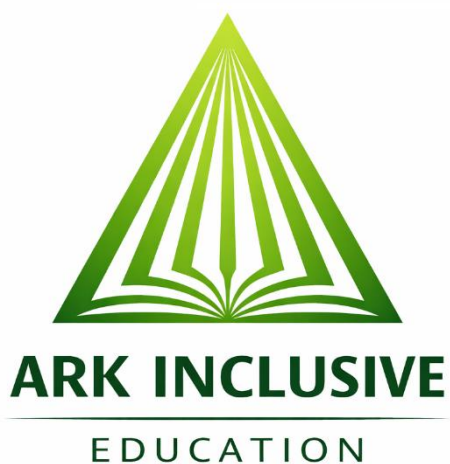




COMPLAINTS POLICY

2026-2027

Group Policy Document

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1.0 INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

1.1 ARK Inclusive Education is committed to providing the very best education and support to the children and young people in our care. We welcome feedback as an important part of continuous improvement and accept that this will not always be positive .

1.2 This Complaints Policy outlines how to raise a concern or make a complaint and what process we will follow to resolve the matter as fairly, promptly, and transparently as possible .

1.3 We will carefully consider all feedback, whether positive or negative, and will review our practices and policies accordingly . In return, we expect complainants to behave respectfully towards all members of our community .

2.0 WHO CAN MAKE A COMPLAINT?

2.1 This complaints procedure is not limited to parents or carers of children that are registered with us. Any person, including members of the public, may make a complaint about any provision of facilities or services that we provide .

2.2 A concern or complaint can be made by a third party acting on behalf of a complainant, as long as they have appropriate consent to do so .

3.0 THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A CONCERN AND A COMPLAINT

3.1 A concern may be defined as "an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought" .

3.2 A complaint may be defined as "an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action" .

3.3 It is in everyone's interest that concerns and complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. Many issues can be resolved informally, without the need to use the formal stages of the complaints procedure. We take concerns seriously and will make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible .

4.0 SCOPE OF THIS COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

4.1 This procedure covers all complaints about any provision of services by ARK Inclusive Education other than complaints that are dealt with under other statutory procedures .

4.2 The following matters are NOT dealt with under this procedure and have their own processes:

Subject of Concern	Appropriate Policy/Process
Safeguarding and Child Protection	Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy (refer to LADO if necessary)
Whistleblowing	Whistleblowing Policy
Staff Grievances	Grievance Procedure
Staff Conduct/Disciplinary	Disciplinary Policy and Procedure
Pupil Exclusions	Behaviour Policy and Exclusions Policy
Pupil Admissions	Admissions Policy
Subject Access (Data Protection) and Freedom of Information Requests	Data Protection Policy

Subject of Concern

Appropriate Policy/Process

Statutory Assessment of Special Educational Needs

Contact the Local Authority directly

Complaints about a third party used by ARK Inclusive Education

Contact the third party directly

4.3 If other bodies are investigating aspects of the complaint, for example the police, Local Authority safeguarding teams, or Tribunals, this may impact on our ability to adhere to the timescales within this procedure or result in the procedure being suspended until those public bodies have completed their investigations .

4.4 If a complainant commences legal action against ARK Inclusive Education in relation to their complaint, we will consider whether to suspend the complaints procedure in relation to that complaint until those legal proceedings have concluded .

5.0 PRINCIPLES

5.1 This policy is founded on the following principles:

- To treat all concerns and complaints seriously, courteously, and without prejudice .
- To resolve complaints as quickly and informally as possible, dependent upon the complexity of the issues raised .
- To ensure that all complaints are dealt with fairly and impartially .
- To learn from complaints and use them to improve our provision.
- To ensure that complainants are not treated less favourably for raising a genuine concern or complaint.
- To consider making reasonable adjustments, if required, to enable complainants to access and complete this complaints procedure (e.g., providing information in alternative formats or holding meetings in accessible locations) .
- Not to discriminate against any individual in the application of this policy on the grounds of any protected characteristic .

6.0 HOW TO RAISE A CONCERN OR MAKE A COMPLAINT

6.1 A concern or complaint can be made in person, in writing, or by telephone . A template complaint form is available upon request .

6.2 INFORMAL CONCERNS (Stage 1 - Initial Resolution)

- Most concerns can be dealt with outside of the formal complaints process and should be raised with the relevant member of staff who will have the best understanding of the situation .
- **First Point of Contact:** Concerns should be raised with the **Lead Coordinator** or the relevant class tutor/keyworker.
- **Timeframe:** Wherever possible, informal concerns will be responded to quickly and resolved amicably. Ideally, your concern will be acknowledged within **3 school days**, and a response or meeting arranged to discuss the issue .
- **Records:** The Lead Coordinator will record the concern and the outcome .

6.3 FORMAL COMPLAINTS (Stage 2 - Formal Investigation)

- If an initial concern has been raised and the complainant feels the issue has not been addressed, or if the Lead Coordinator decides the initial concern warrants a more detailed investigation, a formal complaint should be made .
- **Making a Formal Complaint:** Formal complaints must be made in writing (preferably using the complaint form) to the **Director** (unless the complaint is about the Director) . Please mark the complaint as "Private and Confidential".
- **What to Include:** The complainant should confirm:
 - A summary of the complaint
 - Who has been involved (use job titles if names are not known)
 - Anything that has already been done to resolve the matter and why this is not satisfactory
 - Any evidence they have to support their complaint
 - What is needed to resolve the complaint (e.g., an explanation / apology / further action)

6.4 ANONYMOUS COMPLAINTS

- We will not normally investigate anonymous complaints. However, the Director, if appropriate, will determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation . Where anonymous complaints relate to safeguarding, these will be dealt with under the Safeguarding Policy.

