

Complaints Policy

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3.00	September 2026	Annual review, updated in line with current statutory requirements and DfE guidance.	Head of Centre	RBET Trustees
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Key Contacts

Role	Contact Details
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1. Purpose

Red Balloon of the Air (RBAir) seeks to provide a high-quality learning experience for all its learners. We aim to always practise professionally and effectively but acknowledge that, on occasion, we may fail to meet our aim. Under such circumstances we want anyone who has concerns about the organisation or feels that a specific member of staff has failed to perform their job in a professional manner to understand how to raise their concern, be able to raise it without fear of negative response and to understand how the concern will be dealt with.

1.1 Legislation and guidance

This policy meets the requirements of Part 7 of the *Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014*, which requires independent schools to have and make available a written procedure for handling complaints from parents of learners. It also takes account of the Department for Education (DfE) *Best Practice Guidance: School Complaints Procedures (2019)*.

In addition, RBAir will record any action taken as a result of complaints, whether or not they are upheld, and will ensure that all correspondence, statements, and records relating to individual complaints are kept confidential, except where access is requested by the Secretary of State or by a body conducting an inspection under sections 108 or 109 of the *Education and Skills Act 2008*.

2. Scope

This policy explains how parents/carers of learners at RBAir can raise a concern or complaint about the provision or practice at RBAir. RBAir may also consider complaints from other individuals where appropriate.

Staff who wish to raise concerns about wrongdoing, malpractice or the conduct of another member of staff should refer to the RBET Whistleblowing Policy. Concerns relating to safeguarding or allegations against staff should be raised in accordance with the Safeguarding & Child Protection Policy and the RBET Dealing with Allegations Against Staff and Low Level Concerns policy, as appropriate.

The Chair of RBET Trustees is responsible for monitoring the way in which complaints are responded to.

To comply with statutory requirements, RBAir's complaints procedure:

- is set out in writing;

- is available to parents/carers of learners on the RBAir website or, on request, in writing;
- set out clear time scales for the management of a complaint;
- allow for a complaint to be made and considered initially on an informal basis.

RBAir will ensure that a written record is kept of all complaints that proceed to the formal stage together with any action taken because of the complaints, regardless of whether they are upheld. Further we will ensure that correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints are kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 108 requests access to them.

NB Wherever the term 'parent' is used in the policy, that means any person with parental responsibility for the learner.

3. Policy statement and provision

RBAir seeks to:

- encourage resolution of problems by informal means wherever possible;
- make procedures easily accessible;
- be impartial;
- be non-adversarial;
- allow swift handling with established time limits for action, keeping people informed of the progress;
- ensure a full and fair investigation by an independent person where necessary;
- respect people's desire for confidentiality;
- address all the points at issue and provide an effective response and appropriate redress, where necessary;
- provide information to RBAir's senior leadership team so that services may be improved if appropriate.

In investigating complaints RBAir will:

- establish what has happened so far, and who has been involved;
- clarify the nature of the complaint and what remains unresolved;
- meet with the complainant and re-contact them should clarification or further information be required;
- clarify what the complainant feels would put things right;

- interview those involved in the matter (including those complained of), allowing them to be accompanied if they wish;
- conduct all interviews with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning;
- keep notes of interviews.

In seeking to resolve complaints, it might be sufficient to acknowledge that the complaint is valid in whole or in part. In addition, it may be appropriate to offer one or more of the following:

- an apology;
- an explanation;
- an admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better;
- an assurance that the event complained of will not recur, together with an explanation of the steps that have been taken to ensure that it will not happen again;
- an undertaking to review RBAir policies and/or practice in light of the complaint.

4. Procedures

4.1 Aims and objectives

RBAir seeks to be fair, open and honest when dealing with any complaint. Careful consideration is given to all complaints, and we aim to deal with them as swiftly as possible. We aim to resolve any complaint through dialogue and mutual understanding, and, in all cases, we put the interests of the learner above all other issues. Further we aim to provide sufficient opportunity for any complaint to be fully discussed and subsequently resolved.

4.2 The complaints process

The process has three distinct sections:

- Informal (Stage 1);
- Formal (Stage 2);
- Panel hearing (Stage 3).

