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   APPENDIX 1 – EAST STREET FARM COMPLAINTS FORM (OPTIONAL USE)

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1. POLICY INTENT

East Street Farm is an independent special school providing therapeutic education for children aged 8 to 16 with autism, Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA) and associated mental health needs including developmental trauma.

This Complaints Policy ensures that all concerns and complaints are handled promptly, fairly and sensitively in a way that respects the rights and needs of students, families and staff. This policy ensures East Street Farm has a clear, written procedure for handling complaints, available to parents/carers of current students, as required under Part 7 of the Independent School Standards (2014). At East Street Farm, we recognise that concerns and complaints may arise and view them as opportunities for reflection and improvement. This policy is available to the parents/carers of current and prospective students via the East Street Farm website or on request, in line with the Independent School Standards.

This policy aims to:

- Ensure all stakeholders understand the process for raising concerns and how they will be addressed
- Promote resolution at the earliest possible opportunity through open communication
- Provide a fair and impartial procedure for handling complaints
- Foster a culture of trust, openness and accountability
- Uphold the rights of students and families

2. LEGISLATION AND GUIDANCE

This Complaints Policy complies with the following legislation and statutory guidance:

- Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 – Part 7 - This policy ensures that East Street Farm has a clear, written procedure for handling complaints, in accordance with Part 7 of the Independent School Standards (2014)
- The Education Act 2002
- Children and Families Act 2014
- The Equality Act 2010
- General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) and Data Protection Act 2018

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- DfE 'Best Practice Guidance for School Complaints Procedures 2020'

To comply with legislation this complaints procedure:

- Is available to parents and carers of current and prospective students through this policy document
- Sets out clear timeframes for each stage of the process to ensure timely resolution
- Includes provision for a panel hearing, which will always include at least one independent member not involved in the management or running of East Street Farm
- Requires that accurate records of all complaints and actions taken are maintained and available for inspection

Safeguarding Commitment: East Street Farm is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of students. We expect all staff and volunteers to share this commitment. We aim to ensure that all students feel safe and reach their full emotional and academic potential.

3. RELATED POLICIES

This policy should be read in conjunction with:

- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy
- Behaviour Policy
- Staff Code of Conduct Policy
- Equality and Diversity Policy
- Parent/Carer Communication and Conduct Policy

4. WHO THIS POLICY APPLIES TO

- Students
- Parents and carers
- All Staff
- Visitors
- Governance Committee members

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- Proprietors

This policy applies to complaints made by parents and carers of students currently registered at East Street Farm. It does not cover complaints from prospective parents/carers or third parties, except where directly related to the education or welfare of a current student.

5. VISION AND VALUES

We are guided by three core values:

Nurturing Belonging – We create a safe and inclusive culture where students, families and staff feel respected and valued

Inspiring Change – We welcome feedback as a catalyst for reflection, growth and improved practice

Supporting Growth – We promote personal and academic development by listening and responding to concerns

6. DEFINITIONS

- A **Concern** is an expression of worry or doubt requiring reassurance
- A **Complaint** is an expression of dissatisfaction requiring formal 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 this complaint's procedure. East Street Farm takes concerns seriously and will make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly and effectively as possible.

If you have difficulty discussing a concern with a particular member of staff, we will respect your views and refer you to the Head of Education.

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

7. POLICY DETAILS

7.1. Scope of This Policy

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This policy and its procedures apply to all complaints relating to our organisation's education, therapeutic provision and community services, except where specific statutory procedures apply as outlined below:

Exceptions	Who to contact
Admissions to schools Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs	Admission decisions for East Street Farm are managed internally in accordance with the Admissions policy Statutory SEND assessment concerns should be directed to the relevant Education Authority, who are responsible for Education, Health and Care (EHC) assessments under the Children and Families Act 2014
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
Exclusion of children from school	Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions
Whistleblowing	East Street Farm has an internal whistleblowing procedure for all our staff, including temporary staff and contractors
Staff grievances	Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the East Street Farm internal grievance procedure
Staff conduct	Complaints about staff will be dealt with under East Street Farm'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 the premises or facilities	Any complaints about services provided by other providers who may use the premises or facilities, will be raised directly with the third party by the Head of Education.
National Curriculum content	Please contact the Department for Education at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus

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If other bodies are investigating aspects of the complaint, for example the police, local education authority (LEA), safeguarding teams or tribunals, this may impact our 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 East Street Farm in relation to their complaint, East Street Farm will consider whether to suspend the complaints procedure until those legal proceedings have concluded.

7.2. **Raising a Concern**

We value open communication and positive relationships with families. We aim to resolve concerns quickly and informally, in a way that fosters collaboration, trust and transparency.

