Inspire Education Trust

Together we achieve, individually we grow

Complaints Policy (Trust)

Policy Date: July 2026

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Document History

Version	Status		Date	Author	Summary Changes
V1			June 21	Rob Darling	Page 9. Para 5. Removal of meeting with the complainant and the Investigating Officer
V2			March 2022	Vicki Shelley	Added to incorporate secondary changes Updated the Stage 1/2/3 processes to include timescales
V3			March 2023	V Shelley/R Darling	Confirm no changes
V4			June 2023	L Whitehouse	See highlights
V5			July 2024	K Grainger	- New table on Page 5 - Head of Education, Primary changed to Deputy CEO - Page 7, para 6 & 7 reference to Headteacher (Primary) and Head of Secondary amended to read Headteacher - Page 8, para 4 amended to Trust Governance Professional to be contacted and inc. contact details - Page 8, para 5 10 days changed to 20 days and to contact the Governance Professional
V6			May 2025	R Darling	- Page 4, third party complaints section added in. - Page 9, withdrawal of a complaint and record keeping added in. - Page 11, complaint campaigns section added in. - Page 12, reporting process to Trust Standards & Board explained. - Inlcude Arley and Frederick Bird throughout the policy
V7			Nov 25	K Grainger	- Name change only to refer to the DfE and not ESFA
V8			May 26	KGR & RDA	- Amends in line with the new White Paper recommendations. - Improved definitions of stages and IRP meaning - Addition of paragraph in Definition and Scope as to who this policy applies to

1 Aims

At the Inspire Education Trust, we value our relationship with students, parents and community users and we endeavour to provide a high quality service at all times. We recognise that at times things can and do go wrong. The Board of Trustees, Headteachers, staff and members of the Local Governing Committees (LGC) at Blue Coat C of E School and Music College, Arley Primary Academy Clifford Bridge Academy, Frederick Bird Academy, Hearsall Community Academy, Stockingford Academy, Walsgrave C of E Academy and Whittle Academy and believe that it is in everybody's best interest to resolve concerns and complaints at the earliest possible stage. For ease of read, the term 'parent' has been used throughout the document, to include parents, legal guardians and full-time carers.

Framework of Principles

The Inspire Education Trust Complaints procedure will:

- Encourage resolution of problems by informal means wherever possible.
- Be impartial and non-adversarial.
- Be easily accessible and publicised.
- 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.
- Keep complainants informed of the progress of the complaints process.
- Provide information to the leadership teams of the schools so that services can be improved.

2 Legislation and Guidance

This procedure complies with part 7 of Schedule 1 to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, which states that we must have and make available a written procedure to deal with complaints from parents of pupils at the school.

It is also based on guidance published by the Department for Education (DfE) (formerly the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA)) on developing and publishing a complaints procedure that complies with the above regulations, and refers to good practice guidance on setting up complaints procedures from the Department for Education (DfE).

In addition, it addresses duties set out in the Early Years Foundation Stage statutory framework with regards to dealing with complaints about the school's fulfilment of Early Years Foundation Stage requirements.

3 Definitions and Scope

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".

The school will resolve concerns through day-to-day communication as far as possible. A complaint is defined as "an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action".

The school 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.

Who may use this policy

This policy is intended for use by parents, legal guardians and full-time carers of pupils attending schools within the Inspire Education Trust. It may also be used where appropriate by pupils acting with the support of a parent, carer or advocate. This policy is not intended for use by members of the public, community users of school facilities, external organisations or other third parties who are not directly connected to a pupil attending the school. Concerns or complaints from such individuals will be considered on a case-by-case basis and may be dealt with through an alternative process determined by the Trust or school.

This policy does not cover complaints procedures relating to – see table below. Please see our separate policies for procedures relating to these types of complaint.