Stage 1: Informal

If a parent/carer is concerned about any aspect of the provision at RBAir, they should, where appropriate, first raise the matter directly with the member of staff concerned, either by telephone or through an arranged meeting. This approach is encouraged wherever possible, as many concerns can be quickly and effectively resolved at this level. If the concern cannot be resolved in this way, or if it is not appropriate to raise the matter with the member of staff

concerned, the parent/carer should discuss the matter with the Head of Department, or the Assistant Head.

Concerns relating to safeguarding, allegations against staff, or matters of serious misconduct should be raised directly with the Head of Centre in the first instance and will be managed in accordance with the relevant safeguarding, disciplinary or other applicable procedures rather than through the informal complaints process.

All staff work very hard to ensure that each learner is well provided for at RBAir, is happy at RBAir and is making good progress. They always want to know if there is a problem so that they can act before the problem seriously affects any learner's progress. All RBAir staff involved will listen carefully to any concern expressed, treat the complainant respectfully and make every attempt to ensure that concerns are allayed and/or the matter resolved.

RBAir will acknowledge the concern within five working days. The complainant will be assured that the concern has been received and will be responded to. Where appropriate, RBAir will arrange either a meeting at a mutually convenient time or a further telephone conversation. This conversation or meeting will normally take place within ten working days of the concern being raised, unless there are exceptional circumstances.

It may be necessary to hold further meetings to ensure that the complaint has been appropriately responded to, and any improvements in practice identified because of the complaint, implemented.

Assuming that the parent/carer is content that the response has been sufficient and appropriate, this will still be deemed to be an informal response.

Stage 2: Formal

If the matter is not resolved through informal discussion, or if the complainant considers that the nature of the complaint makes informal resolution inappropriate, they may request that the complaint proceeds to Stage 2: Formal.

In any situation where a parent or other complainant feels that the complaint they have made has not been sufficiently well dealt with, they should submit their complaint in writing (email is acceptable). The written complaint should be sent to the Head of Centre unless the Head of Centre has already been substantively involved in the informal stage, in which case the complaint should be sent to the Chair of RBET Trustees.

Where a complaint concerns the Head of Centre, or where the Head of Centre has been directly involved in the informal consideration of the complaint, the Chair of RBET Trustees, or a trustee nominated by the Chair, will oversee the formal investigation.

Appendix A provides a template for Stage 2 complaints, although other written forms of complaint are also acceptable.

The Head of Centre or Chair of RBET Trustees, as appropriate, must then acknowledge receipt of the complaint within five working days of receipt. The Head of Centre (or Chair of RBET Trustees) will supply the complainant with details of the complaints procedure and will then carry out an investigation regarding the complaint. This may involve interviewing staff or learners, reviewing relevant records or communications, checking learners' work, or undertaking any other activity relevant to the complaint.

The Head of Centre or Chair of RBET Trustees must complete this process within thirty working days of receipt of the formal complaint - unless the nature of the complaint requires additional time to investigate fully. In such cases, the complainant will be kept informed of progress and provided with an updated timescale. They will keep appropriate records of the investigation and will provide the complainant with a written response setting out the findings, the reasons for the decision and any appropriate action to be taken.

The Head of Centre or Chair of RBET Trustees, as appropriate, will share the outcome of the investigation with the complainant at a meeting, where appropriate, which should take place within five working days of completion of the investigation. The outcome will explain whether the complaint is upheld, partially upheld or not upheld and will provide the reasons for the decision. Where appropriate, the response will also explain any action to be taken or changes to practice or policy.

Where a complaint is not upheld, the complainant will be informed of the reasons for this decision in writing.

Stage 3: Panel Hearing

If, following completion of Stage 2, the complainant considers that the complaint has not been properly investigated, that the outcome has not been appropriately addressed, or that they wish to contest the findings, they may request that the complaint proceeds to Stage 3: Panel Hearing. The request should be submitted in writing to the Chair of RBET Trustees.

This complaint must be made in writing (as stated previously email is acceptable), stating the nature of the complaint, how RBAir has handled it thus far, and whether the complaint at this point concerns:

- a perceived failure to investigate the initial complaint properly;
- a belief that the findings were correct but have not been appropriately responded to;
- a wish to contest the findings or outcome.

