

The Robert Drake Primary School

Complaints Policy



Who can make a complaint?

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 The Robert Drake Primary School about any provision of facilities or services that the school provides. Unless complaints are dealt with under separate statutory procedures (such as appeals relating to exclusions or admissions), the school will use this complaints procedure.

The difference between a concern and a complaint

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 defined as 'an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action'.

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 use the formal stages of the complaint's procedure. The Robert Drake Primary School takes concerns seriously and will make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.

If you have difficulty discussing a concern with a particular member of staff, the school will respect your views. In these cases, the Co-Headteachers will refer you to another staff member. Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels unable to deal with a concern, the Co-Headteachers will refer you to another staff member. The member of staff may be more senior but does not have to be. The ability to consider the concern objectively and impartially is more important.

We understand however, that there are occasions when people would like to raise their concerns formally. In this case, The Robert Drake Primary School will attempt to resolve the issue internally, through the stages outlined within this complaint's procedure.

How to raise a concern or make a complaint

A concern can be made in person, in writing or by telephone. A complaint must be made via the Complaints Form, see the end of this policy. The Complaint Form is also available on the school's website (<https://robertdrake.co.uk/index.php/policies-and-information/complaints>). Complaints 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 either the class teacher or Phase Leader then the Co-Headteachers. If the matter is brought to the attention of the Co-Headteachers, they may decide to delegate the matter or deal with it themselves, depending on the circumstances. 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 3 of the procedure.

Formal complaints concerning members of staff (other than the Co-Headteachers) should, in the first instance, be addressed to the Co-Headteachers using the Complaints Form. Completed forms may be submitted either by email or by hand via the school office. All correspondence should be clearly marked 'Private and Confidential'.

Complaints that involve or are about the Co-Headteachers should be addressed to the Chair of Governors/Vice Chair of Governors, following the same procedure as above.

Complaints about the Chair of Governors, any individual governor or the whole governing body should follow the procedure above and be addressed to the Clerk to the Governing Body.

If you require help in completing the form, please contact the school office. You can also ask third party organisations like the Citizens Advice to help you.

In accordance with equality law, the school 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.

Anonymous complaints

The school will not normally investigate anonymous complaints. However, the Co-Headteachers or Chair of Governors/Vice Chair of Governors, if appropriate, will determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation. If the school can find out enough information to take the complaint further, or if the complaint is serious, the school will follow this policy as closely as we can. If the school can't find out any other information or the complaint isn't serious, the school will take no further steps, although the complaint will be logged.

Time scales

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. The school will consider complaints made outside of this time frame if exceptional circumstances apply.

Complaints received outside of term time

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

Confidentiality

When participating in the complaint's procedure, the school expects confidentiality to be maintained. Each party automatically agrees to undertake to not at any time disclose to any person (or more widely on social media) any confidential information concerning any part of the complaint's procedure, including but not limited to any personal information regarding any party to the complaint (including any personal information which may be used to identify the complainant or the person subject to the complaint), the content of the complaint, and the timeline and result of the complaint, except as permitted by the following clause:

Each party may disclose the other party's confidential information to any professional or volunteer who are required to know such information for the purposes of carrying out the complaint's procedure or as may be required by law, a court of competent jurisdiction or any governmental or regulatory authority.

Records of complaints

The school will maintain written records of all complaints received, whether they are resolved following the informal procedure or proceed to a formal stage. Records will include:

- the date the complaint was received;
- the nature of the complaint;
- details of the investigation undertaken;
- correspondence, statements and records of meetings;
- the outcome of the complaint; and
- any actions taken by the school as a result of the complaint.

Records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except where disclosure is required by law, by the Secretary of State, by regulatory authorities or as part of an inspection.

Scope of this complaints procedure

This procedure covers all complaints about any provision of community facilities or services provided by The Robert Drake Primary School other than complaints that are dealt with under other statutory procedures, including those listed below.

