



iMap Education

School Policy

Section	School Policies
Policy Number	SP-018
Policy Name	Complaints Policy

Creation Date	Review date	Next Review date	Nominated Reviewer
01.08.16	18.05.2023	18.05.2024	Christine Merrick

POLICY / GUIDANCE FOR DEALING WITH COMPLAINTS

1. Aims

Our school aims to meet its statutory obligations when responding to complaints from parents of pupils at the school, and others. When responding to complaints, we aim to:

- Be impartial and non-adversarial
- 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 and courtesy
- Make sure that any decisions we make are lawful, rational, reasonable, fair and proportionate, in line with the principles of administrative law
- Keep complainants informed of the progress of the complaints process
- Consider how the complaint can feed into school improvement evaluation processes

We try to resolve concerns or complaints by informal means wherever possible. Where this is not possible, formal procedures will be followed.

The school will aim to give the complainant the opportunity to complete the complaints procedure in full.

To support this, we will make sure we publicise the existence of this policy and make it available on the school website.

Throughout the process, we will be sensitive to the needs of all parties involved, and make any reasonable adjustments needed to accommodate individuals.

2. Legislation and guidance

This document meets the requirements set out in part 7 of the schedule 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 Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) on [creating 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).

3. Definitions and scope

3.1 Definitions

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”
- A **complaint** is defined as “an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action”

3.2 Scope

This procedure covers all complaints about any provision or services by iMap School, other than complaints that are dealt with under other statutory procedures, including those listed below.

Exceptions	Who to contact
• • Admissions to schools Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs	Concerns about admissions, statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs, should be raised with the SEN Officer at your Local Authority
• Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation	Complaints about child protection matters are handled under our child protection and safeguarding 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. This can be done by completing a referral form via Allegations Management (LADO) - Cheshire West and Chester Safeguarding Children Partnership (cheshirewestscp.co.uk)

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suspension of children from school* 	<p>Further information on raising concerns about suspension can be found at: https://www.gov.uk/schooldisciplinesuspensions/suspensions</p> <p>Please refer to the school's Behaviour Policy should you wish to find out more information. This can be located in the Parent's & Carers section of the school's website. Alternatively, you may request a copy from the school office.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whistleblowing 	<p>We have an internal whistleblowing procedure for all our employees, including temporary staff and contractors.</p> <p>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: www.education.gov.uk/contactus.</p> <p>Volunteer staff who have concerns about our school should complain through the school's complaints procedure. You may also be able to complain direct to the LA or the Department for Education (see link above), depending on the</p>
	<p>substance of your complaint.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff grievances 	<p>Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the school's internal grievance procedures.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff conduct 	<p>Complaints about staff will be dealt with under the school's internal disciplinary procedures, if appropriate.</p> <p>Complainants will not be informed of any disciplinary action taken against a staff member as a result of a complaint. However, the complainant will be notified that the matter is being addressed.</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Complaints about services provided by other providers who may use school premises or facilities 	<p>Providers should have their own complaints procedure to deal with complaints about service. Please contact them direct.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Complaints which involve or are about iMap School Principal 	<p>Complaints which involve or are about Principal should be addressed to Beth Davies iMap CEO, via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential. iMap Centre Limited Barrowmore Estate Barnhouse Lane Great Barrow Chester CH3 7JA 01829 741869 enquiries@imapcentre.co.uk</p>

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.

4. Roles and responsibilities

4.1 The complainant

The complainant will get a more effective and timely response to their complaint if they:

- Follow these procedures
- Co-operate with the school throughout the process, and respond to deadlines and communication promptly
- Ask for assistance as needed
- Treat all those involved with respect
- Do not publish details about the complaint on social media

4.2 The investigator

An individual will be appointed to look into the complaint and establish the facts. They will:

- Interview all relevant parties, keeping notes
- Consider records and any written evidence and keep these securely
- Prepare a comprehensive report to the Principal or complaints committee, which includes the facts and potential solutions

4.3 The complaints co-ordinator

The complaints co-ordinator is the Principal Christine Merrick The complaints co-ordinator will:

- Keep the complainant up to date at each stage in the procedure ➤
- Make sure the process runs smoothly by liaising with staff members ➤

Be aware of issues relating to:

- Sharing third party information
- Additional support needed by complainants, for example interpretation support or where the complainant is a child or young person ➤
- Keep records

5. 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

5.1 Time scales

The complainant must raise the complaint within 3 months of the incident. If the complaint is about a series of related incidents, they must raise the complaint within 3 months of the last incident.

