

Persistent Complaints Policy

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Change History

Version	Date	Description
1	April 2026	Policy re-written

Signatures:

Headteacher:



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Chair of Governors:



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1.0 Purpose and Scope

1.1 Purpose of the Policy

The purpose of this Persistent Complaints Policy is to ensure that Inkpen Primary School manages all complaints, including those that are persistent, serial, or vexatious, in a fair, transparent, and effective manner. The policy aims to balance the right of individuals to raise concerns with the need to protect staff, pupils, and the wider school community from unreasonable or abusive behaviour.

We are committed to resolving concerns at the earliest possible stage, promoting respectful communication, and using feedback to drive continuous improvement in our provision.

1.2 Scope of the Policy

This policy applies to all complaints raised by parents, carers, members of the public, and other external stakeholders about the operation of Inkpen Primary School, its staff, or its provision.

It covers complaints that become persistent, serial, or vexatious, as defined in section 4.0 of this policy.

The policy does not apply to:

- Staff grievances or disciplinary matters
- Whistleblowing concerns
- Allegations relating to safeguarding or child protection
- Admissions or exclusions
- Complaints relating to services provided by other providers using school premises or facilities

Where a complaint raises issues that fall under more than one policy, the school will clarify which procedures will be followed and ensure that all concerns are addressed appropriately.

1.3 Relationship to Other Policies

This policy should be read in conjunction with the following related policies and procedures:

- Complaints Policy (general complaints procedure)
- Whistleblowing Policy
- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy
- Data Protection and Privacy Policies
- Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Policy

- Behaviour and Anti-Bullying Policy

Where complaints relate to staff conduct or safeguarding, the school will refer to the relevant policy and statutory guidance, including Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE).

The school will ensure that all procedures are compliant with current legislation and guidance, and will adapt to any future changes as required.

2.0 Definitions

2.1 Persistent, Serial, and Vexatious Complaints

A **persistent complaint** is one where the complainant continues to pursue the same issue, or closely related issues, after the school's complaints procedure has been fully and properly implemented and exhausted.

A **serial complaint** refers to repeated complaints about the same or similar issues, often with minor variations, by the same individual or group.

A **vexatious complaint** is one that is obsessive, harassing, or abusive in nature, or which is intended to cause disruption or distress rather than to seek a genuine resolution.

Examples of persistent, serial, or vexatious complaints may include:

- Repeatedly raising the same issue with different staff members or governors
- Refusing to accept documented evidence or the outcome of the complaints process
- Making excessive demands on school resources or staff time
- Using abusive, threatening, or harassing language or behaviour
- Submitting complaints that are clearly intended to cause disruption, rather than to resolve a genuine concern

These definitions are informed by DfE and ACAS guidance and are applied consistently and objectively.

2.2 Distinction from Genuine Complaints

Inkpen Primary School recognises the importance of distinguishing between persistent, serial, or vexatious complaints and genuine concerns. A complaint will not be considered persistent or vexatious simply because the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome or raises concerns robustly.

The school will always seek to address the substance of genuine complaints, ensuring that all concerns are considered fairly and impartially.

Only where a complaint meets the objective criteria set out above, and after all reasonable steps to resolve the issue have been taken, will it be managed under the procedures for persistent or vexatious complaints.

3.0 Principles and Commitments

3.1 Fairness, Accessibility, and Inclusion

Inkpen Primary School is committed to providing a complaints process that is fair, accessible, and inclusive for all members of the school community.

We will ensure that no individual is treated less favourably or disadvantaged on the basis of a protected characteristic, in accordance with the Equality Act 2010.

The policy and all related procedures will be made available in alternative formats and languages upon request, and reasonable adjustments will be made to support complainants with disabilities or additional needs.

3.2 Respectful Communication

We expect all members of the school community, including staff, parents, carers, and visitors, to communicate with one another in a respectful, constructive, and courteous manner. Abusive, threatening, or harassing language or behaviour will not be tolerated and may result in the application of additional procedures, including the restriction of contact or involvement of external agencies.

3.3 Record Keeping, Confidentiality and Data Protection

Inkpen Primary School is committed to maintaining accurate, confidential, and comprehensive records of all complaints, including those deemed persistent or vexatious. Records will include details of the complaint, correspondence, actions taken, and outcomes. These records will be made available for inspection by Ofsted and the Local Authority as required.