Admissions Statutory assessments of specialeducational needs (SEN)	Concerns about admissions and statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs should be raised with Coventry City Council or Warwickshire County Council (Arley Primary Academy and Stockingford Academy only).
Complaints about services provided by other providers who use school premises or facilities	Providers should have their own complaints procedure to deal with complaints about service. Please contact them direct.
Complaints made directly to Ofsted	Further information about raising concerns to Ofsted can be found at https://www.gov.uk/complain-about-school
Exclusion of children from school	Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at Behaviour in schools: sanctions and exclusions: Exclusions - GOV.UK
Prejudice related matters	Any concern relating to discrimination, bullying, harassment or any other type of prejudice-related concern should be addressed under the Dignity at Work Policy.
Safeguarding matters	Complaints about child protection matters are handled under the Inspire Education Trust's/the School's 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 local Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH).
Staff discipline / conduct	Complaints about staff will be dealt with under the Inspire Education Trust's/School's internal disciplinary procedures, if appropriate. Complainants will not be informed of any disciplinary action taken against a staff member as result of a complaint. However, the complainant will be notified that the matter is being addressed.
Staff grievances	Complaints from staff will be dealt with in accordance with the Inspire Education Trust's/the School's internal grievance procedure.
Whistleblowing	The Inspire Education Trust has an internal Whistleblowing procedure for employees, including temporary and contractors.

	The Secretary of State for Education is the prescribed person for matters relating to education for whistle-blowers in education who do not want to raise matters direct with their employer. Referrals can be made at: Department for Education - GOV.UK Volunteer staff who have concerns about the school should complain through The Inspire Education Trust's Complaints Policy. You may also be able to complain direct to the DfE depending on the substance of your complaint.
Third-party suppliers using school premises or facilities	Refer to separate complaints procedures. The school will ensure any third-party supplier using school premises or facilities to offer community facilities or services has its own complaints procedures in place and such complaints do not fall within the scope of this policy.

Arrangements for handling complaints from parents of children with SEND about a school's support are within the scope of this policy. Such complaints should first be made to the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENDCo) or Headteacher; they will then be referred to this Complaints Policy. Our SEN Policy includes information about the rights of parents of pupils with disabilities who believe that our school has discriminated against their child.

4 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

We also intend to address complaints as quickly as possible. To achieve this, realistic and reasonable time limits will be set for each action within each stage.

Where further investigations are necessary, new time limits will be set, and the complainant will be sent details of the new deadline with an explanation for the delay.

The school expects that complaints will be made as soon as possible after an incident arises and no later than three months afterwards. We will consider exceptions to this time frame 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.

Complaints about our fulfilment of Early Years Foundation Stage requirements

We will investigate all written complaints relating to the school's fulfilment of the Early Years Foundation Stage requirements, and notify the complainant of the outcome within 28 days of receiving the complaint. The school will keep a record of the complaint (see section 9) and make this available to Ofsted on request.

Parents and carers can notify Ofsted if they believe that the school is not meeting Early Years Foundation Stage requirements, by calling 0300 123 4234 or 0300 123 4666, or by emailing enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk An online contact form is also available at Ofsted - GOV.UK.

STAGE 1: Informal

Expression of concern to a member of staff

(acknowledge receipt within 5 school days at that stage)*

Satisfactory Outcome Reached?

(response received within 10 school days at that stage)*

No — Refer to Stage 2

Yes — No further action

STAGE 2: Leadership

Complainant chooses to escalate the complaint to Stage 2

(receipt acknowledged within 5 school days at that stage)*

Investigation conducted *(may take up to 10 school* days from receipt at that stage)*

and outcome reported to complainant *(response within 20 school* days of receipt of the written complaint)*

Satisfactory Outcome Reached?

No — Refer to Stage 3

Yes — No further action

STAGE 3: Independent Review Panel

Complainant refers matter to Independent Review Panel

within 5 school days of receiving Stage 2 outcome letter*

(receipt acknowledged within 5 school days at that stage)*

Investigation by Complaints Committee of Governors.

(Committee to meet within 20 school* days of receipt of the written complaint)

Satisfactory Outcome Reached?

