Complaints Policy

Links to other Policies, please see:
Whistleblowing Policy
Staff Handbook

Policy Information		
Policy Author: Emma Shutt Governing Board approval date/date policy is in effect from: October 2020		
Latest Review information:	**Summary of amendments**	**Date of next review:**
Date: March 2026 Name of reviewer/s: Amy Clewlow	Minor amendments to wording Ombudsman to DFE), added most recent complaint data.	**March 2027**
Date: September 2026 Name of reviewer/s: Amy Clewlow	Full compliance review; updated for Data (Use and Access) Act 2025 and revised data protection complaints requirements; updated scope, independent panel requirements, record keeping and complaints process timescales.	**September 2027**

Complaints Policy and Procedure

Introduction

At Intuition School and Diamond Families Farm, we are committed to providing a high standard of education and care for all students. We believe that a strong partnership between the school/farm, parents, carers, and the wider community is essential in achieving this goal. However, we acknowledge that there may be times when concerns or complaints arise. This Complaints Policy is designed to provide a clear, transparent, and accessible procedure for addressing concerns in a fair and timely manner. Our aim is to resolve complaints as quickly and effectively as possible, ensuring that all parties feel listened to and valued.

This policy applies to parents, carers, students, staff, and other stakeholders who wish to raise a complaint about any aspect of the school/ farm's provision. We encourage concerns to be raised informally in the first instance, as many issues can be resolved swiftly through open communication. However, if a resolution is not reached, this policy outlines the formal steps available to escalate a complaint.

We are committed to handling complaints with sensitivity, impartiality, and confidentiality, ensuring that all individuals are treated with respect throughout the process.

Links to Legislation

This Complaints Policy aligns with the following legislation and statutory guidance:

1. **The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014** – Requires independent schools to have a clear complaints procedure in place and ensure it is available to all stakeholders.
2. **The Children Act 1989 and 2004** – Outlines the duty of care schools have in safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children, which may be relevant to certain complaints.
3. **The Equality Act 2010** – Ensures that complaints related to discrimination, accessibility, or inclusion are handled fairly and lawfully.
4. **The UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) and Data Protection Act 2018** – Protects personal data shared as part of the complaints process and ensures confidentiality.
5. **The Human Rights Act 1998** – Ensures that complaints processes align with fundamental rights, such as the right to a fair hearing and respect for private and family life.
6. **Statutory Guidance on Handling Complaints (DfE) –** Provides best practice recommendations for independent schools in handling complaints effectively and equitably.

7. **Data (Use and Access) Act 2025-** amends the UK data protection framework and introduces statutory requirements for organisations when handling complaints about the processing of personal data.

Scope of the Policy

The statutory complaints procedure applies to parents/carers of pupils currently registered at Intuition School. Where a complaints process began while a pupil was registered at the school, the process will be permitted to conclude after the pupil has left.

The school may consider concerns from former parents, pupils, members of the public and other stakeholders under an appropriate procedure at its discretion.

This policy does not apply to complaints regarding:

- Safeguarding concerns (which should be addressed via the school's Safeguarding Policy)
- Staff grievances (which should follow the Staff Grievance Policy)
- Exam results or assessment decisions (which should follow the Appeals Procedure)
- Disciplinary issues involving students (which should follow the Behaviour Policy)

If a complaint falls outside the scope of this policy, the complainant will be informed and advised on the appropriate course of action.

Data Protection Complaints

Complaints specifically concerning the school's processing of personal data will be handled in accordance with UK data protection legislation, including the UK GDPR, Data Protection Act 2018 and Data (Use and Access) Act 2025.

The school will provide an accessible means for individuals to make a data protection complaint.

The school will acknowledge receipt of a data protection complaint within 30 days of receiving it.

The school will, without undue delay, take appropriate steps to investigate and respond to the complaint. This will include making appropriate enquiries into the matters raised and keeping the complainant informed of progress where necessary.

The complainant will be informed of the outcome without undue delay.

Individuals who remain dissatisfied may raise their concerns with the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO).

Where a complaint concerns both the school's general provision and the processing of personal data, the school will identify the relevant elements and ensure that the statutory requirements applying to data protection complaints are met alongside this complaints procedure.

Complaints Procedure

(see Appendix 1 for further information on the complaints process)

Stage 1. Informal expression of concern made to the school

In the first instance, the matter should be discussed with the student's Keyworker. In our experience most matters of concern can be resolved positively in this way with apologies where necessary. There is no doubt that if a concern is shared with the Keyworker they can either reassure worried parents or devise steps together to take to address the concern. They will always be taken seriously, and due consideration given to a mutually agreeable resolution.