All complaints will be handled with the utmost confidentiality, in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018. Information about complaints will only be shared with those who need to know in order to investigate, respond, or take appropriate action.

Records will be stored securely and retained in line with statutory requirements and the school's Data Retention Policy.

Complainants have the right to request access to their personal data held by the school, subject to legal exemptions.

4.0 Staged Complaints Procedure

4.1 Overview of the Complaints Process

Inkpen Primary School operates a staged complaints process, designed to resolve concerns at the earliest possible stage while ensuring fairness and transparency. The process includes clear timelines, escalation routes, and opportunities for mediation or facilitated resolution.

The stages are as follows:

1. **Stage 1: Informal Resolution** – The complaint is raised with the relevant staff member or line manager and an attempt is made to resolve the issue informally.
2. **Stage 2: Formal Complaint** – If unresolved, the complaint is submitted in writing to the Headteacher or designated senior leader for formal investigation.
3. **Stage 3: Panel Hearing** – If the complainant remains dissatisfied, the complaint is considered by a panel of governors or trustees, which may include an independent member.
4. **Stage 4: Escalation to External Bodies** – If the complaint remains unresolved after all school-based stages, the complainant may refer the matter to the Local Authority, ESFA (for academies), or the DfE, as appropriate.

At each stage, the school will communicate clearly with the complainant, set out expected timescales, and provide information about the next steps.

4.2 Initial Handling of Complaints

All complaints, whether received in person, by telephone, in writing, or by email, will be acknowledged promptly (within 15 school days).

The school will record the details of the complaint, the complainant's preferred method of communication, and any additional support needs.

Where possible, complaints will be resolved informally at the earliest stage.

If the complaint is complex or requires further investigation, the complainant will be informed of the likely timescale and the process to be followed.

4.3 Managing Persistent or Serial Complaints

When a complaint becomes persistent, serial, or vexatious, the school will:

- Review the history and nature of the complaint to determine whether it meets the objective criteria set out in section 4.1.
- Notify the complainant in writing that their complaint is being managed under the Persistent Complaints Policy, explaining the reasons and providing a copy of the policy.
- Assign a designated lead (e.g., Headteacher or Chair of Governors) to monitor and coordinate the response.
- Set clear boundaries for communication, including specifying a single point of contact and limiting the frequency or format of correspondence if necessary.

- Continue to address any new issues or evidence raised, while making clear that repeated or substantially similar complaints will not be reconsidered unless new information is provided.

The school will always act in accordance with the principles of fairness, transparency, and proportionality, ensuring that the complainant's rights are respected.

4.4 Communication and Record-Keeping

All interactions, correspondence, and actions taken in relation to persistent or serial complaints will be documented in detail.

Records will include dates, times, the content of conversations, and any agreed actions or outcomes.

These records will be stored securely and made available for inspection by regulatory bodies as required.

The school will ensure that all staff involved in managing complaints are aware of their responsibilities for accurate and timely record-keeping.

4.5 Mediation and Resolution Strategies

Where appropriate, the school will offer mediation, facilitated meetings, or other forms of alternative dispute resolution to help resolve ongoing complaints.

Mediation may involve an impartial third party, such as a trained mediator from the Local Authority or an independent governor.

The aim is to find a mutually acceptable solution and restore positive relationships wherever possible.

Participation in mediation is voluntary, and the school will respect the wishes of the complainant if they decline this option.

4.6 Decision to Cease Correspondence

In exceptional circumstances, where a complaint is deemed to be persistent, serial, or vexatious, and all reasonable steps to resolve the issue have been exhausted, the school may decide to stop responding to further correspondence on the matter.

This decision will only be taken after careful consideration by the Headteacher and/or Chair of Governors, and in accordance with DfE guidance.

The process for ceasing correspondence is as follows:

- The school will write to the complainant, explaining the decision, the reasons for it, and the evidence considered.
- The complainant will be informed of their right to appeal the decision and/or escalate the matter to an external body (see section 6.7).
- The school will continue to consider any new complaints or issues raised that are unrelated to the original matter.

This process ensures that the school remains accountable while protecting staff and resources from unreasonable demands.

4.7 Escalation and Appeals

If a complainant remains dissatisfied after the school's procedures have been exhausted, they may escalate their complaint as follows:

- Complainants may contact the Local Authority (West Berkshire Council) or the Department for Education (DfE).
- Ofsted may be contacted if the complaint relates to the school's overall effectiveness or safeguarding.