(outcome letter issued within 15 school days of IRP Hearing)*

No — Refer to Stage 4

Yes — No further action

STAGE 4: There is no further right of appeal, but if the complainant considers that the process followed by the Independent Review Panel was unfair, he/she may refer the case

to the DfE

5 Stages of complaint

Complaints are expected to be made as soon as possible after an incident arises to amend the issue in an appropriate timescale. The Trust upholds a three-month time limit in which a complaint can be lodged regarding an incident. Complaints made outside this time limit will be considered in exceptional circumstances. In the case of any timescales changing, all parties involved will be informed of the changes in a timely manner. Complaints received outside of term time will be treated as being received on the first school day after the holiday period.

Stage 1: An informal discussion

The school 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 Headteacher, 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 school office.

The school will acknowledge informal complaints within five school days, and investigate and provide a response, either verbally or written, within ten school days of the complaint at that stage.

If, after due consideration, the complaint is not resolved informally, it could be escalated to a formal complaint – stage 2 if the complainant wishes to progress this further.

Stage 2: Complaint heard by the Headteacher/ Deputy CEO/ Executive Headteacher/ Chair of Governors/ CEO

If the complainant would like us to investigate their concerns further, our complaint form can be found at Annex A, should be completed and handed to the relevant school's receptionist.

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

The School will acknowledge the complaint form within five school days of receipt at that stage. The Headteacher (or other person either appointed by the Headteacher for this purpose, or in line with below) will then conduct an investigation, speak to the necessary individuals, take statements from those involved. This could take up to ten school days. Written records of meetings, telephone calls and other documentation will be kept.

Once the facts have been established, the Headteacher or persons stated above will arrange for the complainant to receive a letter that explains the outcome of the investigation. The letter will be sent within twenty school days from the date the complaint form was received by the school.

If the complainant is not satisfied with the response and wishes to proceed, they should refer to Stage 3.

Where the complaint is against the Headteacher, Stage 2 will be conducted by an Executive

Headteacher or Deputy CEO.

Where the complaint is against the Deputy CEO, Stage 2 will be carried out by the CEO.

If the complaint is against a Governor, Stage 2 will be carried out by the Chair of Governors. If the complaint is about a Chair of Governors' stage 2 will be conducted by an IET Director.

Stage 3: Independent Review Panel

Complaints will be escalated to an Independent Review Panel if the complainant is not satisfied with the response to the complaint at Stage 2.

The Stage 3 process is a review of the Stage 2 investigation and outcome. It is not a reinvestigation of the complaint.

The purpose of the Independent Review Panel is to consider whether the Stage 2 investigation was conducted fairly and in line with this Complaints Policy, and whether the outcome reached was reasonable in light of the evidence available at that time.

The panel will not consider new complaints or issues that were not raised as part of the original Stage 2 complaint.

The panel will only consider new evidence where it is directly relevant to the matters previously investigated and where there is a clear reason why it was not available at Stage 2. The panel reserves the right to determine the relevance of any additional information submitted. The panel will be appointed by, or on behalf of the school, and must consist of at least three people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint. At least one panel member must be independent of the management and running of the school. The panel cannot be made up solely of the School's LGC, as they are not independent of the management and running of the school.

For the purposes of this policy, an "independent" panel member is defined as someone who has had no prior involvement in the matters detailed in the complaint, has no personal or professional interest in the outcome, and is not part of the management or day-to-day running of the school or Trust.

No individual who has previously been involved in the consideration or investigation of the complaint will sit on the Independent Review Panel.

The aim of the Independent Review Panel is to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant.

The panel will reach findings and may make recommendations for action or improvement.
If you wish to request a panel hearing, please contact the Trust Governance Professional by letter or email, over the phone, in person, or through a third party acting on behalf of the complainant. Contact details are admin@ietrust.org or 024 76011479 explaining why you are unhappy. The letter should be sent within five school days of receiving the outcome letter from Stage 2. If the letter is received outside the five school days, the complaint will be referred back to Stage 1 of this process.

The Trust Governance Professional will set up a hearing within 20 school days of receiving the letter

at that stage and inform the complainant of this in writing. All parties will be given five school days' notice of a hearing. The review panel reserves the right to convene at their convenience rather than that of the complainant. At the review panel meeting, the complainant and representatives from the school, 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 if they wish.

If the complainant is unable or chooses not to attend the hearing, the panel will proceed in their absence and will consider any written submissions provided.

