



Concerns and Complaints Policy 2022-2023

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Aims

Read Academy aims to establish and promote a close relationship with all parents/carers and the wider community, in the interest of the children. We recognise that children will feel more secure when they receive consistent messages from both home and school. Parents/carers view about our school is welcomed, included the expression of any concerns. At the same time, we undertake to inform parents/carers as soon as possible about any issues of concern to the school, so that we can work together to resolve them.

We recognise that from time-to-time parents and members of the public may have a concern that they wish to raise with the school. At Read Academy, we are committed to responding to a concern/complaint effectively and as quickly and sensitively as possible in order to resolve the issue promptly. We will do so with fairness to all parties in line with this procedure.

In accordance to part 7 paragraph 8.1 in the Independent School Standards April 2019. The proprietor must have and make available a procedure to deal with complaints relating to their school. Any third-party provider offering community facilities or services through the school premises, or using school facilities, have their own complaints procedure in place. A 'Concern' may be defined as 'an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurance are sought'. A complaint may be generally defined as 'an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action.

Concerns or complaints relating to any of the following are not covered by these procedures, as separate procedures apply (see Appendix 1):

- Child Protection
- Freedom of Information access
- Functions of the County Council
- Pupil Exclusions
- School Admissions
- Services provided by other organisations on the school site or through the school
- Staff grievance
- Special Educational Needs assessment and statementing procedure
- Whistleblowing by an employee

Serious complaints or allegations relating to the abuse of children, assault, criminal or financial matters are also subject to separate procedures.

Read Academy is committed to:

- Dealing with your concern as quickly as possible
- Keeping you informed of the progress of your concern
- Dealing with your concern in an impartial and non-adversarial way.
- Making sure that all of your concerns are considered and that a fair investigation is undertaken when necessary.
- Maintaining confidentiality at all times, however, where complaints are made about an individual member of school staff, the person will be informed of the complaint at the earliest opportunity.

What we do to avoid parental concerns arising:

At Read Academy we work closely with parents in order to keep you informed of all aspects of school life.

We have:

- A home school agreement on which to base strong, positive relationships.
- An open-door policy – members of the senior leadership team are available at the beginning and end of the day.
- A comment box for all feedback
- School email address usually checked within 48 hours (term-time only)
- Regular written communication about school events
- A school app
- A school website
- A written report for parents/guardians about your child every half term/term

Stages in the Procedure

The school expects concerns/complaints to be made as soon as possible after an incident arises (although the school will consider complaints lodged within three months of the incident taking place). Concerns/complaints can be made in person, by telephone or in writing. Brief notes of meetings and telephone calls will be kept. Where there are communication difficulties, we may use a recording device to ensure the complainant is able to access and review the discussion at a later point.

The school will ask the complainant at the earliest stage what they think might resolve the issue (an acknowledgement that the school could have handled the situation better is not the same as an admission of unlawful or negligent action)

Complaints made by members of the public will be directed to the relevant member of staff and senior leader. Parental concerns should be addressed the following way:

Stage 1: Discussion with class teacher

- It is our view that it is in everyone's interest that any concerns are resolved at the earliest opportunity by a meeting with your child's class teacher.
- We find that most issues can be satisfactorily addressed this way.
- Class teachers are available to meet parents/guardians, by appointment, at the end of the school day (morning appointments are sometimes available).
- This stage should take no more than 10 working days, if not concluded complainant may proceed to stage 2.

Stage 2: Discussion with the Senior Leader

- If you feel that stage 1 has not adequately addressed your concern, or, if for whatever reason, you do not wish to discuss your complaint with the class teacher, you can make an appointment to meet with the relevant senior leader:
- The staff in the school office can liaise on your behalf if you do not know who the relevant staff member is.
- Senior leaders are available to meet parents/carers, by appointment, at the end of the school day. (Morning appointments are sometimes available)
- This stage should take no more than 10 working days, if not concluded, complainant may proceed to stage 3.

We expect the majority of concerns will be resolved in this way (and will not be recorded as a formal complaint). However, if the concern is not resolved during Stage 1 or Stage 2, the following formal procedure will be adhered to:

Stage 3: Discussion with a member of the Headship Team

- If you feel that stage 2 has not adequately addressed your concern, or, if for whatever reason, you do not think it is appropriate to discuss your concern with the class teacher or senior leader, you can make an appointment with the Headship. This may be the Headteacher or the

Deputy Headteacher and will be determined by the nature of your concern and the availability of staff.