7.3. **How to Raise a Concern**

A concern can be raised in person, in writing or by telephone.
Concerns may also be raised by a third party acting on behalf of a parent, carer or student, with appropriate consent.

In the first instance, individuals should contact the relevant staff member most directly involved. If you are unsure who to approach, the admin office can direct your enquiry.

Where a concern cannot be resolved at this level, it should be referred to the Head of Education. If the issue remains unresolved, the next step is to follow the formal complaints procedure outlined in this policy.

7.3.1. <u>Communication Expectations</u>

- All communication should follow our Communication Policy, using agreed channels such as email via the East Street Farm office, phone messages or pre-arranged meetings
- Direct approaches to staff during lessons cannot be accommodated, as they may disrupt teaching and learning
- Direct approaches to staff outside working hours cannot be accommodated
- We ask that all communication be respectful, courteous and constructive

7.3.2. <u>Accessibility and Support</u>

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East Street Farm will make reasonable adjustments for all individuals (including students) who need assistance to communicate a concern, such as providing accessible formats or arranging support where required.

7.3.3. Recording and Monitoring

A brief log of informal concerns (date, issue and outcome) will be recorded to ensure patterns can be monitored and to promote continuous improvement.

This process ensures that all concerns are managed fairly, consistently and with the shared goal of achieving the best outcomes for our students.

7.4. **Raising a Formal Complaint**

7.4.1. Stage 1

Formal complaints must be made to the Head of Education (unless they are about the Head of Education), via the admin office. This should be done in person, in writing (preferably on the Complaint Form – see Appendix A) and support with this process can be obtained through the East Street Farm office.

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

Note: The Head of Education may delegate the investigation to another member of the team but not the decision to be taken.

During the investigation, the Head of Education (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 Head of Education will provide a formal written response within 10 school days of the date of receipt of the complaint.

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If the Head of Education is 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 East Street Farm will take to resolve the complaint.

The Head of Education 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 Head of Education, one of the proprietors will be appointed to complete all the actions at Stage 1.

Stage 1 Complaints should be addressed as follows:

- About a staff member (excluding Head of Education): to the Head of Education
- About the Head of Education: to the Proprietor (MSA Director) who will appoint an independent investigator to consider the matter in line with Part 7 of the Independent School Standards
- About the Proprietor: to the Governance Committee
- About a Governance Committee member: to the Proprietors
- About the majority of the Governance Committee: an independent investigator is appointed by a Proprietor

7.4.2. Stage 2

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 panel hearing. This is the final stage of the complaint's procedure.

A request to escalate to Stage 2 must be made to the Business Manager (acting on behalf of the Proprietors) via the office, within 5 school days of receipt of the Stage 1 response.

The Business Manager will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 3 school days.

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

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The Business Manager will write to the complainant to inform them of the date of the meeting. They will aim to convene a meeting within 10 school days of receipt of the Stage 2 request. If this is not possible, the Business Manager will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed.

If the complainant rejects the offer of three proposed dates, without good reason, the Business Manager 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.

Panel composition:

- Minimum 3 members, including at least 1 independent of East Street Farm. The independent panel member will have no previous connection with East Street Farm staff or governance and will be appointed to ensure impartiality
- The panel will be appointed by one of the Proprietors
- If the complaint is about the Proprietor or involves a conflict of interest within the governance committee, an independent panel will be convened by an individual appointed by the Proprietor who has had no prior involvement with the complaint or with the day-to-day running of East Street Farm. This ensures the complaint is reviewed impartially and in line with Part 7 of the Independent School Standards

The panel 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 be accompanied by someone for support. This can be a relative or friend. Generally, we do not encourage either party to bring legal representatives to the panel meeting. However, there may be occasions when legal representation is appropriate. For instance, if an East Street Farm staff member is called as a witness in a complaint meeting, they may wish to be supported by union and/or a legal representative.

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

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

The panel 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.

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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.

Panel Consideration and Resolving Complaints

The panel will consider the complaint and all evidence presented carefully and impartially. After review, the panel may:

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

If the complaint is upheld (in whole or in part), the panel will determine the most appropriate actions to resolve the complaint and may recommend changes to East Street Farm's systems, procedures or policies to prevent similar issues in the future.

At every stage in the process, East Street Farm aims to resolve complaints in a fair, transparent and timely manner. Where appropriate, we will acknowledge that the complaint is upheld in whole or in part and may offer one or more of the following outcomes:

- An explanation of what happened and why
- An admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better
- An assurance that steps will be taken to ensure the event complained of does not recur
- An explanation of measures that have been or will be implemented to prevent a recurrence, including timescales for any changes
- A commitment to review east Street Farm policies or practices in light of the complaint
- An apology

The Chair of the Panel will provide both the complainant and East Street Farm with a full written explanation of the decision and the reasons for it within five school days of the hearing.

