

Complaints to Ofsted about schools: guidance for parents

Are you concerned about your child's school?

If you are concerned about your child's school, you should start by talking directly to the teachers or headteacher or, if necessary, the governing body or the local authority.

If you are not satisfied with the responses you have received Ofsted may be able to help.

There are a number of things we can do, and in exceptional cases we can arrange an immediate inspection of the school.

This leaflet explains when and how we can help.

Who can complain to Ofsted?

We **can** consider complaints from parents (or people registered as parents, such as foster carers) of pupils registered at the school the complaint is about.

We **can** also consider complaints from people who:

- are not registered parents
- wish to remain anonymous

but our powers to investigate are more limited.

We **cannot** consider complaints from parents of pupils attending independent schools (please see the section on independent schools below).

What kinds of complaints can Ofsted respond to?

We can investigate complaints about the work of the school as a whole, but are not in a position to investigate any matter that relates only to your child.

For example, we can investigate if you feel that:

- the school is not providing a good enough education
- the pupils are not achieving as much as they should, or their different needs are not being met
- the school is not well led and managed, or is wasting money
- the pupils' personal development and well-being are being neglected.

We are not in a position to:

- investigate incidents that are alleged to have taken place
- judge how well a school investigated or responded to a complaint
- mediate between you and the school to resolve a dispute.

If your concern is about the **safety of a child** or a **child protection** issue, please call 08456 40 40 45.

You will be referred to a child protection team. They may refer the matter to social services, or to the police.

When will we advise you to contact someone else about your complaint?

We will usually advise you to contact the local authority or your local parent partnership if your concerns are about:

- admission procedures
- exclusions of individual pupils
- provision for individual pupils with special educational needs
- religious education or the religious character of a school
- temporary changes to the curriculum
- an independent school (please see the section below).

How to make a complaint to Ofsted

Ofsted's helpdesk is open from 8am to 8pm Monday to Friday to assist you if you have concerns about your child's school. You can contact the helpdesk by telephone on **08456 40 40 45**, or by email (enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)

The adviser on the helpdesk will discuss your concerns with you, advise you on whether to make a complaint to Ofsted in writing, or suggest other ways in which you can pursue your concerns.

To make a complaint to Ofsted you should write to us at:

Enquiries
National Business Unit
Ofsted
Royal Exchange Building
St Anne's Square
Manchester, M2 7LA

or email us at: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

or complete an online complaint form: <http://live.ofsted.gov.uk/onlinecomplaints/>.

To help us to respond to your complaint please tell us:

- the full name of the school and the local authority in which it is situated
- as much as you can about the matters that concern you
- whether you have already raised your concerns with the school, the governing body and the local authority, how they responded, and why you are still dissatisfied
- if you do not wish your name to be disclosed to the school – remembering that the action we can then take is more limited (see below).

What we will do

If you telephone us, an adviser on **our helpdesk will provide assistance.**

If you make a complaint in writing, we will acknowledge it within **five working days**, giving you a contact for further help if needed.

We will provide a fuller response **within 20 working days**, telling you how we have investigated, or intend to investigate. However, we will not say if we intend to inspect a school, as schools are given very short notice of inspection.

If we think that action by Ofsted may be able to help, we will take it.

If we are unable to help with your complaint, we will explain why.

If we think you can get help elsewhere, we will say so. We will try to give you **details of who to contact.**

We will record your complaint whether or not we are able to respond.

If we think we may be able to help by taking further action, we will contact the regional complaints manager, who will consider your complaint and decide what action to take. What happens will depend upon the nature of the complaint and the seriousness of the

issues that it raises. We may take one or more of the following actions:

- make informal contact with the school to discuss your complaint
- consider your concerns during the next inspection of the school, if it is to be inspected in the near future
- investigate the complaint by asking the school and local authority for more information
- require the school to arrange a meeting of parents. This will be chaired by an inspector. A representative of the school and of the local authority can also attend this meeting
- arrange an immediate inspection of the school. If the concerns are very serious, this could take place very quickly after a complaint is received (although it is rare for us to take this action).

We will ask you if you will allow us to check that you are registered with the school as a parent of a pupil who is registered at the school. To do this we will have to disclose your name to the school. We will ask the school to treat this information confidentially.

If you are not willing for your name to be disclosed to the school we will not be able to:

- require the school or local authority to provide us with information that we request
- require the school to arrange a meeting of parents.

What happens when Ofsted inspects a school?

When a school is inspected, an inspection report is published, with recommendations about what the school should do to improve further. If we find that a school is inadequate following an inspection, our inspectors make one or more follow-up

monitoring visits to check that it is improving quickly.

Complaints about independent schools

Ofsted is not able to investigate complaints by parents of pupils attending independent schools. However, our advisors will try to help you if you do have concerns. All independent schools must have a clear and fair procedure for handling complaints and must provide a copy of their policy to parents. However, if parents have general concerns about their child's independent school we will advise them to contact the Department for Education and Skills (DfES). The DfES may then ask either Ofsted or the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) to investigate.

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