

Complaints to Ofsted about schools: guidance for parents and carers

This document sets out some things you can do if you are concerned about a state-maintained school or academy.

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

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

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

Often problems are dealt with quicker 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 an opportunity 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 or board of trustees. You will need to do this in writing. You can ask to meet them in person. They 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?

If the school is an academy and you feel that the governing body or board of trustees have acted unreasonably about your concerns, you can write to the Education Funding Agency (EFA).

The EFA carries out certain functions in relation to open academies on behalf of the Secretary of State. They will not usually investigate complaints until the academy's own complaints procedure, including any hearing, has been exhausted.

Full details about the role of the EFA can be found on the Department for Education (DfE) website: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/education-funding-agency/about/complaints-procedure.

If the school is not an academy and 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 Education. 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 Education
Sanctuary Buildings
London SW1

You can also access the online form: www.gov.uk/complain-about-school.

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.

Can I complain directly to Ofsted?

We will not usually consider a complaint if you have not first followed the school's or academy's, local authority's or Education Funding Agency's complaints procedure. This includes writing to the Secretary of State.

Can I complain to Ofsted about an individual pupil issue?

No.

We will not investigate cases to do with individual pupils.

Our powers relate to 'whole-school' issues as set out below.

What other areas are excluded?

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

- admission procedures
- legal exclusions of 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.

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 a parent or carer and a school to resolve a dispute.

If your concerns are about these issues you should contact your local parent partnership, local authority or the DfE.

What if my complaint is about an independent school or a place that provides education only for students aged over 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 Education
Mowden Hall
Staindrop Road
Darlington
DL3 9BG

For provisions that provide education only for people over the age of 16, you should write to the provision first. If you are unhappy with their response, you can send your complaint in writing to:

The Skills Funding Agency
Cheylesmore House
Quinton Road
Coventry
CV1 2WT

What types of complaint can Ofsted consider?

It is important to understand that Ofsted's role in considering a complaint about a school is solely to determine if there is a need to inspect. Ofsted cannot seek to resolve or establish cause for any individual complaint.

If your concern affects the school as a whole and you have followed all of the existing processes including complaining to the governing body and local authority, we have powers to consider some complaints made in writing about schools and we provide an online form for this.

These complaints may come from registered parents or carers of pupils at the school that the complaint is about and complaints from other people. This includes the parents and carers of pupils who may be off sick or temporarily excluded. Examples could include:

- 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 inappropriately managing finances
- as a group, the pupils' personal development and well-being are being neglected (as stated above, we cannot look at individual cases).

How should I ask Ofsted to look at my complaint?

If you are certain that you have exhausted the school's full complaints procedures as set out above, then you should fill in an online complaints form:

www.ofsted.gov.uk/onlinecomplaints.

What might Ofsted do?

- We may decide to take no further action.
- We may keep a copy of the complaint for the information of the inspection team at the school's next inspection.
- We may send any concerns we receive about child protection to the social services or the police.
- We may move an inspection forward to a date earlier than planned.
- We may arrange an immediate inspection of the school if the concerns are very serious (although it is rare for us to take this action).

Where else can I get help?

You can find information and support for parents and carers on a wide range of issues on GOV.UK, the website for government services and information:

www.gov.uk.

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*. www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/090181.