This response will include:

- Details of the actions taken to investigate the complaint
- Information on any measures East Street Farm will take to resolve the issue or prevent it from recurring

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- Guidance on how the complainant may escalate their concerns if they remain dissatisfied

7.4.3. Next Steps

If the complainant believes East Street Farm 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 schools. They will consider whether schools have 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/contactus
- by telephone on: 0370 000 2288
- or by writing to:
  Department for Education, Piccadilly Gate, Store Street, Manchester, M1 2WD.

7.4.4. Anonymous Complaints

Anonymous complaints are not usually investigated. The Head of Education or member of the Governance Committee will decide whether investigation is warranted. Safeguarding concerns raised anonymously will always be taken seriously and investigated as appropriate, even if raised without a name.

7.5. **Timeframes**

Complaints should be raised within **3 months** of the event unless there are exceptional circumstances. Timelines are paused during school holidays.

7.6. **Complaints Outside of Term Time**

Complaints received during school breaks will be treated as received on the **first school day back**.

7.7. **Withdrawal of a complaint**

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

7.8. **Record Keeping and Confidentiality**

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- Written records will be kept for at least 6 years
- Records of complaints will be stored securely and made readily available to Ofsted or the Department for Education upon request, as required under Part 7 of the Independent School Standards
- All complaints will be treated in accordance with GDPR and confidentiality laws, except where required by law or inspection
- Records will state whether the complaint was resolved at stage 1 or proceeded to a panel hearing. The records will also document if the complaint was upheld or not and what action was taken as a result. These records will be made available to Ofsted and the DfE on request
- A summary of the number of formal complaints registered under this procedure during the previous school year and whether they were upheld, is available to parents/carers of students on request

7.9. **Unreasonable or Persistent Complaints**

We will always listen and aim to resolve complaints fairly. However, if a complainant's behaviour becomes unacceptable, we may:

- Limit communication
- Designate a communication contact
- Treat the complaint as unreasonable if it includes abusive or obstructive behaviour

Examples include:

- Repetitive or trivial complaints
- Refusing to cooperate
- Harassing or offensive language
- Publishing unsubstantiated claims on social media

Decisions to limit or cease communication with a complainant must be authorised by the Head of Education and Proprietors and communicated in writing with reasons.

Stopping Responding

We may stop responding to a complaint when:

- We have taken all reasonable steps to resolve a complaint
- A clear final position has been communicated

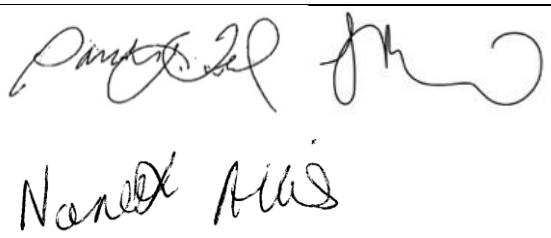
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- Further contact appears intended to cause disruption

The complainant will be notified in writing and new complaints will still be accepted and reviewed.

8. POLICY REVIEW AND UPDATES

- This policy will be reviewed annually, or sooner if:
  - a significant incident occurs
  - statutory or regulatory requirements are updated or
  - the needs of students change
- The Head of Education and Proprietors are responsible for overseeing the review process, evaluating outcomes and implementing any necessary updates
- Any revisions to this policy will be communicated to staff, parents/carers, the Governance Committee and other relevant stakeholders
- This policy is available to all individuals on our website and upon request from the admin office

Proprietors Signature: Head of Education Signature:	
Date:	20/10/2025
Review Date:	20/10/2026

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APPENDIX 1

East Street Farm Complaints Form (Optional Use)

This form is available to support anyone wishing to raise a formal complaint. You are not required to use this form – complaints can also be submitted in writing by letter or email. We are happy to provide assistance or alternative formats upon request.

Your Details

- **Full Name:** _____
- **Relationship to Student (if applicable):** _____
- **Student's Name (if applicable):** _____
- **Address:** _____

- **Contact Number:** _____
- **Email Address:** _____

Details of the Complaint

Please provide as much information as possible, including what happened, when and who was involved. You may continue on a separate sheet if needed.

Have you previously raised this concern informally (Stage 1)?

☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, who did you speak to and what was the outcome?

What outcome are you seeking?

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Signed: _____ Date: _____

Please return this form to:

The Head of Education (or relevant person as outlined in the policy)

East Street Farm

Pitmore Lane

Sway

Lymington

Hampshire

SO41 6BX

If you require assistance completing this form or need it in another format, please contact the East Street Farm office.

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