



**R.E.A.L. Education Limited**

## **Complaints Policy**

**(R.E.A.L. Education Ltd.)  
(R.E.A.L. Independent Schools, Hinckley)  
(R.E.A.L. Independent Schools, Mansfield)**



## 1. Principles

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It is the aim of R.E.A.L. Education to provide an outstanding education for all our learners. The staff team work hard to build positive relationships with all learners, parents/carers and commissioners. We are nonetheless obliged to have procedures in place in case there may be complaints by learners, parents/carers or other interested parties. The following policy sets out the procedures that we follow in such cases.

If any party is unhappy with the education that any child is receiving, or has any concerns relating to our schools or alternative provision, then we will use this complaints procedure.

## 2 Aims

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R.E.A.L. Education aims to be fair, open and honest when dealing with any complaint. We give careful consideration to all complaints and deal with them as swiftly as possible. We aim to resolve any complaint through dialogue, mutual understanding and in some cases investigation. We always put the interests of the child above all else. We provide sufficient opportunity for any complaint to be fully discussed and then resolved.

## 3 The difference between a concern, complaint and appeal

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A 'concern' may be defined as 'an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought'. A complaint may be generally defined as 'an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action'. An appeal is defined as a 'application to a higher court for a decision to be reversed'.

It is in everyone's interest that concerns and complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. Many issues can be resolved informally, without the need to invoke formal procedures. R.E.A.L., Education will take all informal concerns seriously and will make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.

We understand however, that there are occasions when people would like to raise their concerns formally. In this case, R.E.A.L. Education will attempt to resolve the issue internally, through the stages outlined within this complaints procedure.

## 4. How to raise a concern or make a complaint

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A concern or complaint can be made in person, in writing or by telephone. They may also be made by a third party acting on behalf of a complainant, as long as they have appropriate consent to do so.

Concerns should be raised with an appropriate member of staff. If the issue remains unresolved, the next step is to make a formal complaint.



Complainants should not approach individual governors to raise concerns or complaints. They have no power to act on an individual basis and it may also prevent them from considering complaints at Stage 2 of the procedure.

Complaints against school staff (except the Head of Schools) should be made in the first instance, to the Head of Schools for school staff and the Head of Safeguarding and Standards for Alternative Provision staff via the contact us page on our website. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Complaints that involve or are about the Head of Schools should be addressed to the Chair of Governors, via the contact us page of the website. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Complaints about the Chair of Governors, any individual governor or the whole governing body should be addressed to the Directors of R.E.A.L. Education via the contact us page of the website. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

For ease of use, a template complaint form is included at the end of this procedure. If you require help in completing the form, please contact us. You can also ask third party organisations like the Citizens Advice to help you.

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.

## **5. Anonymous complaints**

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We will not normally investigate anonymous complaints. However, the Head of Schools or Chair of Governors, if appropriate, will determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation.

## **6. Time Scales**

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You must raise the complaint within three months of the incident or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within three months of the last of these incidents. We will only consider complaints made outside of this time frame if exceptional circumstances apply.

Throughout this document, the term 'working days' refers to a day when the R.E.A.L. Education is fully open to all learners. In respect of a complaint which does not relate to a specific area, the term 'working day' refers to any day when all of our sites are open to learners.

We will consider complaints made outside of term time to have been received on the first day after the holiday period.



## 7. Resolving Complaints

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At each stage in the procedure, R.E.A.L. Education wants to resolve the complaint. If appropriate, we will acknowledge that the complaint is upheld in whole or in part. In addition, we may offer one or more of the following:

- an explanation
- an admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better
- an assurance that we will try to ensure the event complained of will not recur
- an explanation of the steps that have been or will be taken to help 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
- an apology.

## 8. Withdrawal of a complaint

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

## 9. Stage 1

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Formal complaints must be made to the Head of Schools for anything in relation to our Independent Schools, or to the Head of Safeguarding and Standards for anything in relation to our vocational provision (unless they are about the Head of Schools/Head of Safeguarding and Standards), via the contact us page of our website. This may be done in person, in writing (preferably on the Complaint Form), or by telephone.

The person identified above 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.

Within this response, the person identified will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, ask what remains unresolved and what outcome the complainant would like to see. They will consider whether a face to face meeting is the most appropriate way of doing this.

*Note: The Head of Schools/Head of Safeguarding and Standards may delegate the investigation to another member of the senior leadership team but not the decision to be taken.*

During the investigation, the investigator will:



- if necessary, interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish
- keep a written record of any meetings/interviews in relation to their investigation.

At the conclusion of their investigation a formal written response will be provided within 10 school days of the date of receipt of the complaint.

If they are unable to meet this deadline, The Head of Schools/Head of Safeguarding and Standards, will provide the complainant with an update and revised response date.

The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions R.E.A.L. Education will take to resolve the complaint.

The Head of Schools/Head of Safeguarding and Standards will advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 1.

If the complaint is about the The Head of Schools/Head of Safeguarding and Standards, or a member of the governing body (including the Chair or Vice-Chair), a suitably skilled governor will be appointed to complete all the actions at Stage 1.

Complaints about the The Head of Schools/Head of Safeguarding and Standards or member of the governing body must be made to the Directors of R.E.A.L. Education, via the contact us page of our website.

If the complaint is:

- jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair or
- the entire governing body or
- the majority of the governing body

Stage 1 will be considered by an independent investigator appointed by the Directors. At the conclusion of their investigation, the independent investigator will provide a formal written response.

## 10. Stage 2

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If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome at Stage 1 and wishes to take the matter further, they can escalate the complaint to Stage 2 – a meeting with members of the governing body's complaints committee, which will be formed of the first three, impartial, governors available. This is the final stage of the complaints procedure.