The school will cooperate fully with any external investigation and provide all relevant records as required.

4.8 Banning from the School Premises

Although fulfilling a public function, schools are private places. The public has no automatic right of entry. Schools will therefore act to ensure it remains a safe place for pupils, staff and other members of their community.

If an individual's behaviour is a cause for concern, a school can ask him/her to leave school premises. If the complainant presents himself/herself regularly at the school site and behaves inappropriately, the school will seek advice and guidance from the LA about managing this situation.

In serious cases, the Head teacher or the local authority can notify them in writing that their implied license to be on school premises has been temporarily revoked subject to an appeal hearing. If this decision is taken, this will be put in writing and explain how the decision can be appealed. The individual will be given the opportunity to formally express their views on the decision to ban in writing.

The decision will be reviewed and either confirmed or lifted. If the decision is confirmed the individual will be notified in writing, explaining how long the ban will be in place.

Anyone wishing to complain about being banned can do so, by letter or email, to the Head teacher or Chair of Governors. However, complaints about banning cannot be escalated to the Department for Education. Once the school procedure has been completed, the only remaining avenue of appeal is through the Courts; independent legal advice must therefore be sought.

5.0 Supporting Staff and Wellbeing

5.1 Support for Staff Handling Persistent Complaints

Inkpen Primary School recognises that managing persistent or vexatious complaints can be challenging and may impact staff wellbeing.

The school is committed to supporting staff by:

- Providing access to guidance, supervision, and professional support
- Offering training on managing difficult conversations and maintaining professional boundaries
- Ensuring that staff have a clear point of contact for advice and escalation
- Monitoring staff wellbeing and providing access to employee assistance programmes or counselling services as needed

Staff are encouraged to seek support from their line manager or the designated lead if they feel affected by the complaints process.

5.2 Managing Unacceptable Behaviour

The school will not tolerate abusive, threatening, or unreasonable behaviour by complainants.

Where such behaviour occurs, the school may:

- Issue a warning letter outlining the unacceptable behaviour and the consequences of continued misconduct
- Restrict contact with the complainant (e.g. limiting communication to written correspondence or a single point of contact)
- Involve external agencies, such as the police or legal advisors, where necessary to protect staff and pupils

All actions taken in response to unacceptable behaviour will be proportionate, clearly documented, and communicated to the complainant in writing.

The school will ensure that any restrictions imposed are reviewed regularly and lifted when appropriate.

6.0 Training and Awareness

6.1 Staff and Governor Training

All staff and governors at Inkpen Primary School will receive regular training on the complaints procedure, including the management of persistent or vexatious complaints.

Training will cover:

- The staged complaints process and escalation routes
- Identifying and responding to persistent or serial complaints
- Maintaining professional boundaries and managing challenging interactions
- Record-keeping, confidentiality, and data protection requirements
- Equality, diversity, and inclusion considerations

Training will be provided as part of induction for new staff and governors, and updated at least annually or in response to changes in legislation or guidance.

6.2 Stakeholder Awareness

The school will ensure that all stakeholders, including parents, carers, pupils, and members of the public, are aware of the complaints procedure and how to access it. Information about the policy will be:

- Published on the school website in an accessible format
- Made available in alternative formats (e.g., large print, translated versions, audio) upon request
- Communicated through newsletters, meetings, and other channels as appropriate

The school will actively encourage feedback and engagement from all members of the community, recognising the value of complaints as an opportunity for learning and improvement.

7.0 Monitoring, Evaluation, and Review

7.1 Monitoring and Use of Complaints Data

Inkpen Primary School will monitor and analyse complaints data, including persistent or vexatious complaints, to identify trends, areas for improvement, and potential safeguarding or equality issues.

The Headteacher and Governing Body will receive regular reports on complaints, including:

- The number and nature of complaints received
- The outcomes and actions taken
- Any recurring themes or concerns
- Lessons learned and improvements made as a result of complaints

This information will be used to inform school self-evaluation, strategic planning, and staff training.

The school will ensure that all data is anonymised and handled in accordance with data protection requirements.

9.2 Policy Review Process

This policy will be reviewed every three years or sooner if required by changes in legislation, statutory guidance, or best practice.

The review process will include consultation with staff and governors.

Feedback from stakeholders and learning from complaints will be used to update and improve the policy.