review these arrangements on [date]. You may make written representations about them to [name/role].

Yours sincerely,

[Headteacher / Chair / authorised person]

Appendix 4 – Reference points used for this revision

This revision has been prepared with reference to the school's previous 2026 policy and the following current public guidance available at the date of revision:

- [Department for Education – School complaints procedures: guidance for maintained schools](#)
- [Department for Education – Best practice guidance for school complaints procedures](#)
- [Department for Education – Complain about a school](#)
- [Suffolk County Council – Making a complaint about a school](#)

This policy should be read alongside the school's safeguarding and child protection policy, staff conduct procedures, whistleblowing arrangements, SEND information and other relevant policies. Where current statutory guidance or legislation conflicts with this policy, the governing body should seek advice and update the policy promptly.