

Complaints Procedure



FUTURES - ESSEX
EDUCATING MINDS, SOARING HIGH

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1. Aims

Futures-Essex Ltd aims to meet its statutory obligations when responding to complaints from parents of pupils at the provision, and others.

When responding to complaints, we aim to:

- Be impartial and non-adversarial
- Facilitate a full and fair investigation by an independent person or panel, where necessary
- Address all the points at issue and provide an effective and prompt response
- Respect complainants' desire for confidentiality
- Treat complainants with respect and courtesy
- Make sure that any decisions we make are lawful, rational, reasonable, fair and proportionate, in line with the principles of administrative law
- Keep complainants informed of the progress of the complaints process
- Consider how the complaint can feed into provision improvement evaluation processes

We try to resolve concerns or complaints by informal means wherever possible. Where this is not possible, formal procedures will be followed.

Futures-Essex Ltd will aim to give the complainant the opportunity to complete the complaints procedure in full.

To support this, we will make sure we publicise the existence of this policy and make it available on our website.

Throughout the process, we will be sensitive to the needs of all parties involved, and make any reasonable adjustments needed to accommodate individuals.

2. Legislation and guidance

This document meets the requirements of section 29 of the [Education Act 2002](#), which states that “schools” must have and make available a procedure to deal with all complaints relating to them and to any community facilities or services that the “school” provides.

It is also based on [guidance for schools on complaints procedures](#) from the Department for Education (DfE), including the model procedure, and model procedure for dealing with serial and unreasonable complaints.

3. Definitions and scope

3.1 Definitions

The DfE guidance explains the difference between a concern and a complaint:

- A **concern** is defined as “an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought”
- A **complaint** is defined as “an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action”

3.2 Scope

Futures-Essex Ltd intends to resolve complaints informally where possible, at the earliest possible stage.

There may be occasions when complainants would like to raise their concerns formally. This policy outlines the procedure relating to handling such complaints.

This policy does **not** cover complaints procedures relating to:

- Statutory assessments of special educational needs (SEN)
- Safeguarding matters
- Whistle-blowing
- Staff grievances
- Staff discipline

4. Roles and responsibilities

4.1 The complainant

The complainant will get a more effective and timely response to their complaint if they:

- Follow these procedures
- Co-operate with Futures-Essex Ltd throughout the process, and respond to deadlines and communication promptly
- Ask for assistance as needed
- Treat all those involved with respect
- Do not publish details about the complaint on social media

4.2 The investigator

An individual will be appointed to look into the complaint and establish the facts. They will:

- Interview all relevant parties, keeping notes
- Consider records and any written evidence and keep these securely
- Prepare a comprehensive report to the headteacher or complaints committee, which includes the facts and potential solutions

4.3 The complaints co-ordinator

The complaints co-ordinator can be:

- The Provision Manager
- The designated complaints Director
- Any other staff member providing administrative support

The complaints co-ordinator will:

- Keep the complainant up to date at each stage in the procedure
- Make sure the process runs smoothly by liaising with staff members and all other stakeholders.
- Be aware of issues relating to:
 - Sharing third-party information
 - Additional support needed by complainants; for example, interpretation support or where the complainant is a child or young person
- Keep records

5. Principles for investigation

When investigating a complaint, we will try to clarify:

- What has happened
- Who was involved
- What the complainant feels would put things right

5.1 Timescales

The complainant must raise the complaint within 3 months of the incident. If the complaint is about a series of related incidents, they must raise the complaint within 3 months of the last incident.

We will consider exceptions to this timeframe in circumstances where there were valid reasons for not making a complaint at that time and the complaint can still be investigated in a fair manner for all involved.

When complaints are made out of term time, we will consider them to have been received on the first day after the holiday period.

If at any point we cannot meet the timescales we have set out in this policy, we will:

- Set new time limits with the complainant
- Send the complainant details of the new deadline and explain the delay

6. Stages of complaint

6.1 Stage 1: informal

Futures-Essex Ltd will take informal concerns seriously and make every effort to resolve the matter quickly. It may be the case that the provision or clarification of information will resolve the issue.

