

Complaints Policy

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This policy covers all aspects of Autism Anglia including, specifically for the purposes of the Independent School Standards Regulation 2014

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1 Introduction

Autism Anglia is committed to providing a quality service for the individuals we support and employ by working in an open and accountable way that builds the trust and respect of all our stakeholders.

One of the ways in which we can continue to improve our service is by listening and responding to the views of our staff, learners, supported individuals, parents, carers and significant others in addition to other stakeholders who are involved in our services. Autism Anglia will treat each concern or complaint as an expression of dissatisfaction with our services. Autism Anglia will respond positively to any issues raised and will learn from them to improve our service.

Therefore, Autism Anglia aims to ensure that:

- Raising a concern or making a complaint is as easy as possible; verbal complaints will be taken seriously, and a summary of your complaint will be summarised in writing. You may also submit an informal complaint in writing.
- A concern or complaint is treated as a clear expression of dissatisfaction with our service which requires acknowledgement and timely response.
- A concern or complaint is dealt with promptly, politely and, when appropriate confidentially.
- A complaint will be responded to in the right way, for example, with an explanation or an apology where we have got things wrong, or by providing information on any action taken.
- We learn from complaints and use them as an opportunity to review and improve our services.

Autism Anglia will regularly review this policy and procedure to make sure that it meets the needs of individuals who require to complain about the charity.

Autism Anglia recognises that many concerns will be raised informally and dealt with quickly.

Autism Anglia aims to:

- Resolve informal concerns quickly.
- Keep matters low key.
- Enable mediation between the complainant and the individual to whom the complaint has been referred.

Autism Anglia recognises that an informal approach is appropriate when it can be achieved. However, if concerns cannot be satisfactorily resolved informally, then the formal stages of the complaints procedure should be followed.

2 What is a Complaint?

Autism Anglia defines a concern or complaint as “any expression of dissatisfaction” and which requires a response from the charity in relation to any issue with:

- Autism Anglia
- Doucecroft School
- The standard of the service we provide
- A member of staff
- A Trustee

The complaints procedure is intended to ensure that all concerns and complaints are handled fairly, consistently, and wherever possible resolved to the complainant's satisfaction.

Our policy does not cover:

- Comments about our policies or policy decisions.
- Dissatisfaction with our policies.
- Matters which have already been fully investigated through this procedure.
- Anonymous complaints (refer to Whistle Blowing policy).

2.1 Persistent and/or Vexatious Complaints

Autism Anglia accepts that in most cases complaints are raised due to genuine concerns regarding the services provided by the charity and with a view to finding resolution.

Persistent and/or vexatious complaints are problematic for charities and can place strain on individuals and the resources of the charity. The Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman defines unreasonably persistent complainants as: *“Those who, because of the frequency or nature of their contact with an authority, hinder the authority’s consideration of their or other people’s, complaints”*.

In the circumstances where the charity considers a complaint is vexatious or persistent, we reserve the right not to follow the stages as outlined in this policy.

2.2 Responsibilities

Autism Anglia’s responsibility will be to:

- Acknowledge the formal complaint in writing.
- Respond within a reasonable time.
- Deal reasonably and sensitively with the complaint.
- Take all complaints seriously.
- Treat complainants with courtesy and fairness; we would request that the complainant will also be courteous in their dealings with our staff.
- Act where appropriate.
- Not deal with you less favourably than anyone else because of any protected characteristics, including;
 - Sex.
 - Civil partnership or marital status, this includes family status, responsibility for dependents, and gender (including gender reassignment, whether proposed, commenced or completed). (where relevant).
 - Sexual orientation.
 - Pregnancy or maternity.
 - Race, this includes ethnic or national origin or nationality and colour.
 - Disability.
 - Age (where relevant).
 - Religion and beliefs including philosophical beliefs.
 - Any other reasons, such as trade union affiliation.