All relevant records from the earlier stages of the process will be retained and made available to the panel, subject to appropriate confidentiality and data protection considerations.

The Chair of RBET Trustees must acknowledge receipt of the Stage 3 complaint within five working days of receipt. The Chair of RBET Trustees will provide the complainant with details of the Stage 3 complaints procedure and will review the Stage 2 investigation, carrying out or commissioning any further investigation that is considered necessary. This review and any further investigation will be completed as soon as reasonably practicable and normally within thirty working days of receipt of the Stage 3 complaint.

Following completion of the review and any further investigation, a panel hearing will be convened within ten working days, or as soon as reasonably practicable thereafter. The complainant will be given at least five working days' notice of the hearing and may be accompanied by a person of their choosing who is not directly connected to the complaint or investigation.

The panel's findings and recommendations will be provided to the complainant in writing as soon as possible and normally within ten working days of the panel hearing.

The panel will consist of a minimum of three people who were not directly involved in the issues covered by the complaint. One of those panel members should be independent of the management and the running of RBAir. DfE advice is that persons suitable for this role are those, 'who have held a position of responsibility and are used to scrutinising evidence and putting forward balanced arguments - examples of persons likely to be suitable are serving or retired business people, civil servants, headteachers or senior members of staff at other schools, people with a legal background and retired members of the police force'.

Following consideration of the complaint and all relevant evidence, the panel will reach its decision. The complainant will be informed of the panel's findings and recommendations in writing, or in another format where appropriate, as soon as possible and normally within ten working days of the panel hearing.

The panel's decision will be final within RBAir's complaints procedure. RBET Trustees will ensure that any action identified as necessary following the panel's decision is undertaken.

5. Frivolous, malicious, and/or vexatious complaints

Frivolous, malicious and/or vexatious complaints are defined as:

- complaints that are obsessive, harassing or repetitive;
- insistence on pursuing non-meritorious complaints and/or unrealistic, unreasonable outcomes;
- insistence on pursuing what may be meritorious complaints in an unreasonable manner;
- complaints which are designed to cause disruption or annoyance;
- demands for redress which lack any serious purpose or value.

RBAir has a responsibility to protect its staff against unacceptable behaviour and provide a working environment that is safe, respectful and tolerant. Consequently, it is expected that learners, their representatives, and staff members should act reasonably and fairly towards each other and treat the process with respect.

Where behaviour is considered unreasonable, persistent or vexatious, RBAir may take reasonable steps to manage contact, such as restricting communication to a named member of staff, limiting the frequency of contact, requiring communication to take place in writing, or specifying a reasonable method and frequency of contact. RBAir will not normally prevent a complainant from completing the complaints procedure solely because their behaviour is considered unreasonable.

If this decision is taken, we will provide this in writing, including the reason(s) why this decision has been taken.

Where restrictions on communication or access are imposed, RBAir will confirm the arrangements in writing and explain the reasons for the decision. The complainant may appeal the decision by submitting their grounds in writing to the Chair of RBET Trustees, who will review the decision and respond within five working days. The Chair of RBET Trustees' decision will be final.

6. Monitoring and review

The Chair of RBET Trustees monitors the complaints procedure to ensure that complaints are handled appropriately. The Head of Centre ensures that complaints received by RBAir are logged and that appropriate records are maintained detailing how they were addressed and resolved. The Chair of RBET Trustees will review the complaints log annually.

RBAir will keep a written record of complaints that reach the formal stage, including the nature of the complaint, how it was investigated, the outcome and any action taken. RBAir will also maintain a record of informal concerns to enable patterns and recurring issues to be monitored and addressed.

RBAir will record any action taken as a result of complaints, regardless of whether they are upheld. Records relating to complaints will be kept confidential and handled in accordance with applicable data protection requirements, except where disclosure is required by law or by a relevant regulatory or inspection body.

RBET Trustees will consider any local or national decisions that affect the complaints process and will ensure any necessary modifications are made to this policy.

The number of formal complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year will be published on the RBAir website (www.rbair.org.uk).

Appendix A: Template for making a Stage 2 Complaint

Please complete and return to the Head of Centre or, where the Head of Centre has already been substantively involved at Stage 1, to the Chair of RBET Trustees. Your complaint will be acknowledged within five working days and you will be informed of the next steps.