A request to escalate to Stage 2 must be made to the Chair of Governors if it is about an Independent School or to Directors if it is about our Alternative Provision, within 5 school days of receipt of the Stage 1 response.

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

Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.

The Chair of Governors/Directors will write to the complainant to inform them of the date of the meeting. They will aim to convene a meeting within 20 school days of receipt of the Stage 2 request. If this is not possible, the Chair of Governors/Directors will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed.

If the complainant rejects the offer of three proposed dates, without good reason, the Chair of Governors/Directors will decide when to hold the meeting. It will then proceed in the complainant's absence on the basis of written submissions from both parties.

The complaints committee will consist of at least three governors with no prior involvement or knowledge of the complaint. Prior to the meeting, they will decide amongst themselves who will act as the Chair of the Complaints Committee. If there are fewer than three governors from R.E.A.L. Independent Schools available, the Chair of Governors/Directors will source an additional, independent representative through another local school or multi-academy trust in order to make up the committee. Alternatively, an entirely independent committee may be convened to hear the complaint at Stage 2.

The committee will decide whether to deal with the complaint by inviting parties to a meeting or through written representations, but in making their decision they will be sensitive to the complainant's needs.

If the complainant is invited to attend the meeting, they may bring someone along to provide support. This can be a relative or friend. Generally, we do not encourage either party to bring legal representatives to the committee meeting. However, there may be occasions when legal representation is appropriate.

For instance, if a school employee is called as a witness in a complaint meeting, they may wish to be supported by union and/or legal representation.



*Note: Complaints about staff conduct will not generally be handled under this complaints procedure. Complainants will be advised that any staff conduct complaints will be considered under staff disciplinary procedures, if appropriate, but outcomes will not be shared with them.*

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

At least 10 school days before the meeting, the Clerk will:

- confirm and notify the complainant of the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that, if the complainant is invited, the dates are convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible
- request copies of any further written material to be submitted to the committee at least 7 school days before the meeting.

Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least 5 school days before the date of the meeting. The committee will not normally accept, as evidence, recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.

The committee will also not review any new complaints at this stage or consider evidence unrelated to the initial complaint to be included. New complaints must be dealt with from Stage 1 of the procedure.

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 must be sought before meetings or conversations take place. Consent will be recorded in any minutes taken.

The committee will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented. The committee can:

- uphold the complaint in whole or in part
- dismiss the complaint in whole or in part.

If the complaint is upheld in whole or in part, the committee will:

- decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint
- where appropriate, recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future.

The Chair of the Committee will provide the complainant and the appropriate area of R.E.A.L. with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within 5 school days.





The letter to the complainant will include details of how to contact the Department for Education if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled by R.E.A.L. Education.

If the complaint is:

- jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair or
- the entire governing body or
- the majority of the governing body

Stage 2 will be heard by a committee of independent governors and/or Directors depending on the nature of the complaint.

The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions R.E.A.L. Education will take to resolve the complaint.

The response will also advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied.

A record of all complaints and the outcomes of them and any steps taken following the complaint will be kept on file.

## 11. Next Steps

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If the complainant believes R.E.A.L. Education did not handle their complaint in accordance with the published complaints procedure or they acted unlawfully or unreasonably in the exercise of their duties under education law, they can contact the Department for Education after they have completed Stage 2.

The Department for Education will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by R.E.A.L. Education. They will consider whether R.E.A.L. Education has adhered to education legislation and any statutory policies connected with the complaint.

The complainant can refer their complaint to the Department for Education online at: [www.education.gov.uk/](http://www.education.gov.uk/) contact us, by telephone on: 0370 000 2288 or by writing to:

Department for Education  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD.



## 12. Complaints not in scope of the procedure

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

Exceptions	Who to contact
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Admissions to schools</li> <li>• Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs (SEN)</li> <li>• School reorganisation proposals</li> <li>• Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation</li> </ul>	Concerns should be raised directly with local authorities (LA).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exclusion of children from school</li> </ul>	Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at: <a href="http://www.gov.uk/schooldiscipline-exclusions/exclusions">www.gov.uk/schooldiscipline-exclusions/exclusions</a> .
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Whistleblowing</li> </ul>	R.E.A.L Education has an internal whistleblowing procedure for their employees and voluntary staff. Other concerns can be raised directly with Ofsted by telephone on: 0300 123 3155, via email at: <a href="mailto:whistleblowing@ofsted.gov.uk">whistleblowing@ofsted.gov.uk</a> or by writing to: WBHL, Ofsted Piccadilly Gate Store Street Manchester M1 2WD..
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff grievances and disciplinary procedures</li> </ul>	These matters will invoke the R.E.A.L Education internal grievance procedures. Complainants will not be informed of the outcome of any investigation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complaints about the services provided by other providers who may use school premises or facilities.</li> </ul>	Providers should have their own complaints procedure to deal with complaints about service. They should be contacted directly



### 13. Complaints template

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This form may be used to make a complaint.

<b>Your name:</b>
<b>Pupil's name (if relevant):</b>
<b>Your relationship to the pupil (if relevant):</b>
<b>Address:</b>
<b>Postcode:</b>
<b>Day time telephone number:</b>
<b>Evening telephone number:</b>
<b>Please give details of your complaint, including whether you have spoken to anybody at the school about it.</b>



<p><b>What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?</b></p>
<p><b>Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details.</b></p>
<p><b>Signature:</b></p> <p><b>Date:</b></p>
<p><b>Official use</b></p>
<p><b>Date acknowledgement sent:</b></p>
<p><b>By who:</b></p>
<p><b>Complaint referred to:</b></p>
<p><b>Date:</b></p>