A complainant's responsibility is to:

- Bring their concern or complaint to the attention of Autism Anglia, normally within 4 weeks of the issue arising.
- Raise concerns promptly and directly with a member of staff within Autism Anglia.
- Explain the problem as clearly and as fully as possible, including any action taken to date.
- Allow Autism Anglia a reasonable amount of time to respond to the matter.
- Recognise that in some circumstances the resolution of the complaint may be beyond Autism Anglia's control.

Responsibility for Action:

- All Staff.
- Trustees

Confidentiality:

Except in exceptional circumstances, every attempt will be made to ensure that both the complainant and Autism Anglia maintain confidentiality under the requirements of the Data Protection Act 2018. However, the circumstances giving rise to the complaint may be such that it may not be possible to maintain confidentiality (with each complaint judged on its own merit). Should this be the case, the situation will be explained to the complainant.

Monitoring and Reporting:

Senior Managers/ Trustees will receive an annual summarised account of all complaints made.

3 Complaints Procedure

3.1 Stage 1 (Informal)

To raise an initial concern, please speak to or email the individual(s) concerned or their line manager and we will endeavour to address your concern and let you know of any remedial action that is to be taken. If you are unsure who to contact or you do not wish to contact the individual involved, please email hrrsupport@autism-anglia.org.uk. All complaints will be acknowledged by the member of staff to whom you communicated your concern to, alternatively Human Resources will be in contact.

In order for us to resolve your issue to the best of our ability, please include as much detail as possible regarding your concern, including any relevant communications or documentation. We will respond to Stage 1 complaints within 7 working days.

For all concerns, you should state:

- The details of your concern.
- The consequences of the issue you are concerned about.
- The remedy you are seeking.

3.2 Stage 2 (Formal Complaint)

If you are not satisfied with the response you receive at Stage 1, or you would prefer your complaint to be formally investigated, you can request your complaint to be escalated to Stage 2. This must be done in writing and addressed to the Chief Executive Officer. Alternatively, for complaints concerning Doucecroft School, your complaint should be directed to the Head Teacher, or should you prefer, it can be addressed to the Chief Executive Officer, who will acknowledge receipt of this within 5 working

days. An appropriate person will conduct an investigation into the complaint raised, including how it was handled at Stage 1, and you will receive a written response within 20 working days from the date of the acknowledgement.

3.3 Stage 3 (Final Stage Appeal to the Board of Trustees)

If you are not satisfied with the formal resolution set out under Stage 2, you can appeal the decision. To make an appeal, please outline the reasons for your dissatisfaction in writing to hrsupport@autism-anglia.org.uk.

The Board of Trustees will write within 30 working days of receiving the appeal confirming the final decision and reasoning. The resolution of the appeal is the final outcome of the complaints process.

As part of the appeal process for Doucecroft, the Charity will ensure that:

- Board makes provision for a hearing before a panel appointed by or on behalf of the proprietor and consisting of at least three people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint;
- Where there is a panel hearing of a complaint, one panel member is independent of the management and running of the school.
- The procedure allows for a parent to attend and be accompanied at a panel hearing if they wish;
- The procedure provides for the panel to make findings and recommendations and stipulates that a copy of those findings and recommendations is:
 - Provided to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about; and
 - Available for inspection on the school premises by the Proprietor, Chief Executive Officer, and the Headteacher;
- The procedure provides for a written record to be kept of all complaints that are made in accordance with sub-paragraph (e) and:
 - Whether they are resolved following a formal procedure, or proceed to a panel hearing; and
 - Action taken by the school as a result of these complaints (regardless of whether they are upheld); and
- The procedure provides that correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints are to be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 108 or 109 of the 2008 Act requests access to them.

4 Patient Safety Incidents – Assessing Harm – NHS Levels of Harm

A patient safety incident is defined as ‘something unexpected or unintended which could have or did, lead to harm for on or more patients receiving healthcare’. Generally, this will only apply to tenders or partnerships with the NHS, such as the Community Connect service. Autism Anglia will follow the principles within the Patient Safety Incident Response Framework (PSIRF) for any patient safety incidents reported. Safety incidents identified by staff should be reported to Chief Executive Officer and hrsupport@autism-anglia.org.uk.