(Please try to provide as much detail as possible, if using a word processor, the boxes expand)

Making a Stage 2 complaint	
Your name:	
Learner's name:	
Your relationship to the learner:	
Address:	
Postcode:	
Daytime telephone number:	
Evening telephone number:	
Email address:	
Please give details of your complaint.	
What action, if any, have you already taken to try to resolve your complaint informally? (For example, who did you speak to and what was the response?)	

If you have not attempted informal resolution, please explain why this was not appropriate in this case.	
What actions do you feel might resolve the complaint at this stage?	
Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details.	
Signature:	
Date:	
Official use	
Date acknowledgement sent:	
By whom:	
Complaint allocated to: Date:	
Outcome:	☐ Upheld ☐ Partially upheld ☐ Not upheld
Date outcome communicated to complainant:	

Appendix B: Template for making a Stage 3 Complaint

Please complete and return to the Chair of RBET Trustees. Your Stage 3 complaint will be acknowledged within five working days and arrangements will be made for a panel hearing.

Stage 3 is the final stage of RBAir's internal complaints procedure.

(Please try to provide as much detail as possible, if using a word processor, the boxes expand)

Making a Stage 3 complaint	
Your name:	
Learner's name:	
Your relationship to the learner:	
Address:	
Postcode:	
Daytime telephone number:	
Evening telephone number:	
Email address:	
Which of the following best describes your reason for requesting a Stage 3 panel hearing?	• You believe RBAir failed to properly investigate the complaint you made at Stage 2. • You believe the complaint was properly investigated and the conclusions reached were correct, but that insufficient action has been taken to address the matter. • You believe the conclusions reached in response to your Stage 2 complaint were incorrect.
Please explain the basis of your Stage 3 complaint.	

Please explain why you believe the complaint has not been handled appropriately or resolved at Stage 2. Please note: Stage 3 is a review of the handling and/or outcome of the original complaint. New complaints or issues should not normally be introduced at this stage unless they relate directly to the handling of the original complaint.	
What outcome or actions do you feel would resolve the complaint at this stage?	
Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details.	
Signature:	
Date:	
Official use	
Date acknowledgement sent:	

By whom:	
Panel members:	
Date:	
Panel decision/outcome:	☐ Upheld ☐ Partially upheld ☐ Not upheld
Date outcome communicated to complainant:	

Appendix C: Local Authorities Complaints Contact Details

Local Authority	Complaints / Feedback contact details (Children's Services)
Bedford Borough Council	How to complain: Give feedback or make a complaint online Bedford Borough Council Safeguarding/referrals (IFD): 01234 718700 (office hours) / 0300 300 8123 (out-of-hours).
Cambridgeshire County Council	Children's complaints email: ChildrensComplaintsAndFeedbackTeam@cambridgeshire.gov.uk Main phone (general contact): 0345 045 5200 How to complain: Feedback/complaints online form and Children's Social Care complaints procedure (see council complaints pages). Council complaints procedures Cambridgeshire County Council
Central Bedfordshire Council	Complaints email: customer.relations@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk Phone: 0300 300 4995 How to complain: Online customer feedback /complaints form. Customer feedback Central Bedfordshire Council
Essex County Council	AP reporting / QA (Non-school AP): Essex Schools Infolink (Quality Assurance team for non-school AP) How to make a complaint: Complaints and compliments Essex County Council Complaints Form: Complaints and compliments - Contact type - Essex County Council
Hertfordshire County Council	Online complaints form: Make a complaint Email: cs.complaints@hertfordshire.gov.uk Phone: 01992 588542 Alternative Provision / AP concerns: Reintegrations / ESCs / AP: reintegration.team@hertfordshire.gov.uk SEND / Inclusion queries: sendstrategy@hertfordshire.gov.uk
Peterborough City Council	Children's Social Care complaints email: complain@peterborough.gov.uk Phone (Complaints): 01733 747474 How to complain: Complaints and feedback Peterborough City Council

Suffolk County Council	Complaints / customer rights email: customerrights@suffolk.gov.uk Phone: 0345 266 1821 How to complain: Compliments & complaints page and CYP Complaints & Customer Feedback Policy (PDF). Compliments and complaints - Suffolk County Council
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