Our main aim is for concerns to be shared so that they can be resolved quickly. After meeting with you, the Headteacher or Deputy Headteacher will decide on the appropriate course of action, for example:

- To refer the matter back to the class teacher or senior leader for further discussion under the earlier stages.
- To agree with you a resolution to your concern.
- To conduct an investigation into your concern before deciding the outcome.

In the event of an investigation, the Headteacher or Deputy Headteacher will write to you with the outcome once it has been concluded, which may be one of the following:

- There isn't sufficient evidence to reach a conclusion so the complaint cannot be upheld.
- The concern is not substantiated by the evidence.
- The concern was not substantiated in part or full (some details may then be given of action the school may be taking to review procedures, but details of any disciplinary procedures will not be released).
- The matter has been fully investigated and that appropriate procedures are being followed, which are not strictly confidential (e.g. where staff disciplinary procedures are being followed).
- This stage will take no more than 10 school days to complete. All records will be retained by the school for monitoring purposes.

Stage 4: Referral to the Chair of Governors

- If you feel that stage 3 has not adequately addressed your concern then you can write to the Chair of Governors preferably using the formal complaint form attached to this document (someone else may write this on behalf of the complainant) or in any other written form. You should include details which might assist the investigation, such as names of potential witnesses, dates and times of events and copies of relevant documents.

- It is very important that you include a clear statement of the actions that you like the school to take to resolve your concern. Without this, it is much more difficult to proceed.
- Please pass the completed paperwork, in a sealed envelope to the school office for the attention of the Headteacher or to the Chair of Governing body, as appropriate.
- A complainant wishing to proceed to the formal stage of the procedure should normally notify the Headteacher/Chair of Governors within 20 school days of being notified of the outcome of the informal stage.
- The chair of Governors will consider your complaint and then decide on the appropriate course of action, for example:
 - *to meet with you (you may be accompanied by a friend – not a member of the legal profession or the media – if you wish, to assist you in explaining the nature of your concerns)*
 - *to conduct an investigation into the concern*
 - *to convene a panel of Governors to formally hear your concern.*
- The chair of Governors will write to you with the outcome of stage 4 once concluded. They will also inform the complainant that they have the right to appeal to the Complaints Appeal Committee within 20 school days.
- This stage will take no more than 20 school days to complete. All records will be retained by the school for monitoring purposes. Complainants have rights to copies of these records under the freedom of information and data protection acts. The governing body will be informed in general terms of all formal complaints.

Complaints concerning the Headteacher

- If you wish to make a complaint concerning the Headteacher, and it cannot be resolved via informal discussion with the Headteacher, then you should write to the Chair of Governors in line with Stage 4 of this procedure.

Complaints about a governor, the Chair of Governors or the Governing Body

- Complaints about a governor should be referred to the Chair of Governors who will investigate and respond to the complainant. In dealing with this matter, the chair will seek advice from the Local Authority's Governor Service Team. Complaints about the Chair of Governors must be referred to the clerk to Governors who would arrange for the complaint to be considered by the Complaints Appeal Committee of the Governing Body

Stage 5: Referral to the Governing Body Complaints Appeal Panel

- If you feel that your concern has not yet been adequately addressed, you may write to the Clerk to the Governing Body giving details of the complaint and asking that it is put before the appeal panel.
- The chair, or if the chair has been involved at any previous stage in the process, a nominated governor, will convene a Governing Body Complaints Appeal Panel.
- The governors appeal hearing is the last school-based stage of the complaints process and is not convened merely to rubber stamp previous decisions.
- The aim of the hearing, which will be held in private, will always be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant.
- The panel will look at written materials, consider the complaint the Headteacher's (or Chair's) action, and may occasionally invite the Headteacher or Chair of Governors (as appropriate) to the meeting. They will seek further advice as necessary.
- However, it has to be recognised that the complainant might not be satisfied with the outcome if the hearing does not find in their favour. It may only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations which will satisfy the complainant that his or her complaint has been taken seriously.

The panel can:

- *Dismiss the complaint in whole or in part.*
 - *Uphold the complaint in whole or in part.*
 - *Decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint.*
 - *Recommend changes to the school's system or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not recur.*
- The panel will notify all parties, in writing, of the final decision (including the reasons for the decision) and minutes of the hearing will be shared with all involved in the hearing.
 - Individual complaints will not be heard by the whole Governing Body at any stage, as this could compromise the impartiality of any panel set up for a disciplinary hearing against a member of staff following a serious complaint.
 - This stage will take no more than 20 school days to complete. All records will be retained by the school for monitoring purposes. Complainants have rights to copies of these records under the

Freedom of Information and Data Protection Acts. The Governing Body will be informed in general terms of all formal complaints.