We will consider exceptions to this timeframe 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.

When complaints are made out of term time, we will consider them to have been received on the first school day after the holiday period.

If at any point we cannot meet the timescales we have set out in this policy, we will:

- Set new time limits with the complainant
- Send the complainant details of the new deadline and explain the delay

6. Stages of complaint (not complaints against the Principal or Proprietor).

6.1 Stage 1: informal

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 Principal, 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 iMap Centre Limited Barrowmore Estate Barnhouse Lane Great Barrow Chester CH3 7JA 01829 741869 enquiries@imapcentre.co.uk

The school will acknowledge informal complaints within the same day and investigate and provide a response within 14 school days.

The informal stage will involve a meeting between the complainant and the Principal.

If the complaint is not resolved informally, it will be escalated to a formal complaint.

6.2 Stage 2: formal

The formal stage involves the complainant putting the complaint to the Principal and/or the subject of the complaint:

- In a letter or email
- Over the phone
- In person
- Through a third party acting on their behalf

The complainant 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.

If complainants need assistance raising a formal complaint, they can contact the school office, iMap Centre Limited Barrowmore Estate Barnhouse Lane Great Barrow Chester CH3 7JA 01829 741869 enquiries@imapcentre.co.uk

The Principal will record the date the complaint is received and will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 2 school days.

The Principal (or other person appointed by the Principal for this purpose) will then conduct their own investigation. The written conclusion of this investigation will be sent to the complainant within 20 school days. If the Principal is unable to meet this deadline, they will provide the complainant with an update and revised response date.

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome at Stage 2 and wishes to take the matter further, they should write to the Principal giving details of their concerns and asking for the matter to be given further consideration. This will be forwarded to the Proprietor.

6.3 Stage 3: review panel Convening the panel

A request to escalate to Stage 3 must be made to the Principal, via the school office, within 5 school days of receipt of the Stage 2 response.

The iMap CEO will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 2 school days.

Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.

In the first instance, iMap CEO will then:

- Check that, where appropriate, the complainant has completed Stages 1 and 2
- Seek any clarification regarding the nature of the complaint

- Arrange for the Complaints Committee to hear the complaint as soon as possible
- Invite the complainant and any representative to the meeting

The iMap CEO will aim to convene a meeting within 20 school days of receipt of the Stage 3 request. If this is not possible, the Principal will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed.

If the complainant rejects the offer of three proposed dates, without good reason, the Principal will decide when to hold the meeting. It will then proceed in the complainant's absence on the basis of written submissions from both parties. The complaints committee will consist of at least three senior iMap staff with no prior involvement or knowledge of the complaint. One panel member will be independent of the management and running of the school. Prior to the meeting, they will decide amongst themselves who will act as the Chair of the Complaints Committee.

The committee will decide whether to deal with the complaint by inviting parties to a meeting or through written representations, but in making their decision they will be sensitive to the complainant's needs.

If the complainant is invited to attend the meeting, they may bring someone along to provide support. This can be a relative or friend. Generally, we do not encourage either party to bring legal representatives to the committee meeting. However, there may be occasions when legal representation is appropriate.

For instance, if a school employee is called as a witness in a complaint meeting, they may wish to be supported by union and/or legal representation.

Note: Complaints about staff conduct will not generally be handled under this complaints procedure. Complainants will be advised that any staff conduct complaints will be considered under staff disciplinary procedures, if appropriate, but outcomes will not be shared with them.

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

At least 5 school days before the meeting, the Principal will:

- confirm and notify the complainant of the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that, if the complainant is invited, the dates are convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible
- request copies of any further written material to be submitted to the committee at least 3 school days before the meeting

Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least 3 school days before the date of the meeting. The committee will not normally accept as evidence, recordings of conversations which were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.

The committee will also not review any new complaints at this stage or consider evidence unrelated to the initial complaint to be included. New complaints must be dealt with from Stage 2 of the procedure.

The meeting will be held in private. Electronic recordings of meetings or conversations are not normally permitted unless a complainant's own disability or

special needs require it. Prior knowledge and consent of all parties attending must be sought before meetings or conversations take place. Consent will be recorded in any minutes taken.

The committee will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented. The committee can:

- uphold the complaint in whole or in part
- dismiss the complaint in whole or in part

If the complaint is upheld in whole or in part, the committee will:

- decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint
- where appropriate, recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future

The Chair of the Committee will provide the complainant and iMap School with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within 5 school days.

The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions iMap School will take to resolve the complaint.

The response will also advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied.

7. Referring complaints on completion of the school's procedure

If the complainant is unsatisfied with the outcome of the school's complaints procedure and the complaint is regarding the school not meeting standards set by the DfE in any of the following areas, the complainant can refer their complaint to the DfE:

- Education
- Pupil welfare and health and safety
- School premises
- Staff suitability
- Making information available to parents
- The spiritual, moral, social or cultural development of pupils

The DfE will consider reports of a major failure to meet the standards. Where appropriate, it can arrange an emergency inspection to look at pupil welfare and health and safety, and make sure that the school deals with serious failings.

For more information or to refer a complaint, see the following webpage:

9. Persistent complaints

9.1 Unreasonably persistent complaints

Most complaints raised will be valid, and therefore we will treat them seriously. However, a complaint may become unreasonable if the person:

- Has made the same complaint before, and it's already been resolved by following the school's complaints procedure
- Makes a complaint that is obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific, defamatory or repetitive
- Insists on pursuing a complaint that is unfounded, or out of scope of the complaints procedure, beyond all reason
- Pursues a valid complaint, but in an unreasonable manner e.g. refuses to articulate the complaint, refuses to co-operate with this complaints procedure, or insists that the complaint is dealt with in ways that are incompatible with this procedure and the timeframes it sets out
- Makes a complaint designed to cause disruption, annoyance or excessive demands on school time
- Seeks unrealistic outcomes, or a solution that lacks any serious purpose or value

Steps we will take.

We will take every reasonable step to address the complainant's concerns, and give them a clear statement of our position and their options. We will maintain our role as an objective arbiter throughout the process, including when we meet with individuals. We will follow our complaints procedure as normal (as outlined above) wherever possible.

If the complainant continues to contact the school in a disruptive way, we may put communications strategies in place. We may:

- Give the complainant a single point of contact via an email address
- Limit the number of times the complainant can make contact, such as a fixed number per term
- Ask the complainant to engage a third party to act on their behalf, such as Citizens Advice
- Put any other strategy in place as necessary

Stopping responding

We may stop responding to the complainant when all of these factors are met:

- We believe we have taken all reasonable steps to help address their concerns
- We have provided a clear statement of our position and their options
- The complainant contacts us repeatedly, and we believe their intention is to cause disruption or inconvenience

Where we stop responding, we will inform the individual that we intend to do so. We will also explain that we will still consider any new complaints they make.

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 our school site.

9.2 Duplicate complaints

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

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

- Tell the new complainant that we have already investigated and responded to this issue, and that 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.

9.3 Complaint campaigns

Where the school receives a large volume of complaints about the same topic or subject, especially if these come from complainants unconnected with the school, the school may respond to these complaints by:

- Publishing a single response on the school website
- Sending a template response to all of the complainants

If complainants are not satisfied with the school's response, or wish to pursue the complaint further, the normal procedures will apply.

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 through a subject access request under the terms of the Data Protection Act, or where the material must be made available during a school inspection.

Records of complaints will be kept securely, only for as long as necessary and in line with data protection law.

11. Learning lessons

The CEO will review any underlying issues raised by complaints with the Principal where appropriate, and respecting confidentiality, to determine whether there are any improvements that the school can make to its procedures or practice to help prevent similar events in the future.

12. Monitoring arrangements

The CEO will monitor the effectiveness of the complaints procedure in making sure that complaints are handled properly. The CEO will track the number and nature of complaints, and review underlying issues as stated in section 11. The complaints records are logged and managed by The Principal.

This policy will be reviewed annually by the Principal

At each review, the policy will be approved by the CEO.

13. Links with other policies

Policies dealing with other forms of complaints include:

- Safeguarding and Child Protection policy and procedures
- Admissions policy
- Staff grievance procedures
- Staff disciplinary procedures
- SEN policy