



**Independent Schools Inspectorate**

**Complaints Policy**

August 2021

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## Introduction

- 1 The Independent Schools Inspectorate ('ISI') is approved by the Secretary of State for Education to inspect independent schools in England. These schools are members of five<sup>1</sup> of the seven<sup>2</sup> Associations that 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 We welcome feedback from individuals and organisations on all aspects of our services. Your feedback is valuable in helping us evaluate and improve our work. If you have a complaint about an inspection or other aspects of our work, we want to hear from you so we can try to resolve your concerns.
- 3 Throughout this policy 'us', 'we' and 'our' refer to ISI; 'you' and 'your' refer to someone who has a concern or is making a complaint. Please note that in paragraphs 20 to 35 'you' and 'your' refer solely to the most senior leader in a school that has been recently inspected by ISI.
- 4 This complaints policy tells you:
  - What to do if you think a child is at risk (paragraphs 6–10)
  - How to complain about a school that ISI inspects (paragraphs 11–16)
  - How to complain about an ISI inspection (paragraphs 17–35)
  - How to complain about ISI's non-inspection work (paragraphs 36–49).
- 5 The aim of this policy is to make sure:
  - You know how to make a complaint about our work and you understand how we will handle any complaints we receive
  - We will deal with complaints consistently, fairly and sensitively within clear time frames
  - You have a fair and effective way to complain about our work
  - We monitor complaints to improve our services.

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<sup>1</sup> The Girls' School Association (GSA), the Headmasters' and Headmistresses' Conference (HMC), the Independent Association of Prep Schools (IAPS), the Independent Schools Association (ISA) and The Society of Heads.

<sup>2</sup> The other two are the Association of Governing Bodies of Independent Schools (AGBIS) and the Independent Schools' Bursars Association (ISBA).

## If you think a child is at risk

- 6 **If a child is in immediate danger, call 999.**
- 7 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.
- 8 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.
- 9 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](mailto:concerns@isi.net)
- 10 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.

## **How to complain about an independent school or education provider that ISI inspects**

- 11 If you have a complaint or concern about a school, please refer to the ISI Concerns Policy.

## **How to complain about an ISI inspection**

- 12 Please note that, under the terms of our agreement with the Secretary of State for Education, complaints about inspections cannot delay the publication of inspection reports (except in exceptional circumstances and the DfE has agreed to postponement).
- 13 We will only consider complaints about inspections from the most senior leader in the school or education provider inspected, who is or will be named on the inspection report (referred to as 'you' in paragraphs 20 to 35).
- 14 We take complaints seriously and will respond within a clear time frame, for resolution as quickly as possible.

## **Informal resolution during or shortly after inspection**

- 15 We value and prioritise open relationships between schools and inspection teams on inspection. Our inspectors are trained to ensure good and regular communication with the school throughout the inspection process. The Reporting Inspector will try to resolve any issues as quickly as possible.
- 16 It is very important that you speak to the Reporting Inspector about any concern you have about an inspection as soon as possible while the inspection team is on site. We expect you to do this if you have a concern while the inspection team is on site. This enables the Reporting Inspector to deal with any issues as they arise. We hope this will resolve most issues.
- 17 If you feel the Reporting Inspector was unable to resolve your concerns while on site, you can tell us by emailing [complaints@isi.net](mailto:complaints@isi.net) within two working days of the end of the onsite part of the inspection process. We will try to resolve any issues informally. We may take your concerns into account as part of our quality assurance process.
- 18 You can also tell us about any remaining concerns during the pre-publication review part of the inspection process. This is when we send you the draft inspection report for a factual accuracy check and ask you to complete a pre-publication review form. You can include any remaining concern(s) on this form. We will respond in writing to any concern(s) you include within 10 working days.

### Formal Complaint Stage 1

- 19 If you feel that your concern is still unresolved after you have received the final inspection report, you can submit a formal complaint by emailing [complaints@isi.net](mailto:complaints@isi.net). You must email within 10 working days of receiving the final inspection report.
- 20 We will acknowledge receipt of your complaint within five working days. We will allocate an investigating officer who will investigate your complaint. You may receive a phone call from the investigating officer.
- 21 We will send you a full response to your complaint within 30 working days from our receipt of your complaint.
- 22 Our response will explain whether we uphold part, all or none of your complaint and why, and any steps we will take as a result.
- 23 Complex investigations may take longer. If this is the case, we will write to you after ten working days from the date we receive your complaint. We will give you a final date by which we expect to reach our conclusion.