Stage 2. Discussion and investigating

If the matter has not been resolved and needs further investigation parents may request that the Keyworker fully investigates the matter further involving other members of staff. Feedback from the investigation will be given to parents within 7 school days. Members of the school/farm's leadership team may also be involved at this stage.

Stage 3. Principal

Complaints rarely reach this formal level, but should you need to you should make a formal complaint to the Principal or Farm Service Coordinator, please follow the steps below.

Within 10 school days of the issue a written complaint should be addressed to the Principal or Farm Service Coordinator and marked “Private and Confidential” and left in the school office or sent via email to principal@intuitionschool.co.uk for Intuition School or Manager@diamond-families.org.uk for the farm. The letter should say why you remain unhappy and what you wish to see happen. The Principal/Farm Manager will let you know when your complaint is to be considered. If a meeting with you and others involved is considered necessary, you will be given adequate notice to prepare. You will be informed of the outcome of the Principal/Farm Manager’s investigation and decision on what further action will be taken within 10 school days of the letter being received.

Stage 4. Governors

If the complaint remains unresolved following Stage 3, the parent/carer may escalate their complaint to the school Governors or farm Trustees within two months of receiving the Principal/Farm Service Coordinator/Proprietor's response.

The request should be made in writing and addressed to the Chair of Governors/Trustees, marked "Private and Confidential", and submitted to the school/farm office.

The complaint will proceed to a hearing before a Complaints Panel appointed by or on behalf of the proprietor. The panel will consist of at least three people who have not been directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint. At least one member of the panel will be independent of the management and running of the school.

The parent/carer will be given reasonable notice of the panel hearing and will be entitled to attend and be accompanied if they wish. A parent/carer may choose to be accompanied or supported by an appropriate person, which may include an advocate or a representative from a service such as SENDIASS.

A clerk may be present to record the proceedings and support the administration of the panel.

The panel will consider the complaint impartially, taking account of the written complaint, the school's response, any relevant evidence and the representations of those involved. The panel may make findings and recommendations and, where appropriate, recommend actions to address the complaint or improve school/farm procedures.

The panel's findings, recommendations and outcome will be provided in writing within 15 school days of the panel hearing.

A copy of the panel's findings and recommendations will be provided to the complainant and, where relevant, to the person complained about. The findings and recommendations will also be made available for inspection on the school/farm premises by the proprietor, Principal/Farm Service Coordinator and any other person entitled to inspect them under the applicable regulatory requirements.

The school/farm will maintain an appropriate confidential record of the complaint, the panel proceedings, its findings and recommendations, and any action taken as a result.

Stage 5. Further Representation

If you remain dissatisfied, you may make further representations.

If the complainant believes the school has acted unlawfully or failed to follow its procedures, they may refer the complaint to the Department for Education (DfE). This is usually appropriate where concerns relate to regulatory compliance rather than disagreement with the outcome.

The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman does not usually investigate complaints about independent schools.

If stakeholders have a complaint about the Principal/Farm Service Coordinator, they should first make an informal approach to the Chair of the Governors/Trustees (as at stage 4 above) who is obliged to investigate it. The Chair will do all they can to resolve the issue through a dialogue with the school/farm, but if parents are unhappy with the outcome, they can make a formal complaint, as outlined above.

If, despite all stages of this policy being followed, the complainant remains dissatisfied they are not entitled to reopen the same issue. In such cases the Chair of Governors/Trustees is able to inform them in writing that the process has been exhausted and that the school may consider the complaint closed unless new evidence or safeguarding concerns arise.

If an anonymous complaint is received it will not be investigated under this procedure unless there are exceptional circumstances or serious concerns such as child protection issues or bullying allegations, where the school might consider it appropriate to contact outside agencies.

Investigating complaints

The person investigating the complaint will:

• Establish what has happened so far and who has been involved.

• Clarify the nature of the complaint and what remains unresolved.

• Meet with the complainant or contact them if further information is required

• Clarify what the complainant feels would put things right.

• Conduct any interviews with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning.

• Complete all necessary notes.

• Involve any relevant agencies or seek advice. For example, LADO, safeguarding leads, HR,

or external legal advice where appropriate.

Resolving Complaints

At each stage in the complaint, the school/farm and the complainant will want to keep in mind ways in which a complaint can be resolved. It might be sufficient to acknowledge that the complaint is valid in whole or in part. In addition, it may be appropriate to offer one or more of the following:

• An apology

• An admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better*

• Assurance that the event that was the basis of the complaint will not recur

• Explanation of the steps that have been taken to ensure it does not happen again. Details of any disciplinary procedures that have taken place as a result of the complaint will not be shared.

