



# Nishkam Schools multi-academy trust

## Concerns and Complaints Policy

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## 1. Purpose of this policy

Nishkam Schools Multi Academy Trust aims to work openly and constructively with parents, carers and the wider community.

Most concerns can be resolved quickly through discussion. Where this is not possible, this policy sets out a clear, fair and proportionate process for handling complaints.

This policy applies to all schools within NSMAT and to the Trust.

## 2. Legislation and guidance

This document meets the requirements set out in part 7 of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, which states that we must have and make available a written procedure to deal with complaints from parents of pupils at the school.

## 3. Definitions

- A **concern** is an expression of worry or uncertainty where reassurance or clarification is sought.
- A **complaint** is an expression of dissatisfaction about an action taken, or a lack of action, that requires investigation.

Concerns should be raised as early as possible so they can be resolved informally.

## 4. Scope of the policy

This policy covers complaints about:

- the school
- school staff or leadership
- school services or decisions
- the Trust, Trustees or CEO

## 5. Matters not covered by this policy

This policy does not apply to matters that are subject to separate statutory or legal procedures, including:

- admissions appeals
- statutory SEND assessments
- safeguarding or child protection matters
- staff grievances or disciplinary matters
- suspensions or permanent exclusions
- examination results
- whistleblowing concerns

Details of these procedures are available on the school or Trust website.

## 6. When complaints will not normally be considered

Complaints will not normally be investigated where:

- they are raised more than **2 months** after the incident, or the last incident in a series
- they are anonymous
- the same issue has already been fully investigated
- they are abusive, malicious or unreasonable

- they are published on social media rather than raised directly with the school
- they relate to matters under police or legal investigation
- they are made by a third party without appropriate authority

## 7. Principles for handling complaints

All complaints will be handled in a way that is:

- fair and impartial
- respectful to all parties
- proportionate
- focused on resolution

Complaints are treated confidentially and taken seriously.

## 8. Time limits

- Complaints must be raised within **2 months** of the incident or last related incident.
- Complaints received during school holidays are treated as received on the next school day.
- Where timescales cannot be met, the complainant will be informed and given a revised date.

## 9. The complaints process

The Trust uses a **three stage process**.

### Stage 1 – Informal resolution

- Concerns should be raised with the relevant member of staff or school leader.
- Most concerns are resolved at this stage.
- A written response is not always required.
- A response will normally be provided within **10 school days**.

If the concern is not resolved, a request to move to Stage 2 must be made within **10 school days**.

### Stage 2 – Formal complaint

- Complaints must be submitted in writing by email or letter.
- The complaint should include:
  - what happened
  - dates and times
  - who was involved
  - what outcome is being sought
- The complaint will be investigated by school leadership.
- A written outcome will be provided within **10 school days** of the investigation starting.

If the complainant remains dissatisfied, they may request Stage 3 within **10 school days** of receiving the Stage 2 response.

### Stage 3 – Review panel (final stage)

- A review panel of **up to three independent people** will be appointed by the Trust.
- Panel members will:
  - have had no prior involvement in the complaint
  - have no prior knowledge of the case
  - act impartially and independently

### Role of the panel

The panel's role is to **review**:

- whether the complaint was handled fairly and properly

- whether the decision reached was reasonable based on the information available
- May choose to speak to any of the parties involved to clarify any points

This stage is **not a re-hearing of the complaint**.

#### **Evidence**

- The panel will consider the documentation from earlier stages.
- **No new evidence** may be introduced at this stage, to ensure fairness and procedural integrity.

#### **Outcome**

- The panel may confirm the previous decision, in whole or in part, or
- recommend that the decision is reconsidered, in whole or in part.

The written outcome will normally be provided within **30 school days**, where possible. This is the final stage of the Trust's complaints procedure.

### **10. Complaints about the Trust, CEO or Trustees**

Complaints about the Trust, CEO or Trustees must be submitted in writing to: [complaints@nishkamschools.org](mailto:complaints@nishkamschools.org)

An impartial investigator or panel will be appointed, following the same principles set out in this policy. If the complaint involves the Chair or Vice Chair, independent panel members will be used.

#### **11. After the Trust procedure is complete**

If the complainant remains dissatisfied after completing all stages, they may refer the complaint to the Department for Education.

The DfE considers whether the Trust has followed the correct process. It does not overturn decisions.

### **12. Escalation and appropriate routing of complaints**

Complaints must be raised and progressed in line with the stages set out in this policy.

Where a complaint is submitted directly to the Trust, CEO or Local Advisory Board Members before the relevant earlier stages have been completed, the complaint will normally be redirected to the appropriate stage for consideration.

The Trust will not consider complaints at a higher stage where the earlier stages of the process have not been followed, unless there are exceptional circumstances.

This approach ensures that concerns are addressed at the earliest possible stage by those closest to the issue and that the process remains fair and proportionate for all parties.

### **13. Unreasonable or persistent complaints**

Most complaints are reasonable. However, behavior may be considered unreasonable if a complainant:

- repeatedly raises the same issue after it has been fully addressed
- refuses to cooperate with the process
- uses abusive or threatening language
- makes excessive or disruptive contact

Where this occurs, the Trust may:

- restrict communication to a single point of contact
- set reasonable limits on contact
- stop responding once the process is complete

Any such decision will be explained in writing.

#### **14. Complaint campaigns**

Where a large number of similar complaints are received, the Trust may:

- publish a single response, or
- issue a standard response to all complainants

Normal complaint rights still apply.

#### **15. Early years provision**

Parents of children in early years provision may also contact Ofsted if they believe statutory requirements are not being met.

#### **16. Record keeping and confidentiality**

- Complaints are handled confidentially.
- Records are kept securely for **two years**.
- Information may be disclosed where legally required, including during inspections or formal information requests.

#### **17. Related policies**

This policy should be read alongside:

- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy
- Admissions Policy
- Exclusions Policy
- SEND Policy
- Whistleblowing Policy
- Staff grievance and disciplinary procedures

#### **Trust assurance statement**

This policy reflects the Trust's commitment to fairness, transparency and continuous improvement.