### Independent Adjudicator Stage 2

- 24 If you are not satisfied with our response to your complaint you can refer it to the Independent Adjudicator by using our by emailing [complaints@isi.net](mailto:complaints@isi.net). You must email within 10 working days of receiving our response.
- 25 The Independent Adjudicator can consider whether:
  - We followed this policy properly in handling your complaint; and/or
  - We reached a reasonable decision in response to your complaint.
- 26 We will acknowledge your referral to the Independent Adjudicator within five working days of receiving it.
- 27 The Independent Adjudicator will decide whether we handled your complaint properly under this policy and/or whether we reached a reasonable decision.
- 28 You will receive a response to your referral within 30 working days.
- 29 If the Independent Adjudicator upholds part or all of your complaint, the response will tell you which aspects of your complaint have been upheld and why. The response will include any steps we will take as a result.

- 30 The decision of the Independent Adjudicator is final. We are not able to engage in further correspondence after the complaints process has been concluded.

## How to complain about ISI's non-inspection work

### Informal resolution

- 31 Please send your complaint to [complaints@isi.net](mailto:complaints@isi.net). Please explain how your complaint relates to ISI's non-inspection-related work. We can only consider complaints that relate directly to the work that we do.
- 32 If your complaint does not relate to the work that we do, we will, if possible, direct you to another body that may be able to help you.
- 33 If your complaint does relate to work that we do, we will contact you within 15 working days to try and resolve your complaint informally.

### Formal Complaint Stage 1

- 34 If you are not satisfied with an informal resolution, you can make a formal complaint via [complaints@isi.net](mailto:complaints@isi.net).
- 35 We will acknowledge your complaint within five working days. We will investigate your complaint and we will respond within 30 working days. We will explain whether part, all or none of your complaint has been upheld. We will also tell you any steps we will take as a result.
- 36 Occasionally investigations may take longer. If this is the case, we will write to you after ten working days from the date we receive your complaint. We will give you a final date we expect to reach a conclusion.

### Formal Complaint Stage 2

- 37 If you are not satisfied with our response to your complaint, you can refer it to the ISI Board within 10 working days of receiving it by emailing [complaints@isi.net](mailto:complaints@isi.net).
- 38 A subset of the ISI Board can consider whether:
- We followed this policy properly in handling your complaint; and/or
  - We reached a reasonable decision in response to your complaint.
- 39 We will acknowledge your referral to the ISI Board within five working days of receiving it.

- 40 A subset of the ISI Board will decide whether we handled your complaint properly under this policy and/or whether we reached a reasonable decision.
- 41 You will receive a response to your referral within 30 working days.
- 42 If the ISI Board upholds part or all of your complaint, the response will tell you which aspects of your complaint have been upheld and why. The response will include any steps we will take as a result.
- 43 The decision of the ISI Board is final. We are not able to engage in further correspondence after the complaints process has been concluded.
- 44 There is no further right of appeal under this policy. If you have been through all stages of the process and you are still not satisfied, you could approach:
- [Citizens' Advice](#)
  - A solicitor

### **Our commitment to our complaints policy**

- 45 We recognise that all service users, agencies and organisations that we work with directly have the right to raise concerns or complaints about our services and should have access to clear information on how to voice complaints and concerns.
- 46 A complaint is any expression of dissatisfaction by an individual, whether justified or not.
- 47 We will:
- Make sure our complaints policy is on our website
  - Investigate and respond to complaints promptly within the timescales in this policy
  - Deal with complaints in line with our Data Protection Policy
  - Keep a register of all complaints, which the ISI Board will review regularly as part of the quality assurance of inspections
  - 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 complaints we receive
    - The outcomes; and
    - Any actions we take.

## **Anonymous complaints**

- 48 We will record and consider complaints received anonymously, but action may be limited if further information is required to ensure a full and fair investigation.
- 49 We will always pass anonymous concerns about a school to the DfE if they relate to one or more of the Independent School Standards.

## **Whistle-blowing**

- 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 head office staff and can be found on the ISI website.

## **Data protection**

- 50 We will use the personal data you give us to handle your complaint. We will share information from your complaint with people whose actions you have complained about, relevant ISI staff who need it to do their job and/or external agencies as appropriate. Apart from these exceptions, the complaints process is regarded as private and we will maintain the privacy of anyone who makes or is referred to in a complaint as far as possible. We will normally destroy complaints files in a secure manner six years after the complaint has been closed.

End of policy.