The panel will have access to the existing record of the complaint's progress (see section 8) and will base its review primarily on the evidence considered at Stage 2.

At the meeting, each individual will have the opportunity to give statements and present their evidence, and witnesses may be called, where necessary, to support the panel's review of the Stage 2 process.

The panel, the complainant and the school representative(s) will be given the chance to ask and reply to questions. Once the complainant and school representative(s) have presented their cases, they will be asked to leave and evidence will then be considered.

The panel may decline to consider information that falls outside the scope of the Stage 2 complaint. The panel must then put together its findings and recommendations from the case. The panel will also provide a copy of the findings and recommendations to the complainant and, where relevant, the individual who is the subject of the complaint, and make a copy available for inspection by the proprietor and Headteacher.

The School will inform those involved of the decision in writing within 15 school days.

Ofsted should not be contacted until the school's internal complaints process has been completed, except in safeguarding cases.

6 Withdrawal of a complaint

Where a complainant wishes to withdraw their complaint, the academy/ Trust will ask them to confirm this in writing. Despite the complaint having been withdrawn, the academy will still take the complainant's voice seriously and attempt to avoid causing similar distress to others in the future. The academy/ Trust will not under any circumstances ask, or pressure an individual, to withdraw a complaint.

7 Referring complaints on completion of the School's procedure

If the complainant is unsatisfied with the outcome of the school's complaints procedure, they can refer their complaint to the Department for Education (DfE). The DfE will check whether the complaint has been dealt with properly by the school. The DfE will not overturn a school's decision about a complaint.

However, it will look into:

- Whether there was undue delay, or the school did not comply with its own complaint's

procedure
- Whether the school was in breach of its funding agreement with the Secretary of State.
- Whether the school has failed to comply with any other legal obligation

If the school did not deal with the complaint properly, it will be asked to re-investigate the complaint.

If the school's complaints procedure is found to not meet regulations, the school will be asked to correct its procedure accordingly.

For more information or to refer a complaint, see the following webpage: Complain about a school to the Department for Education - GOV.UK

8 Unreasonable complainants

The Inspire Education Trust is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially. We do not normally limit the contact complainants have with the school, however, we do not expect our staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour and will take action to protect staff from that behaviour, including that which is abusive, offensive or threatening.

Inspire Education Trust defines unreasonable behaviour as that which hinders our 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 Headteacher/ Head of Primary/Secondary/ CEO (where applicable) or Chair of Local Governors/ Trust will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying an '*unreasonable*' marking.

If the behaviour continues, the Headteacher/ Head of Primary/Secondary/ CEO will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and ask them to change it. For complainants who excessively contact their Inspire Education Academy causing a significant level of disruption, we 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, we will immediately inform the police and communicate our actions in writing. This may include barring an individual from their Inspire Education Trust Academy.

Where a complainant tries to re-open the issue with the school after the complaint's procedure has been fully exhausted and the school has done everything it reasonably can in response to the complaint, the Chair of Governors or CEO (or other appropriate person in the case of a complaint about the Chair) will inform the complainant that the matter is closed.

If the complainant subsequently contacts the school again about the same issue, the school can choose not to respond. The normal circumstance in which we will not respond is if:

- The school has taken every reasonable step to address the complainant's needs, *and*
- The complainant has been given a clear statement of the school's position and their options (if any), *and*
- The complainant is contacting the school repeatedly but making substantially the same points each time.

However, this list is not intended to be exhaustive.

The school will be most likely to choose not to respond if:

a. We have reason to believe the individual is contacting the school with the intention of causing disruption or inconvenience, and/or
b. The individual's letters/emails/telephone calls are often or always abusive or aggressive, and/or
c. The individual makes insulting personal comments about, or threats towards, school staff

Unreasonable behaviour which is abusive, offensive or threatening may constitute an unreasonably persistent complaint.

Once the school has decided that it is appropriate to stop responding, the complainant will be informed in writing, either by letter or email.

The school will ensure when making this decision that complainants making any new complaint are heard, and that the school acts reasonably.

