



SCHOOL INSPECTION SERVICE

Policy for handling complaints

1. SIS strives to provide high quality inspections and reports and thus hopes that there should be no cause for complaint. However, we recognise that, from time to time, concerns will arise which prompt schools, colleges, registered Early Years settings or individuals to complain. Where this occurs the following procedure should be followed:

Informal complaint – Stage 1

2. Complaints are best resolved as soon as possible. Therefore as soon as concerns arise on an inspection, the school, setting or college should talk to the Reporting Inspector (RI), giving as much detail as possible about the issue. If you are a parent or a teacher concerned about the way your child or you yourself have been treated in the inspection, you should normally raise the issue with the head of the school who will speak to the RI. Wherever possible the RI will seek to resolve the matter while the inspection is in progress.
3. You can complain about any failure on the part of an inspection team or an individual inspector to comply with the SIS Code of Conduct or to meet the requirements of the relevant SIS inspection framework. All of these documents are to be found in the SIS Handbook for inspection on the website at www.schoolinspectionsservice.co.uk Complaints might involve, for example:
 - the manner in which the inspection team or individual inspectors have conducted themselves towards pupils, students, staff, trustees or managers at the school, setting or college; or
 - the extent to which one or more of the inspection findings lack validity because evidence available at the time of the inspection has not been considered; or
 - that inspectors have not followed the relevant SIS inspection framework, criteria or grade descriptors so that their judgements lack reliability.
4. Schools, settings or colleges may not appeal against the judgements agreed by the inspection team in accordance with the criteria of the inspection framework or rely on new evidence which was not presented to inspectors at the time of the inspection.

Formal complaint – Stage 2

5. Where Stage 1 has failed to resolve the matter, or if the concern arises at or towards the end of the inspection leaving insufficient time for resolution, the school, college or registered Early Years setting may make a formal complaint through its official representative. This is:
 - the chairman of Focus Learning Trust’s Management Committee (for FLT schools); or
 - the nominated representative of Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship (for SWSF schools).
6. The complainant should set out the issues clearly in writing, providing all necessary details to support the complaint. They must do so within 10 days of the end of the inspection, or within 10 days of the publication of the report, if the matter concerns the inspection report. The nominated representative will note the complaint and refer it to the SIS Chief Inspector.
7. For colleges and British schools overseas (BSO) the complaint should be made directly to the Chief Inspector, who may be contacted at chiefinspector@schoolinspectionsservice.co.uk

Formal complaints about the conduct of inspectors

8. SIS inspectors are bound by the Code of Conduct¹. If a school, setting, college or an individual believes that the inspection team or an individual inspector has failed to abide by the Code of Conduct, then they have the right to complain through the relevant nominated representative to the Chief Inspector. The complaint must clearly indicate the areas of concern, must specify which element of the Code of Conduct has been breached and must be backed up by appropriate evidence.

Formal complaints about the findings of an inspection or report

9. Inspections must be conducted and reports must comply with the relevant inspection framework for independent schools (in England); for Early Years settings, for British Schools Overseas (BSO) or for independent colleges, as set out in the SIS Handbook for inspection which is published on the website. If a school, college or registered Early Years setting, or a parent, feels that any finding fails to meet this requirement, they can address an appeal to the Chief Inspector via their nominated representative, or directly in the case of colleges and BSO. The complainant must clearly state the grounds for appeal and provide all the appropriate evidence to support their view. It is important to realise that disagreement with the inspectors’ judgements is not a sufficient ground to request an internal review:

¹ The SIS Code of Conduct is found in the ‘Policies’ section of the SIS Handbook for inspection of independent schools. It is also incorporated into the Framework for inspection. Both documents are on the website at www.schoolinspectionsservice.co.uk

this can only be done if the complainant can show either that the inspection team has failed to take into account material evidence that was in existence at the time of the inspection and was presented to the inspectors, or that in arriving at the disputed finding, the inspectors have not applied the inspection framework properly and correctly. It is essential that any such complaint is clearly linked to the judgement which the inspection team has made and which the complainant feels is wrong.

10. The Chief Inspector will consider the complaint seriously and will consult with the Reporting Inspector for the inspection, any other inspector(s) concerned and with any other relevant parties. In reaching a view, the Chief Inspector will review the complaint in the light of all the inspection evidence including information sought from individual inspectors where the complaint concerns their conduct. The Chief Inspector's findings and the reasons for them will be reported to the complainant, the inspectors, the association's nominated representative and any other interested parties wherever possible within 20 working days of receiving the complaint².
11. In handling a complaint the Chief Inspector will have regard to the four key standards for the handling of complaints set out below. These are:
 - **impartial**, in that fair and equal attention is paid to the points, arguments and evidence of all interested parties;
 - **thorough**, in that all matters raised are fully and systematically examined, all relevant parties have been consulted and all relevant evidence has been scrutinised;
 - **reliable**, in that the sole criteria applied have been the Code of Conduct and the relevant framework; and
 - **transparent**, in that the findings must be communicated in writing to all parties concerned, setting out the reasons for them and any recommendations required.
12. Where the Chief Inspector is the subject of the complaint or has been personally involved in the inspection, the complaint will be considered by the Chair of SIS who may, if appropriate, request professional advice from other members of the team of inspectors.
13. If the complaint is upheld, SIS will apologise to the school, setting, college or individual and, if required, amend judgements and republish the report.

² Every effort is made to adhere to this timescale wherever possible, but it may be necessary to extend it on occasions, for example where the Chief Inspector is working on an inspection or is on annual leave. Where this is the case, the complainant will be advised of the revised timescale.

Appeal to the Independent Complaints Adjudicator – Stage 3

14. If, when all the procedures above have been followed, a school, setting, college or individual remains dissatisfied with the responses and considers that the complaint has not been handled properly or fairly, they may make an appeal to the Complaints Adjudicator (CA). This appeal must be made within 10 days of the response from the Chief Inspector to Stage 2. SIS has recourse to an independent adjudicator who is not connected with SIS and is independent of its management. While the adjudicator provides an external and independent view, he can only accept a case once all internal procedures have been exhausted. Schools should note that the CA can only rule on the handling of the complaints procedure and not on the validity of the original judgements by inspectors. In doing so, the CA will have regard to the four key standards for the handling of complaints set out above.
15. The CA's response will be made within 30 working days of receipt of the appeal.
16. The decision of the CA is final.

Policy review

17. This policy is reviewed annually, unless changes in circumstances require an earlier review. Its next review is due in August 2019.

Jane Cooper, Chief Inspector, SIS
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