



Independent Schools Inspectorate

Concerns Policy

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Contents

Introduction	3
If you think a child is at risk	4
The role of the DfE as regulator in relation to concerns	5
The role of ISI as an inspectorate in relation to concerns	6
Concerns about schools that should be dealt with through the school's complaints procedure	7
Concerns about schools that cannot be dealt with through the school's complaints procedure	8
Our commitment to managing concerns	9
Anonymous concerns	9
Data protection and confidentiality	9
Whistleblowing	10
Other agencies	10

Introduction

- 1 The Independent Schools Inspectorate ('ISI') is approved by the Secretary of State for Education to inspect association independent schools in England. These schools are members of Associations, which form the Independent Schools Council. We are also approved by the Department for Education ('DfE') to inspect British Schools Overseas, and by the Home Office to inspect private further education colleges and language schools. Our mission is to ensure that children and young people in independent schools and colleges stay safe and receive a high quality education.
- 2 Independent schools are inspected against the [Education \(Independent School Standards\) Regulations 2014](#) ('the standards') and, as appropriate, against the [National Minimum Standards for Boarding](#) and/or the [Early Year Foundation Stage Statutory Framework](#).
- 3 Throughout this policy 'us', 'we' and 'our' refer to ISI; 'you' and 'your' refer to someone who has a concern.
- 4 ISI is not an adjudicator and cannot investigate any complaints or concerns about a school. However, concerns may inform key lines of enquiry with regard to a school's compliance with the standards at the time of its next inspection.
- 5 This concerns policy tells you:
 - What to do if you think a child is at risk (paragraphs 8-13)
 - The role of the DfE as regulator in relation to concerns about association independent schools (paragraphs 14–19)
 - The role of ISI as an inspectorate in relation to concerns about association independent schools (paragraphs 20–23)
 - Concerns/complaints about association independent schools that should be dealt with through the school's own complaints procedure (paragraphs 24–29).
 - Concerns/complaints about association independent schools that cannot be dealt with through the school's complaints procedure (paragraphs 30–32).
 - Our commitment to managing concerns (paragraphs 33–40).
- 6 The aim of this policy is to:
 - Inform third parties (you) about how to raise a concern about an association independent school
 - Provide information on how ISI (we) will handle any concerns we receive
 - Provide information on how to complain about our work.

If you think a child is at risk

- 7 **If a child is in immediate danger, call 999.**
- 8 If you think a child is at risk, contact the children's social care team at their [local council](#) or call your local police on 101.
- 9 You should also tell the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) at the child's school. You can find out who this is in the school's safeguarding policy, which must be on their website.
- 10 If contacting the Designated Safeguarding Governor or the Chair of Governors, all of whose contact numbers should be available on the school's website or in the school's safeguarding policy.
- 11 If the safeguarding policy is not on the school's website, or the DSL is not named in the policy, you should let us know at concerns@isi.net. We will also inform the DfE.
- 12 If you want to find out more about schools' responsibilities to safeguard children, you can read the [latest statutory guidance](#) for schools and education providers published by the government.

The role of the DfE as regulator in relation to concerns

- 13 Anyone may raise a concern about a school with the DfE, as regulator for independent schools.
- 14 All concerns received by ISI will be passed to the DfE and noted on our files.
- 15 These concerns will be considered by the DfE, who may use the information to bring forward a future school inspection, or ask us to do an emergency inspection to look at pupil welfare, health and safety.
- 16 The DfE can also ask us to take minor complaints it has received into account when a school is next inspected.
- 17 In making this decision, the DfE will look at various factors, including whether the concern relates to the standards, the nature and level of seriousness of the concern and the next scheduled date for an inspection of the school.
- 18 The DfE does not arbitrate on parental complaints.
- 19 Once the DfE has received a concern, they will not inform the person who made it of the next steps.
- 20 You can contact the DfE if you want to complain that a school is not meeting one or more of the [standards](#). For guidance on how to contact the DfE, visit www.gov.uk/complain-about-school/private-schools.

The role of ISI as an inspectorate in relation to concerns

- 21 All concerns received by ISI will be passed to DfE and noted on ISI's files. The nature of the concern may inform future inspection planning, but individual concerns will not be investigated by ISI on inspection.
- 22 ISI's responsibility is to inspect schools against the standards at the time of inspection. Concerns raised can help ISI in the planning and conduct of inspections. Inspectors will consider the school's processes and documentation in relation to the requirements of the standards.
- 23 ISI is not a complaints adjudicator and cannot investigate any complaints/concerns about a school. Therefore, an inspection will not reference a complaint or concern, or find in favour of either a school or a complainant.
- 24 ISI cannot:
 - Investigate specific incidents
 - Mediate or resolve fee and other contractual disputes with a school
 - Become involved in admission disputes
 - Become involved in employment matters and disputes
 - Deal with issues concerning the welfare of staff
 - Investigate discrimination against adults
 - Investigate data protection.