Stage 6: Referral to the Local Authority or Department for Education (DfE)

- If you feel that the school has not adequately dealt with your complaint then you can refer the matter to the DfE or Local Authority.
- Making external complaint should only happen after the previous stages above have been exhausted.

Withdrawal of a complaint

If the complainant wishes to withdraw their complaint, they will be asked to confirm this in writing.

Unreasonable Complaints (Serial, Persistent or Vexatious)

- The school is extremely committed to promoting positive relationships with all members of the school community, regardless of age, sex, religion, ability or culture and it welcomes the opportunity to address and resolve the issues that may arise.
- If properly followed, a good complaints procedure will limit the number of complaints that become protracted. However, there will be occasions when, despite all stages of the procedures having been followed, the complainant remains dissatisfied.
- There are rare occasions when complainants behave in an unreasonable manner when raising and/or pursuing concerns. The consequences are that the actions of complainants begin to impact negatively on the day-to-day running of the school and directly or indirectly the overall well-being of the children or staff in the school. In these exceptional circumstances the school may take action in accordance with Appendix 2 of this policy.
- Should a complainant raise an entirely new, separate complaint, it will be responded to in accordance with the complaint's procedure - the exemption can only be applied to requests themselves, and not the individuals who submit them.
- In cases of unreasonably persistent complaints or unreasonable behaviour, the school may take some or all of the following steps, as appropriate:
 - Inform the complainant informally that his/her behaviour is now considered by the school to be unreasonable or unacceptable, and request a changed approach;
 - Restrict the complainant to a single point of contact via an email address;
 - Limit the number of times the complainant can make contact e.g. inform the complainant that, with the exception of urgent communication regarding their child in school, the school will respond to their correspondence on a 6 weekly basis only.

- Inform the complainant that except in emergencies, the school will respond only to written communication and that these may be required to be channelled through a third party chosen by the school, for example, the local authority or County Solicitor.
- Take legal advice on pursuing a case under Anti-Harassment Legislation.

Serious allegations or complaints

- If the allegations refer to criminal activity which may require the involvement of the Police, the Headteacher should inform the chair of Governors and seek the advice of the County Council.
- If the allegations relate to the abuse of the children, the Headteacher should seek the advice of the local authority designated officer (LADO), Senior HR Officer and other agencies such as Children's social care. Serious allegations of this nature must be referred under Child Protection Procedures to Children's Social Care. Reference should also be made to the separate procedure 'Staff facing allegations of Physical/Sexual Abuse.'

Monitoring and Evaluation / 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.

Learning lessons

The governing board will review any underlying issues raised by complaints with the headteacher where appropriate, and respecting confidentiality, to determine whether there are any improvements that the school can make to its procedures or practice to help prevent similar events in the future.

Persistent complaints

Read Academy is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, and to providing a high quality service to those who complain. We will not normally limit the contact complainants have with the school. However, we do not expect our staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour and will take action to protect staff from that behaviour, including that which is abusive, offensive or threatening.

Read Academy defines unreasonable complainants as 'those who, because of the frequency or nature of their contact with the school, hinder our consideration of their or other people's complaints.'

Complainants should limit the numbers of communication with the school while a complaint is being progressed. It is not helpful if repeated correspondence is sent (either by letter, phone, email or text) as it could delay the outcome being reached.

Unreasonably persistent complaints

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

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

Steps we will take

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

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

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

Stopping responding

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

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

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

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

Duplicate complaints

If we have resolved a complaint under this procedure and receive a duplicate complaint on the same subject from a partner, family member or other individual, we will assess whether there are aspects that we hadn't previously considered, or any new information we need to take into account.

If we are satisfied that there are no new aspects, we will:

- Tell the new complainant that we have already investigated and responded to this issue, and that the local process is complete
- Direct them to the DfE if they are dissatisfied with our original handling of the complaint

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

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.

Monitoring arrangements

The headteacher and members of SLT will monitor the effectiveness of the complaints procedure in making sure that complaints are handled properly. The governing board will track the number and nature of complaints, and review underlying issues.

The complaints records are logged and managed by senior leaders.

This policy will be reviewed by the headteacher once every year.

At each review, the policy will be approved by full governing board.