

Complaints to Ofsted about schools: guidance for parents

What can I do if I am concerned about my child's school?

Many parents are happy with the school that their child goes to, and many pupils have a happy school life, but sometimes problems do arise. This leaflet sets out some things you can do if you are concerned about a state-maintained school.

First of all, it is important to let the school know about your concern as soon as possible.

Often problems are dealt with more quickly if they are handled informally. Contact the school office, and ask who the best person would be to talk to – this may be your child's class teacher. Many teachers will be in the classroom for a lot of the working day, but you can arrange for them to phone you back, or book an appointment to see them.

Plan what you would like to say to the teacher before the appointment.

- What is your main concern?
- How would you like the school to help?
- What would you like to happen after you have told the school your concern?

If you are not happy with the outcome of your discussion, you could ask to speak to the headteacher. If this is not possible or satisfactory, you will need to follow the school's complaints procedure and put your concerns in writing.

Give the school a chance to deal with the issue and respond to you before you take your concern further. The school will need to have enough time to investigate thoroughly.

If, when you receive the response, you feel that the school has not dealt with the problem satisfactorily, you can take the complaint to the governing body. You will need to do this in writing. You can ask to meet the governors in person. The governing body will respond to your concerns in writing.

What can I do if I am not happy with the school's and governing body's responses?

Local authorities are responsible for education in their area, and may be able to offer guidance and advice if the governing body cannot deal with your complaint. You will need to put your concerns in writing.

If you feel that the governing body or the local authority have acted unreasonably about your concerns, you can write to the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families. You will need to list the steps you have already taken and the responses you have received. Write to:

The Secretary of State
Department for Children, Schools and Families
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BT.

Can I complain directly to Ofsted?

We have powers to consider some complaints made in writing about schools. These may come from registered parents or carers of pupils at the school that the complaint is about. This includes the parents and carers of pupils who may be off sick or temporarily excluded.

We can also consider complaints from other people or those who do not want to give their names. However, our powers to investigate these complaints are more limited.

We will not usually consider a complaint if you have not first followed the school's and local authority's complaints procedure.

What types of complaint can you consider?

We can consider complaints about maintained schools, if your concern affects the school as a whole. For example:

- 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, or
- the pupils' personal development and well-being are being neglected.

We will not normally investigate cases to do with individual pupils. However, we will do our best to offer advice about where you can get more help, guidance or support.

We may send any concerns we receive about child protection to the social services or the police.

We are not able to consider a complaint when there are other statutory (legal) ways of pursuing it.

Examples include complaints relating to:

- admission procedures
- excluding individual pupils
- providing education for individual pupils with special educational needs
- religious education or the religious character of a school, or
- temporary changes to the curriculum.

And 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, or
- mediate between a parent and a school to resolve a dispute.

If your concerns are about these issues, we will usually advise you to contact your local parent partnership or local authority.

What if my complaint is about an independent school or a place that provides education only for students over age 16?

We cannot consider complaints about independent schools or places that provide education only for people over the age of 16. For independent schools you should write to the school first. If you are unhappy with their response, you can send your complaint in writing to:

Independent and Boarding Team
Department for Children, Schools and Families
Mowden Hall
Staindrop Road
Darlington
DL3 9BG.

For information on making a complaint about an institution providing education for students over age 16, please contact our

Central Learning and Skills division via our helpdesk.

How should I contact you?

You should contact our helpdesk, which is open from 8am to 8pm, Monday to Friday. Phone 08456 404045, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

Staff on the helpdesk will discuss your concerns with you, advise you about whether to put your complaint in writing to us or suggest other ways to deal with your concerns.

To make a formal complaint write to:

Enquiries
National Business Unit
Ofsted
Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester
M2 7LA.

Or you can fill in an online complaints form at <http://live.ofsted.gov.uk/onlinecomplaints>.

What do I need to include in my letter of complaint?

Please tell us:

- the full name of the school
- the local authority in which the school is based
- as much as you can about what concerns 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 not satisfied with their response
- the action you feel might deal with the problem and what you hope that we will be able to do, and
- whether or not we can pass your name to the school.

What will you do?

If we think that we can help, we will take action. What happens will depend on the nature of the complaint and how serious the issues are that it raises.

We may do one or more of the following:

- advise you to discuss the matter with other people or organisations
- give you advice and guidance
- contact the school informally to discuss the complaint
- keep a copy of the complaint for the information of the inspection team at the school's next inspection, or
- decide to take no further action.

If you are happy for us to give your name to the school, we may:

- investigate the complaint by asking the school and local authority for more information
- tell the school to arrange a meeting of parents to explore the complaint, or
- report the outcome of an investigation. (We can only take this action if we receive confirmation that you and your child are registered at the school. We will ask the school to keep your details confidential.)

We may inspect any school at any time. If we think it is necessary, we may:

- move an inspection forward to a date earlier than planned, or
- arrange an immediate inspection of the school if the concerns are very serious (although it is rare for us to take this action).

We will normally send you a response within 20 working days of receiving your written complaint. We will let you know how we have investigated, or will investigate, your complaint.

If we cannot help you, we will explain why. If we think you can get help elsewhere, we will give you details.

Where else can I get help?

You can find information and support for parents on a wide range of issues on the ParentsCentre website at www.parentscentre.gov.uk.

You can also find lots of helpful information on Directgov, the website that brings together a wide range of public service information and services.

www.direct.gov.uk/en/Parents

What happens when Ofsted inspects a school?

You can find out about inspections by reading our leaflet *School inspections: a guide for parents and carers*.

You can download a copy from our website at www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/070015.

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