Exceptions	Who to contact
• Admissions to schools • Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs • School re-organisation proposals	Concerns about admissions, statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs, or school re-organisation proposals should be raised with Essex County Council.
• Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation	Complaints about child protection matters are handled under our Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy and in accordance with relevant statutory guidance. If you have serious concerns, you may wish to contact the local authority designated officer (LADO) who has local responsibility for safeguarding or the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH). The LADO can be contacted using: 03330 139 797.
• Exclusion of children from school*	Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at: www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions. *complaints about the application of the behaviour policy can be made through the school's complaints procedure. Please refer to our Behaviour and Anti-Bullying Policy on the school website. https://robertdrake.co.uk/
• Whistleblowing	The school has an internal whistleblowing procedure for all employees, including temporary staff and contractors. The Secretary of State for Education is the prescribed person for matters relating to education for whistleblowers in education who do not want to raise matters directly with their employer. Referrals can be made at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus. Volunteer staff who have concerns about the school should complain through the school's complaints procedure. You may also be able to complain directly to the LA or the Department for Education (see link above), depending on the substance of your complaint.
• Staff grievances	Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the school's internal grievance procedures.

• Staff conduct	Complaints about staff will be dealt with under the school's internal disciplinary procedures, if appropriate. Complainants will not be informed of any disciplinary action taken against a staff member as a result of a complaint. However, the complainant will be notified that the matter is being addressed.
• Complaints about services provided by other providers who may use school premises or facilities	Providers should have their own complaints procedure to deal with complaints about service. Please contact them directly.
• National Curriculum - content	Please contact the Department for Education at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus
• Data Protection	Complaints relating to the handling of personal data should be referred to the school's Data Protection Officer in the first instance. Complainants may also contact the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO).
• Discrimination	Complaints relating to discrimination may be referred to the Equality Advisory Support Service (EASS).
• Teacher Misconduct	Concerns regarding teacher misconduct should be referred to the Teaching Regulation Agency (TRA).
• Exam Malpractice or Maladministration	Concerns should be directed to Ofqual or the relevant awarding organisation.
• Criminal Matters	Criminal matters should be reported directly to the Police.

If other bodies are investigating aspects of the complaint, for example the police, local authority (LA) safeguarding teams or Tribunals, this may impact on the school's ability to adhere to the timescales within this procedure or result in the procedure being suspended until those public bodies have completed their investigations.

If a complainant commences legal action against The Robert Drake Primary School in relation to their complaint, the school will consider whether to suspend the complaints procedure in relation to their complaint until those legal proceedings have concluded.

Resolving complaints

At each stage in the procedure, The Robert Drake Primary School wants to resolve the complaint. If appropriate, the school will acknowledge that the complaint is

upheld in whole or in part. In addition, the school 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 the school 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.

Withdrawal of a complaint

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

Dealing with your concern or complaint

The majority of concerns from parents, carers and others are managed under the following procedure. It is in everyone's interest that complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. Many issues can be resolved informally, without the need to follow formal procedures. The school takes informal concerns seriously and make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.

The procedure is divided into three stages:

- **Stage 1** aims to resolve the concern through informal contact at the appropriate level in school, as described above;
- **Stage 2** is the first formal stage, when complaints are considered by the Co-Headteachers. Usually, concerns and complaints are resolved either at Stage 1 or Stage 2. See Complaints Form. If following these stages, the complaint is not resolved to your satisfaction, the Governors will become involved and take your complaint to Stage 3;
- **Stage 3** involves a complaints review panel of governors, who will review how your complaint has been handled and the outcome and decisions so far.

Please note that this procedure does not include complaints about the personal conduct of members of the school staff, teaching or non-teaching, as these are handled under confidential arrangements in line with employment law. If you are concerned about the conduct of any member of staff other than the Co-Headteachers, you should write to the Co-Headteachers. If your concern is about the personal conduct of the Co-Headteachers, please write to the Chair of Governors/Vice Chair of Governors c/o the school.