• An undertaking to review school/farm policy or procedure in light of the complaint

• An explanation that there is insufficient evidence and thus the complaint cannot be upheld

• An explanation that, following investigation, the evidence does not substantiate the concern

*An admission that the school could have handled things better is not the same as an admission of negligence

Confidentiality and Record-Keeping

- All complaints will be handled sensitively and shared only on a need to know basis, with records kept securely. Records will state whether the complaint was resolved following a formal procedure or proceeded to a panel hearing; and the action taken by the school as a result of the complaint, regardless of whether the complaint was upheld.
- A summary of complaints and resolutions will be shared with the Governing/Trustee Board for review, ensuring continuous improvement.

Number of formal written complaints by academic year for Intuition School					
2020-2021	**2021-2022**	**2022-2023**	**2023-2024**	**2024-2025**	**2025-2026**
0	0	0	0	0	0
Number of formal written complaints by academic year for Diamond Families Farm					
2020-2021	**2021-2022**	**2022-2023**	**2023-2024**	**2024-2025**	**2025-2026**
0	0	0	0	0	0

Unreasonable or Vexatious Complaints

A complaint may be considered unreasonable if:

- It is repeatedly raised despite being fully addressed.
- The complainant is abusive, aggressive, or threatening.
- It places excessive demands on school/farm staff without valid justification.

In such cases, the school/farm reserves the right to:

- Limit communication with the complainant.
- Refuse to consider further complaints on the same issue.

- Report any abusive behaviour to external authorities.

Monitoring and Review

The Governors/Trustees/Proprietor will monitor the complaints procedure, in order to ensure that all complaints are handled properly. The Principal/Farm Service Coordinator will log all Stage 2 complaints received by the school/Farm – whether resolved or proceeded to a panel hearing and action taken by the school/farm as a result of the complaint (regardless of whether they are upheld). All correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints are kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting a standard inspection of a non-association independent school requests access to them.

The Governors of Intuition School/Trustees of Diamond Families Farm review this policy as necessary. The Principal/Farm Service Coordinator will review this policy annually.

Appendix 1: Complaint Process Timescales

Stage	Action	Timescale / Outcome
Stage 1 – Informal Expression of Concern	The concern should initially be discussed with the student's Keyworker, with the aim of resolving the matter informally and promptly.	The school/farm will seek to resolve the concern as soon as reasonably possible. If resolved: no further action. If unresolved: proceed to Stage 2.
Stage 2 – Discussion and Investigation	The parent/carer may ask the Keyworker to investigate the matter further, involving other members of staff and, where appropriate, members of the school/farm leadership team.	Feedback from the investigation will be provided to the parent/carer within 7 school days. If resolved: no further action. If unresolved: proceed to Stage 3.
Stage 3 – Formal Complaint to Principal / Farm Service Coordinator	A formal written complaint should be submitted to the Principal or Farm Service Coordinator, explaining why the complainant remains dissatisfied and the outcome they are seeking.	The policy states that the written complaint should be made within 10 school days of the issue. The complainant will be informed of the outcome of the investigation and any further action within 10 school days of receipt of the written complaint. If unresolved: proceed to Stage 4.
Stage 4 – Governors / Trustees and Complaints Panel	If the complaint remains unresolved following Stage 3, the parent/carer may make written representation to the Governors/Trustees. The complaint will proceed to a hearing before a Complaints Panel appointed by or on behalf of the proprietor. The panel will consist of at least three people who have not been directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint, with at least one member independent of the management and running of the school. The parent/carer will be entitled to attend and may be accompanied	The complaint may be escalated within two months of receiving the Principal/Farm Service Coordinator/Proprietor's response. The panel's findings, recommendations and outcome will be provided in writing within 15 school days of the panel hearing. Copies of the findings and recommendations will be provided to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about.

	and supported if they wish.	
Stage 5 – Further Representation	If the complainant remains dissatisfied after the school's procedure has been exhausted and believes that the school has acted unlawfully or failed to follow its procedures, they may make representations to the Department for Education (DfE).	This route is generally appropriate for concerns about regulatory compliance or failure to follow the required procedure, rather than simply disagreement with the school's decision. The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman does not usually investigate complaints about independent schools.
Process Exhausted	Once all stages have been completed, the Chair of Governors/Trustees may inform the complainant in writing that the school's complaints procedure has been exhausted.	The school/farm may consider the complaint closed and will not normally reopen the same matter, unless new evidence or safeguarding concerns arise.

Useful Links

http://parentalengagement.co.uk/getting-it-right-for-ofsted/4574813099

https://www.sendiass-stoke.co.uk/

https://stoke-on-trent.cylex-uk.co.uk/company/stoke-on-trent-parent-partnership-14633659.html