Each incident will be assessed using the NHS standard levels of harm:

- **No Harm** – Impact prevented or did not reach the individual.
- **Low Harm** – Minimal harm requiring no or minimal intervention.
- **Moderate Harm** – Significant harm requiring medical treatment or intervention.

- **Severe Harm** – Long-term or permanent harm caused.
- **Death** – Incident contributed to or caused a person’s death.

This framework ensures a consistent approach to classification and supports effective review and learning.

As part of our commitment to safety, Autism Anglia adopts the four keys aims of PSIRF:

1. Compassionate Engagement and Involvement

We will involve autistic individuals, families and carers in a respectful, inclusive, and compassionate manner when incidents occur. We recognise that the lived experience of people affected by incidents is vital to learning and improving.

2. Application of a Systems-Based Approach to Learning

We will look beyond individual actions to understand the wider system factors that contribute to incidents. This includes considering how processes, communication, training and environments may affect outcomes.

3. Considered and Proportionate Responses

Our investigations and reviews will be tailored to the level of harm and complexity of each incident. This ensures our response is timely, fair, and focused on meaningful learning.

4. Supportive Oversight Focused on Strengthening Response Systems

Leadership within the charity will regularly review incident trends, ensure learning is embedded into practice, and support continuous improvement. Oversight will focus on development a strong safety culture and learning environment.

In the event a safety incident of moderate (or greater) harm is reported, Autism Anglia will inform the Integrated Care Board for information and support regarding the next steps of the investigation. Autism Anglia will co-operate in any cross-system investigation as required patients who received care from more than one organisation.

5 Extending Time Limits

Autism Anglia aims to respond to all complaints within the timescales indicated above. However, if a complaint is very complex it may occasionally be necessary to extend the time limit. If this is the case, we will keep you informed of progress with the investigation, the reasons for the delay, and advise of an amended deadline for completion of the investigation.

6 Remedies

Where appropriate, Autism Anglia will act to:

- Acknowledge responsibility.
- Explain what went wrong and why.
- Put things right by making any changes required.
- Improve our processes for the future.

The remedy needs to be proportionate and appropriate to the failure in the service, and to take account of the resolution that has been requested.

We will not provide confirmation of any specific outcomes for individual staff members in respect of a complaint.

7 Contacts

You can contact us to make a complaint by writing to us at our address detailed below:

Autism Anglia
Head Office
846 The Crescent
Colchester Business Park
Colchester
CO4 9YQ
Tel: 01206 577678

Contact Details for CQC:
Phone: 03000 616161
National service centre
Citygate
Gallowgate
Newcastle upon Tyne
NE1 4PA
Website: <https://www.cqc.org.uk/>

Contact details for Essex County Council:
Phone Number: 0345 603 7635

Contact details for Norfolk County Council:
Phone Number: 0344 800 8020

Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman:
Phone Number: 0300 061 0614

SEND Operations Teams Essex:
Phone Number: 0345 603 7638

Mid Essex (Braintree, Chelmsford, Halstead and Maldon):
SENDOperations.Mid@essex.gov.uk

North-East Essex (Colchester and Tendring):
SENDOperations.NE@essex.gov.uk

South Essex (Basildon, Billericay, Brentwood, Castle Point, Rochford and Wickford):
SENDOperations.South@essex.gov.uk

West Essex (Epping, Harlow and Uttlesford):
SENDOperations.West@essex.gov.uk

South Suffolk and Ipswich:

Phone Number: 01473 260670, SENDSS@suffolk.gov.uk

West Suffolk, Central Suffolk and Bury St Edmunds:

Phone Number: 01284 741234, SENDWS@suffolk.gov.uk

Ofsted:

Phone Number: 0300 123 1231