Concerns about schools that should be dealt with through the school's complaints procedure

- 25 All parental disputes with schools should be raised directly with the school, informally at first, as this often means the problem may be resolved more quickly.
- 26 All schools are required to have a complaints policy, which should be on the school's website if the school has a website, or can requested from the school.
- 27 If parents have been unable to address their complaint informally, then they should follow the school's complaints procedure.
- 28 If, after the complaints procedure has been exhausted, parents remain dissatisfied with the outcome, they may then choose to seek independent legal advice as to other possible avenues available to them.
- 29 For the avoidance of doubt, ISI is not able to intervene in the complaints process or influence findings. However, on inspection ISI does assess whether the school handles complaints in line with regulatory requirements.
- 30 If you believe that the school has not complied with its complaints procedure at any stage, or that the school's complaints policy is not in line with the standards, please inform the DfE (registration.enquiries@education.gov.uk).
- 31 If you inform ISI (concerns@isi.net) of a concern that a school has not complied with its complaints procedure or that the school's complaints policy is not in line with the standards, we shall pass this concern to the DfE and note it in our files for consideration by inspectors at the next inspection.

Concerns about schools that cannot be dealt with through the school's complaints procedure

- 32 If you cannot use the school's complaints procedure (for example: if you are not a parent; or you are a parent, but your child has left the school and you can no longer make a complaint under the school's complaints policy; or you are unable to tell the school for a different reason), and you think you have a concern about the school's compliance with the standards:
- You can tell the DfE as regulator on registration.enquiries@education.gov.uk
 - If you tell us on concerns@isi.net we will forward your concern to the DfE and note it in our files.
- 33 Concerns about schools that **can be considered on inspection** may relate to:
- The quality of education provided
 - The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils
 - The welfare, health and safety of pupils
 - The suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors
 - The premises of and accommodation at schools
 - The provision of information by schools
 - The manner in which complaints are handled
 - The quality of leadership in and management of schools
- 34 Concerns about schools that **cannot be considered on inspection** include:
- Staff employment disputes. Those affected by employment disputes may seek independent legal advice, for example from a trade union or solicitor.
 - Data protection. Concerns about data protection should be addressed to the [Information Commissioner's Office](#)
 - Fee disputes. Those affected may seek independent legal advice.
 - Admissions and expulsions. Those affected may seek independent legal advice.
 - Staff welfare. Those affected may seek independent legal advice.
 - Discrimination against adults. Those affected may seek independent legal advice and/or contact the police.
 - Crimes. Anyone who believes that a crime has been committed should contact the police.

Our commitment to managing concerns

- 35 We recognise that all service users, agencies and organisations that we work with directly have the right to raise concerns and should have access to clear information on how to voice concerns.

We will:

- Report all concerns we receive to the Department for Education
 - Make sure our concerns policy is on our website.
 - Deal with concerns in line with our Data Protection Policy.
 - Keep a log of all concerns received.
 - Ensure all staff and Board members read, understand and comply with this policy and its procedures.
 - Report annually to the Department for Education: the number of concerns we receive; and any changes to our concerns-handling process.
- 36 If you feel we have not dealt with your concern as outlined in this policy, please see our policy for complaints about ISI.

Anonymous concerns

- 37 All anonymous concerns will be recorded and passed immediately to the DfE. It is helpful to know your relationship to the child/young person/school if you are able to share it as part of the concern

Data protection and confidentiality

- 38 ISI will use personal data given to us to handle concerns. We will pass all concerns on in their entirety to the DfE and we will share information from concerns with relevant ISI staff who need it to do their job and/or external agencies as appropriate.
- 39 Apart from these exceptions, the concerns process is regarded as private, and ISI will maintain the privacy of anyone who makes or is referred to in a concern as far as possible.
- 40 For information about what the Department for Education does with data received, see [here](#).
- 41 ISI inspectors never indicate to a school that any specific concern has been received, and individual complaints and concerns are not referred to in inspection reports.

Whistle-blowing

- 42 If you work in a school, your school will have its own whistle-blowing policy. The ISI whistle-blowing policy is for current ISI inspectors and office staff.

Other agencies

You may wish to contact other agencies depending on the nature of your concern:

- Governance/safeguarding/financial concerns excluding fees: Charity Commission www.gov.uk/complain-about-charity
- SEND: Independent Parental Special Education Advice (IPSEA) www.ipsea.org.uk/contact-ipsea
- Health & Safety: Health & Safety Exec www.hse.gov.uk/contact/index.htm
- Concerns about non-ISC schools: Ofsted: 0300 1234 666

End of policy