If the school has completed its complaints procedure and the complainant remains dissatisfied, they may refer the matter to the Department for Education (DfE). The DfE will not re-investigate the complaint or overturn decisions made by the school.

Its role is to consider whether the school has handled the complaint in accordance with its published complaints procedure and relevant regulations.

Stage 2 –First Formal Stage

Formal complaints concerning members of staff (other than the Co-Headteachers) should, in the first instance, be addressed to the Co-Headteachers using the Complaints Form (Appendix 1). Completed forms may be submitted either by email or by hand via the school office. All correspondence should be clearly marked 'Private and Confidential'.

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

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

Note: The Co-Headteachers may delegate the investigation to another member of the school's senior leadership team but not the decision to be taken.

During the investigation, the Co-Headteachers (or 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, the Co-Headteachers will provide a formal written response within fifteen school days of the date of receipt of the complaint.

If the Co-Headteachers are unable to meet this deadline, they 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 The Robert Drake Primary School will take to resolve the complaint.

The Co-Headteachers will advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 2 (first formal stage).

If the complaint is about the Co-Headteachers, 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 2.

Complaints that involve or are about the Co-Headteachers should be addressed to the Chair of Governors/Vice Chair of Governors, in writing via email or the school office. All correspondence should be clearly marked 'Private and Confidential'.

If the complaint is:

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

Stages 1 and 2 will be considered by an independent investigator appointed by the governing body. At the conclusion of their investigation, the independent investigator will provide a formal written response.

Stage 3 – Complaints Review Panel

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome at Stage 2 (first formal stage) and wishes to take the matter further, they can escalate the complaint to Stage 3 – a meeting with members of the governing body's complaints panel. The panel will consist of at least three members, who have had no prior connection with the complaint, have no conflict of interest, and at least one of these must be an independent panel member. This is to ensure that the panel has the benefit of an external source of scrutiny and challenge in its consideration of the complaint. The independent panel member will not be a member, trustee or employee of the school. This is the final stage of the complaint's procedure.

A request to escalate to Stage 3 must be made to the Clerk, via the school office, within ten school days of receipt of the Stage 2 response. See Appendix 1 for form to complete.

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

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

The Clerk will write to the complainant to inform them of the date of the meeting. They will aim to convene a meeting within twenty school days of receipt of the Stage 3 request. If this is not possible, the Clerk will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed.

If the complainant rejects the offer of three proposed dates, without good reason, the Clerk 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, one of whom will be an independent panel member. Prior to the meeting, they will decide amongst themselves who will act as the Chair of the Complaints Committee. If there are fewer than two governors from The Robert Drake Primary School available, the Clerk will source any additional, independent governors through another local school or through their LA's Governor Services team, in order to make up the committee. Alternatively, an entirely independent committee may be convened to hear the complaint at Stage 3.

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. The school does 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 complaint's 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 five 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 three school days before the meeting.

Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least two 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 Robert Drake Primary School with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within ten school days. Where relevant, a copy of the panel's findings and recommendations will also be provided to the person complained about.

A written record of the findings and recommendations of the complaints review panel will be available for inspection on the school premises by the Co-Headteachers, in accordance with regulatory requirements.

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 The Robert Drake Primary School.

If the complaint is:

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

Stage 3 will be heard by a committee of independent governors.

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 the school will take to resolve the complaint.

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

Recording of meetings

To ensure openness and transparency throughout the complaints process, any party wishing to record a meeting, whether by audio, video, or any other electronic means, must disclose this intention before the meeting begins. The agreement of all participants must be obtained at the start of the meeting and recorded in the meeting notes. Where consent is not provided by all parties, personal recordings will not be permitted.

Where a recording is agreed as a reasonable adjustment or is deemed appropriate by the school, an independent recording device will be provided and operated by the Clerk to the Governors (or another nominated school representative). The recording will form the official record of the meeting and will be stored securely in accordance with the school's data protection and record retention procedures. Any recordings or transcripts shared as part of the complaints process must comply with data protection and privacy requirements.