The complainant should raise the complaint as soon as possible with the relevant member of staff or the Provision Manager as appropriate, either in person or by letter, telephone or email. If the complainant is unclear who to contact or how to contact them, they should contact the office on 01245 982888

We will acknowledge informal complaints within 3 days.

The informal stage will involve a meeting between the complainant and the Provision Manager / Director as appropriate.

If the complaint is not resolved informally, it will be escalated to a formal complaint.

6.2 Stage 2: formal

Formal complaints can be raised:

- By letter or email
- Over the phone
- In person
- By a third party acting on behalf of the complainant

The complainant should provide details such as relevant dates, times, and the names of witnesses of events, alongside copies of any relevant documents, and what they feel would resolve the complaint.

If complainants need assistance raising a formal complaint, they can contact the school office. The Provision Manager will record the date the complaint is received and will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 3 days.

The Provision Manager / Director will call a meeting to clarify concerns, and seek a resolution. The complainant may be accompanied to this meeting, and should inform Futures-Essex Ltd the identity of their companion in advance.

In certain circumstances, Futures-Essex Ltd may need to refuse a request for a particular individual to attend any such meeting – for example, if there is a conflict of interest. If this is the case, the school will notify the complainant as soon as they are aware, so that the complainant has the opportunity to arrange alternative accompaniment.

The Provision Manager / Director will then conduct their own investigation. The written conclusion of this investigation will be sent to the complainant.

If the complainant wishes to proceed to the next stage of the procedure, they should inform within 5 days.

How to escalate a complaint

Complaints can be escalated by contacting the advisory board:

- By letter or email
- Over the phone
- In person
- Through a third party acting on behalf of the complainant

The Advisory Board will need the details of the complaint as set out above, as well as details from the complainant on how they feel the previous stage of the procedure has not addressed their complaint sufficiently, and what they feel would resolve the complaint.

The written conclusion of this investigation will be sent to the complainant within 5 days.

Requests received outside of this timeframe will be considered in exceptional circumstances.

6.3 Stage 3: submit the complaint to the review panel

Convening the panel

The review panel consists of the first 3 members of the advisory board available who don't have direct knowledge of the complaint. These individuals will have access to the existing record of the complaint's progress (see section 10).

The complainant will be given reasonable notice of the date of the review panel.

If the complainant rejects the offer of 3 proposed dates without good reason, the Directors set a date. The hearing will go ahead using written submissions from both parties.

Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least 3 days before the date of the meeting.

At the meeting

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

At the review panel meeting, the complainant and representatives, as appropriate, will be present. Each will have an opportunity to set out written or oral submissions prior to the meeting.

The complainant must be allowed to attend the panel hearing and be accompanied by a suitable companion if they wish. We don't encourage either party to bring legal representation, but will consider it on a case-by-case basis. For instance, if a school employee is called as a witness in a complaint meeting, they may wish to be supported by their union.

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

At the meeting, each individual will have the opportunity to give statements and present their evidence, and witnesses will be called as appropriate to present their evidence.

The panel, the complainant and the school representative will be given the chance to ask and reply to questions. Once the complainant and school representatives have completed presenting their cases, they will be asked to leave, and evidence will then be considered.

The panel will then put together its findings and recommendations from the case. The panel will also provide copies of the minutes of the hearing and the findings and recommendations to the complainant and, where relevant, the subject of the complaint, and make a copy of the findings and recommendations available for inspection by the headteacher.

The outcome

The committee can:

- Uphold the complaint, in whole or in part
- Dismiss the complaint, in whole or in part

If the complaint is upheld, the committee will:

- Decide the appropriate action to resolve the complaint
- Where appropriate, recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future

The school will inform those involved of the decision in writing within 5 days.