8b. Duplicate complaints

If a complaint has been resolved under this procedure and the school receives a duplicate complaint on the same subject from a partner, family member or other individual, the school will assess whether there are aspects that they hadn't previously considered, or any new information they need to take into account.

If they are satisfied that there are no new aspects, they will:

- Tell the new complainant that they have already investigated and responded to this issue, and the local process is complete
- Direct them to the DfE if they are dissatisfied with our original handling of the complaint

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

9 Complaints campaigns

Where the Trust becomes the subject of a complaints campaign from complainants who are not connected with the academy, a standard, single response will be published on the academy's website.
If the academy receives a large number of complaints about the same subject from complainants who are connected to the academy, e.g. parents, each complainant will receive an individual response. If complainants remain dissatisfied with the academy's response, they will be directed to the Department for Education (DfE).

10 Record-keeping

The school 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 held centrally, 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 under

the terms of the Data Protection Act, or where the material must be made available during a school inspection.

Records of complaints will normally be retained for a minimum of three years, and longer where required to demonstrate patterns, compliance, or where a complaint gives rise to ongoing actions or legal considerations.

The details of the complaint, including the names of individuals involved, will not be shared with the whole governing board in case a review panel needs to be organised at a later point.

Where the governing board is aware of the substance of the complaint before the review panel stage, the school will (where reasonably practicable) arrange for an independent panel to hear the complaint.

Complainants also have the right to request an independent panel if they believe there is likely to be bias in the proceedings. The decision to approve this request is made by the governing board, who will not unreasonably withhold consent.

Reporting of complaints, whether informal (Stage 1) or formal (Stages 2 & 3) will be reported to the Standards/ Board by school at regular intervals to ensure clear oversight of process.

The Trust will analyse complaint themes termly to inform school improvement, risk management, and governance oversight via the Executive Leadership Team.

11 Board of Directors

The Board of Trustees will monitor the level and nature of complaints across the schools and will review any underlying issues raised by complaints where appropriate, and respecting confidentiality, determine whether there are any improvements that the schools can make to its procedures or practice to help prevent similar events in thefuture.

Responsibility

The Inspire Education Trust Board of Directors have a responsibility for the oversight of this and all policies within the Trust's academies and may delegate the implementation and review of this policy in accordance with our Scheme of Delegation.

12 Barring from the School Premises

Although fulfilling a public function, schools are private places. The public has no automatic right of entry. School will therefore act to ensure they remain a safe place for pupils, staff and other members of the community.

If a parent's behaviour is a cause for concern, a school can ask him/her to leave school premises. In serious cases, the Headteacher/ Deputy CEO/CEO can notify them in writing that their implied licence to be on school premises has been temporarily revoked subject to any representations that the parent may wish to make. Schools should always give the parent the opportunity to formally express their views on the decision to bar in writing.

The decision to bar should then be reviewed, taking into account any representations made by the parent, and either confirmed or lifted. If the decision is confirmed the parent should be notified in writing, explaining how long the bar will be in place.

Anyone wishing to complain about being barred can do so, by letter or email, to the Headteacher or Chair of Governors. However, complaints about barring cannot be escalated to the Department for Education. Once the school's own complaints procedure has been completed, the only remaining avenue of appeal is through the Courts; independent legal advice must therefore be sought.

Annex A: COMPLAINT FORM (Stage 2)

Please complete the form below and return it to the Headteacher's PA/Office Manager at your school, who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action willbe taken.

Your name:

Students Name (If applicable):

Your relationship to student (If applicable):

Address:

Postcode:

Daytime Telephone Number:

Evening Telephone Number:

Please give details of your complaint / issue:

What action, if any have you taken to try and resolve yourcomplaint? (Who did you speak to and what was the response?):

What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?

Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details:

Signed: (Complainant)

(Print Name)

Date:

Reviewed by:	Rob Darling/Vicki Shelley	March 2023
	Lois Whitehouse	June 2023
	L Whitehouse/R Darling	
	K Grainger	July 2024
	R Darling/ K Grainger	May 2025 & 2026
Next Review Date:		July 2027
Approved by Directors:		06.07.25

Signed:

Lois Whitehouse
CEO

Nicky Aston
Chair of Standards