What happens if you're not happy with the outcome?

The same complaint cannot be raised again, if a complaint has completed the local procedures and the person making the complaint remains dissatisfied, they have a right to refer their complaint to The Department for Education. They may only be able to help if you are unable to complain, or are not satisfied with how the academy handles your complaint, because the academy:

- does not have a complaints procedure;
- did not provide a copy of its complaints procedure when requested;
- does not have a procedure that complies with statutory regulations;
- has not followed its published complaints procedure;
- has not allowed its complaints procedure to be completed.

The Department for Education cannot change an academy's decision about a complaint. Their role is to make sure the academy handles your complaint properly by following a published process.

The Department for Education will not normally consider complaints received more than 12 months after the date of the school's final decision or last action.

The Department for Education cannot:

- overturn the school's decision;
- re-investigate the original complaint;
- order financial compensation; • require staff disciplinary action;
- require the school to issue an apology.

If you think your concerns are within The Department for Education's remit, please contact them using the online form at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/complain-about-an-academy/complain-about-an-academy>

The Local Authority (Essex County Council) has no powers to intervene in complaints against schools. You can complain to Ofsted if you think a school isn't run properly and needs inspecting. However, they won't look into problems with individual pupils, e.g. exclusions or not getting a place at the school.

How we manage serial and unreasonable complaints

The Robert Drake Primary School is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, and to providing a high-quality service to those who complain. Staff will not normally limit the contact complainants have with the school. However, the school does not expect staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour and will take action to protect staff from that behaviour, including that which is abusive, offensive or threatening.

The school defines unreasonable behaviour as that which hinders the consideration of complaints because of the frequency or nature of the complainant's contact with the school, such as, if the complainant:

- refuses to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcomes sought by raising the complaint, despite offers of assistance;
- refuses to co-operate with the complaint's investigation process;
- refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of the complaint's procedure;
- insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the complaint's procedure or with good practice;
- introduces trivial or irrelevant information which they expect to be taken into account and commented on;
- raises large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions, and insists they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales;
- makes unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues, and seeks to have them replaced;
- changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds;
- repeatedly makes the same complaint (despite previous investigations or responses concluding that the complaint is groundless or has been addressed);
- refuses to accept the findings of the investigation into that complaint where the school's complaint procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed including referral to the Department for Education;
- seeks an unrealistic outcome;
- makes excessive demands on school time by frequent, lengthy and complicated contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with;
- uses threats to intimidate;
- uses abusive, offensive or discriminatory language or violence;
- knowingly provides falsified information;
- publishes unacceptable information on social media or other public forums.

Complainants should try to limit their communication with the school that relates to their complaint, while the 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.

Whenever possible, the Co-Headteachers or Chair/Vice Chair of Governors will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying an '*unreasonable*' marking.

If the behaviour continues, the Co-Headteachers will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and ask them to change it. For

complainants who excessively contact The Robert Drake Primary School causing a significant level of disruption, the school may specify methods of communication and limit the number of contacts in a communication plan. This will be reviewed after six months.

In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, the school will immediately inform the police and communicate actions in writing. This may include barring an individual from The Robert Drake Primary School.

Reviewed: September 2026

Next review date: September 2027



The Robert Drake Primary School

Complaints Form

Please complete this form and return it the school office for the attention of the Co-Headteachers, Chair of Governors/Vice Chair of Governors or Clerk.

Please tick:

Stage 2 Complaint	Stage 3 Complaint
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Your name:

Relationship with school (e.g. parent):

Pupil's name (if relevant to your complaint):

Your address:

Telephone number:

Email address:

Please give concise details of your complaint (including dates, names of witnesses, etc) to allow the matter to be fully investigated:

What action, if any, have you already taken to resolve your complaint?

Please continue on a separate sheet, or attach additional documents if you wish.

Number of additional pages attached:

Signature:

Date: