



Complaints Policy and Procedure

Approved by: OLICAT Board

Last reviewed on: March 2026

Next review due by: March 2027

Introduction

We aim for your child to have a positive experience in our schools where they thrive and develop to their full potential.

From time to time something may arise where you need to raise an issue or concern with the school, and this policy will explain to you how to do that.

This policy is about resolving your concerns. It is all about having that conversation that allows the school to understand what is worrying you and how that can be addressed.

Tips to getting the best outcome from a 'complaint'

1. Start Informally: Most "niggles" can be fixed with a friendly email or a 5-minute meeting with the class teacher.
2. Focus on the Child: Clearly state how the situation is affecting your child's wellbeing or learning.
3. Be Clear and Polite: Stick to the facts, avoid emotional language, and suggest a way the school could "put things right".
4. Be specific and focus on the issue – a two-year list of everything you've been upset about doesn't help address the actual concern.
5. Never email angry. Whilst you may be understandably upset take time to calmly reflect and compose what your concern is.
6. Allow the school time to respond. If you email at 8pm the school is unlikely to have seen it and have an answer first thing in the morning.
7. Remember, the school wants your child to succeed and be happy as much as you do. They want to work with you and resolve things.

Aims

The schools within the Our Lady Immaculate Catholic Academies Trust (OLICAT) always welcome meaningful communication with parents, students and the wider community, and whilst we hope you are always happy with your child's progress or relationship with the schools we recognise there are occasions when you will want to bring questions or concerns to a school's attention.

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.
- Ensure that any decisions we make are lawful, rational, reasonable, fair and proportionate, in line with the ethos of the Trust and 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 ensure we publicise the existence of this policy and make the policy and the procedure 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.

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/carers of pupils at the school.

It is also based on [best practice guidance for academies complaints procedures](#) published by the DfE

This policy complies with our funding agreement and articles of association.

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 (EYFS) requirements.

What isn't covered in this policy

This policy does not cover complaints procedures relating to:

- Admissions.
- Statutory assessments of special educational needs (SEN).
- Safeguarding matters.
- Suspension and Permanent Exclusion.
- Whistleblowing.
- Staff grievances and Staff discipline.
- Withdrawal from the curriculum (parents and carers can withdraw their child from any aspect of religious education, including the daily act of collective worship. They do not have to explain why).

Please see our separate policies for procedures relating to these types of complaint.

Complaints about services provided by other providers who use school premises or facilities should be directed to the provider concerned.

Definitions - what is a complaint

The Department of Education recognises there is a difference between a concern and a complaint. Navigating the difference between a concern and a complaint can help you get the best outcome for your child.

What is a Concern?

A concern is typically an informal expression of worry or doubt about an issue where you are seeking reassurance or clarification. Most issues are resolved at this stage through a quick chat with a teacher or other relevant member of staff such as the SENDco.

Examples: Clarifying a homework task or deadline, a minor playground disagreement between friends, or checking in on your child's progress in a specific subject.

The school will resolve concerns through day-to-day communication as far as possible.

What is a Complaint?

A complaint is a formal expression of dissatisfaction about an action the school has taken or has failed to take. This usually happens when an informal concern hasn't been resolved to your satisfaction.

Examples: Bullying that hasn't stopped after being reported, a safety issue on school grounds, or a dispute over a formal school policy like the Behaviour Policy.

The schools intend 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.

How we look into a complaint

All complaints whether formal or informal will be treated in the strictest confidence.

When investigating a complaint, we will try to clarify:

- What has happened.
- Who was involved.
- What the complainant feels would put things right.

Timescales

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.

Complaints about our fulfilment of early years 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 10) 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 <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted#org-contacts>.

We will notify parents and carers if we become aware that the school is to be inspected by Ofsted. We will also supply a copy of the inspection report to parents and carers of children attending the setting on a regular basis.

How to make a complaint (does not include complaints against the headteacher or a governor)

Stage 1: Informal

Our school will take informal complaints 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.

You should raise the complaint as soon as possible with the relevant member of staff – this may be your child’s class or subject teacher, head of year, or the headteacher. If the complaint is regarding the special needs provision provided by the school for your child, you may wish to direct your complaint to the school SENDCO. You can do so either in person or by letter, telephone or email. If you are unclear who to contact or how to contact them, please contact the school office.

The school will acknowledge the complaint within two school days.

The informal stage will involve a meeting between the complainant and the most appropriate member of staff – this might be the head, the class teacher, the head of year etc. A written response will be provided by the school within five school days following the informal meeting.

If the complaint is not resolved informally, you may escalate this to a formal complaint.

Stage 2: Formal

Complainants should have tried to address the concern informally before escalating to a formal complaint. When escalating a complaint, it must identify how the prior stage has not addressed the issue and provide additional information/evidence to support the complaint.

To be accepted a formal complaint must be timely and specific. It must provide details such as relevant dates, times and the names of witnesses of events, alongside copies of any relevant documents. The complainant must also state what they feel would resolve the complaint.

If complainants need assistance raising a formal complaint, they can contact the school office.

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

The headteacher (or other person appointed by the headteacher for this purpose) will then conduct an investigation. You may be asked for further information and/or invited to a meeting to discuss your complaint.

The written conclusion of this investigation will be sent to you within fifteen school days.

How to escalate a complaint

If the complainant wishes to proceed to the next stage of the procedure, they should inform the clerk to the governing board in writing within five school days. Requests received outside of this timeframe will be considered in exceptional circumstances.

To escalate a complaint the complainant will need to explain how the prior stage has not resolved or addressed the complaint. This needs to be more than being unhappy about the outcome – it is quite possible to be unhappy with an outcome and for it still to be correct. The complainant must identify and substantiate why the prior decision was wrong with additional supporting evidence and identify what reasonable resolution would resolve the complaint. Failure to provide this will result in the complaint being rejected.

Stage 3: Review Panel

The panel will be appointed by or on behalf of the Trust and will consist of at least 3 people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint, 2 of which are governors within the Trust and 1 drawn from the Trust’s central management.

The panel will have access to the existing record of progress in dealing with the complaint.

The complainant must have reasonable notice of the date of the review panel. The clerk will aim to find a date within fifteen school days of the request, where possible.

If the complainant rejects the offer of 3 proposed dates without good reason, the clerk will set a date. The hearing will go ahead using written submissions from both parties.

Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least five school days before the date of the meeting.

At the meeting

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 will be sought before the recording of meetings or conversations take place. Consent will be recorded in any minutes taken. Any recordings taken by the school will be kept for ninety days or until the complaint has reached its conclusion.

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 their written position prior to the meeting.

The complainant must be allowed to attend the panel hearing and be accompanied if they wish. We don't encourage either party to bring legal representation but will consider it on a case-by-case basis. For instance, if a school employee is called as a witness in a complaint meeting, they may wish to be supported by their union.

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

At the meeting, each individual will have the opportunity to give statements and present their evidence, and witnesses will be called, as appropriate, to present their evidence.

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

The panel will put together its findings and recommendations from the case. The panel will also provide copies of the minutes of the hearing and 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 Trust and headteacher.

The outcome

The panel can:

- Uphold the complaint, in whole or in part.
- Dismiss the complaint, in whole or in part.

If the complaint is upheld, the panel will:

- Decide the appropriate action to resolve the complaint.
- Where appropriate, recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to the CEO and Directors to prevent similar issues in the future.

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

Complaints against the Headteacher, a Governor or the Local Academy Committee

Stage 1: informal

Complaints made against the headteacher or any member of the Local Academy Committee should be directed to the clerk to the governing board in the first instance.

If the complaint is about the headteacher or one member of the Local Academy Committee (including the chair or vice-chair), a suitably skilled and impartial governor will carry out the steps at stage 1 (set out in section above).

Stage 2: Formal

If the complaint is:

- Jointly about the chair and vice-chair or
- The entire Local Academy Committee or
- The majority of the Local Academy Committee

An independent investigator will carry out the steps in stage 2 (set out in section above). They will be appointed by the Trust and will write a formal response at the end of their investigation, which will be presented to the Chair of the Board.

Stage 3: Directors

If the complainant wishes to proceed to the next stage of the procedure, they should inform the Company Secretary in writing within five school days. Requests received outside of this timeframe will be considered in exceptional circumstances.

To escalate a complaint the complainant will need to explain how the prior stage has not resolved or addressed the complaint. The complainant must identify and substantiate why the prior decision was wrong with additional supporting evidence and identify what reasonable resolution would resolve the complaint. Failure to provide this will result in the complaint being rejected.

A committee of independent governors will hear the complaint. They will be sourced by the MAT and will carry out the steps at stage 3 (set out in section above).

Complaints about the Trust, Trust Leadership or Directors

Stage 1: Informal

We make every effort to address any concerns or complaints early through informal measures.

The complainant should raise any concerns as soon as possible directly with the Trust using the email info@olicatschools.org

If the concern regards the Chief Executive the complainant should contact the Chair of Directors.

If the complainant is unsure who to contact, or needs to contact the Members regarding conduct of the Directors they should contact the Company Secretary at info@olicatschools.org

The process for responding to and investigating an informal complaint about the trust or central staff is the same as that set out above.

Stage 2: Formal

If the complaint is not resolved satisfactorily at the informal stage, the complainant may submit a formal complaint in writing. The complainant will receive written acknowledgement of their complaint within five school days.

An investigating officer will be appointed by the Chair of the Board to conduct an investigation, in line with the process set out above, providing a written response to the complainant within fifteen school days.

Stage 3: Panel Hearing

Complaints may be escalated to the panel hearing stage if the complainant is not satisfied with the response to the complaint at the second, formal stage. Complainants will be required to explain in writing how the decision reached is incorrect and provide additional supporting information to substantiate their opinion.

A panel will be appointed by the trust and will consist of 3 members of the board not involved in investigating the complaint in the formal stage.

The panel will be entirely made up of independent members. They will be sourced by the MAT and will carry out the steps at stage 3 (set out in section above).

Complaints relating to Data Protection

Complaints relating to Data Protection should be referred to the Data Protection Officer at DPO@olicatschools.org

Please also see our Data Protection Policy for guidance on Data Protection.

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 DFE. The DFE will check whether the complaint has been dealt with properly by the school. The ESFA will not overturn a school's decision about a complaint but will intervene if a school or trust has:

- Breached a clause in its funding agreement.
- Failed to act in line with its duties under education law.
- Acted (or is proposing to act) unreasonably when exercising its functions.

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: <https://www.gov.uk/complain-about-school>

Persistent and/or unreasonable complaints

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

- 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 investigation process
- Refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of the complaint procedure
- Insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the complaint 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 ESFA
- 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

Please note: the above list is not intended to be exhaustive and is for guidance purposes only. It is at the discretion of the school what is deemed to be unreasonable.

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.

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 had not 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 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.

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.

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 stored securely by the school/central office 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 be kept securely, only for as long as necessary and in line with data protection law, our privacy notices and data retention schedule.

The details of the complaint, including the names of individuals involved, will not be shared with the whole local governing body of the school (or the entire trust board) in case a review panel needs to be organised at a later point.

Where the local governing body 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 local governing body, who will not unreasonably withhold consent.

Monitoring arrangements

The Governing Body monitors the Complaints Procedure, in order to ensure that all complaints are handled properly. The headteacher will log all formal complaints received by the school and record how they were resolved. Governors will review these on an annual basis and consider the need for any changes to the procedure.

This policy will be reviewed annually by the Trust Board.

Links to other policies

Policies dealing with other forms of complaints include:

Child Protection and Safeguarding

Admissions

School Exclusion Policy/Procedure

Staff Grievance Policy

School SEND Policy

Data Protection (GDPR) Policy

Managing Allegations of Abuse Against Staff Policy