8. Referring complaints on completion of the provision's procedure

If the complainant is unsatisfied with the outcome of the complaints procedure, they can refer their complaint to the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA). The ESFA will check whether the complaint has been dealt with properly. The ESFA will not overturn a school's decision about a complaint, but will intervene if a school or trust has:

- Breached a clause in its funding agreement
- Failed to act in line with its duties under education law
- Acted (or is proposing to act) unreasonably when exercising its functions

If the complaints procedure is found to not meet regulations, Futures-Essex Ltd will be asked to correct its procedure accordingly.

For more information or to refer a complaint, see the following webpage:

www.gov.uk/complain-about-school

9. Persistent complaints

9.1 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 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 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.

9.2 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

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

9.3 Complaint campaigns

Where Futures-Essex Ltd receives a large volume of complaints about the same topic or subject, especially if these come from complainants unconnected with them, Futures-Essex Ltd may respond to these complaints by:

- Publishing a single response on the website
- Sending a template response to all of the complainants

If complainants are not satisfied with the response, or wish to pursue the complaint further, the normal procedures will apply.

10. Record keeping and confidentiality

Futures-Essex Ltd 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 stored securely, 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 and in line with data protection law, our privacy notices.

11. Learning lessons

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

12. Monitoring arrangements

The advisory board will monitor the effectiveness of the complaints procedure in making sure that complaints are handled properly.

This policy will be reviewed every 2 years.

13. Links with other policies

Policies dealing with other forms of complaints include:

- Child protection and safeguarding policy and procedures
- Staff grievance procedures
- Staff disciplinary procedures
- Privacy notices

Addendum to Complaints Policy

Date: August 2025

Next review aligned with main policy review: March 2026

This addendum outlines amendments and enhancements to strengthen the current Complaints Policy. These points should be read in conjunction with the existing policy and incorporated into the next full revision.

1. Accessibility & Inclusion

- The complaints procedure will be made accessible to pupils and families with additional needs, e.g. through easy-read versions, interpreters, and advocacy.
- Complaints from young people themselves will be taken seriously and handled using the same process as parental complaints.

2. Links to Local Authority & Commissioners

- Where placements are commissioned by Local Authorities (e.g. Southend-on-Sea or Essex), commissioners will be informed of complaints relating to safeguarding, provision quality, or placement suitability.

3. Safeguarding Distinction

- Safeguarding matters are excluded from this policy, but clear signposting will be provided: complaints that raise safeguarding concerns should be directed immediately to the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) or to the Essex Safeguarding Children Board.

4. Timeframes for Responses

- A summary table of timescales will be included to ensure transparency:

Stage	Acknowledgement	Outcome
Stage 1 – Informal	Within 3 working days	Within 10 working days
Stage 2 – Formal	Within 3 working days	Within 15 working days
Stage 3 – Review Panel	Convened within 20 working days	Written decision within 5 working days of hearing

5. Independent Element at Panel Stage

- At Stage 3, the review panel will include at least **one independent member** (not connected to the provision) to strengthen impartiality and align with good practice for schools and alternative provision.

6. Complaints from Staff, Partners, or Other Professionals

- The scope will be clarified to confirm that complaints can also be raised by external professionals (e.g. social workers, therapists, partner schools).

7. Vexatious Complaints and Staff Wellbeing

- The section on persistent/unreasonable complaints will include an explicit note that Futures-Essex is committed to protecting staff wellbeing.
- Repeated hostile or aggressive communication will be addressed robustly, and support offered to staff involved.

8. Review & Reporting

- Outcomes of complaints will be reviewed annually by the Advisory Board, with themes and learning points shared with commissioners where appropriate to support service improvement.

9. Contact Details for ESFA

- ESFA contact information will be updated to include:
 - Website:** www.gov.uk/complain-about-school
 - Email:** academy.questions@education.gov.uk
 - Post:** ESFA, Cheylesmore House, Quinton Road, Coventry, CV1 2WT