7.0 CONFIDENTIALITY AND ANONYMITY

7.1 All complaints will be handled in a sensitive and confidential manner. Records relating to individual complaints are confidential, except in limited circumstances to comply with the Data Protection Act or Freedom of Information Act, or where a statutory body conducting an inspection requests access to them .

7.2 Where a complaint involves an individual member of staff, complainants will be notified that the matter is being addressed, but they are not entitled to participate in any disciplinary proceedings or receive any detail about them .

8.0 TIME SCALES

8.1 ARK Inclusive Education reserves the right not to investigate complaints that have been made more than three months after the subject of the complaint took place unless in exceptional circumstances (e.g., new evidence has come to light; if the complaint is about an especially serious matter; or where there is reasonable justification for why the complainant couldn't raise the matter sooner) .

8.2 The timescales for each stage are outlined below:

Stage	Acknowledgment	Full Response
Stage 1 - Concern	Within 3 working days	Discussed and resolved where possible
Stage 2 - Formal Complaint	Within 3 working days	Within 15 working days
Stage 3 - Appeal	Within 3 working days	Within 20 working days

8.3 In complex cases, more time may be needed to conduct a full and fair investigation. In this instance, extended timescales will be confirmed at the earliest possible opportunity .

8.4 Complaints made outside of term time will be considered to have been received on the first working day after the holiday period .

9.0 COMPLAINT PROCEDURE

9.1 Complaints will usually be handled in the order outlined below, from Stage 2 to Stage 3 consecutively .

9.2 STAGE 2 - FORMAL COMPLAINT (Investigation by the Director)

- **Acknowledgment:** Within **3 working days** of receipt of a formal complaint, the Director will acknowledge receipt in writing and confirm the timescales for a response .
- **Investigation:** The Director (or an appointed investigator) will:
 - Clarify the nature of the complaint and unresolved issues .
 - Clarify what the complainant feels would put things right .
 - Interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish .
 - Keep a written record of any meetings/interviews in relation to their investigation .
- **Response:** At the conclusion of the investigation, the Director will provide a formal written response within **15 working days** of the date of receipt of the complaint .
- The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it . Where appropriate, it will include details of actions ARK Inclusive Education will take to resolve the complaint .
- The Director will advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 2 .

9.3 STAGE 3 - APPEAL (Final Stage)

- If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome at Stage 2, they can escalate the complaint to an appeal. This is the final stage of the complaints procedure .
- **Making an Appeal:** A request to escalate to Stage 3 must be made to the Director, within **10 school days** of receipt of the Stage 2 response .
- **Appeal Meeting:** An independent appeal meeting will be convened. This meeting will be held with an **independent person** (who has no prior involvement or knowledge of the complaint) . As ARK Inclusive Education has no governing body, this will be a senior professional from a partner organisation, a legal advisor, or a representative from the Local Authority.
- **Timeframe:** The meeting will be convened within **20 working days** of receipt of the Stage 3 request . If this is not possible, we will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed.
- **Outcome:** The decision of the appeal meeting is final .

10.0 RESOLVING COMPLAINTS

10.1 At each stage, we will seek ways to resolve the complaint satisfactorily. It may be appropriate to offer one or more of the following :

- An explanation
- An admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better
- An assurance that we will try to ensure the event complained of will not recur
- An explanation of the steps that have been or will be taken to help ensure that it will not happen again and an indication of the timescales within which any changes will be made
- An undertaking to review policies in light of the complaint
- An apology

11.0 WITHDRAWAL OF A COMPLAINT

11.1 If a complainant wants to withdraw their complaint, we will ask them to confirm this in writing . However, if the complaint is of a serious nature (e.g., safeguarding), we may need to continue with the investigation .

12.0 PERSISTENT OR VEXATIOUS COMPLAINTS

12.1 We reserve the right to deny investigation of any complaints which are considered to be vexatious, malicious, or those relating to a previous complaint that has already been investigated .

12.2 In the case of vexatious or persistent complaints, the Director will inform the complainant in writing that the procedure has been exhausted and that the matter is now closed .

13.0 COMPLAINTS ABOUT THE DIRECTOR

13.1 If the complainant wishes to raise a complaint about the Director, they should raise this directly with the Director in the first instance to try to resolve the issue informally .

13.2 If the issue remains unresolved, the complainant should put their complaint in writing and send it to an **external independent person** (e.g., a legal advisor, a senior professional from a partner organisation, or the Local Authority).

13.3 The independent person will then complete all the actions at Stage 2 and Stage 3 of the complaints procedure.

14.0 RECORDS AND MONITORING

14.1 All complaints, including informal concerns, will be recorded by the provision .

14.2 Records relating to individual complaints are confidential and will be retained in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018 and UK GDPR .

14.3 The Director will monitor the level and the subject matter of complaints and review the outcomes on a regular basis to identify potential patterns and areas for improvement .

15.0 EXTERNAL PROCEDURES

15.1 The aim of this policy is to provide an internal mechanism for reporting, investigating, and remedying any complaints. In most cases it should not be necessary to alert anyone externally.

15.2 If a complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of the internal complaints procedure, they may contact the following external bodies (depending on the subject matter):

- **Local Authority:** The Local Authority responsible for commissioning the placement.
- **Department for Education:** For complaints about serious failures in education provision.
- **Ofsted:** For complaints about the quality of education or safeguarding concerns.

16.0 MONITORING AND REVIEW

16.1 This policy will be reviewed annually by the Director to ensure it remains fit for purpose and compliant with current legislation and best practice guidance.

16.2 The effectiveness of this policy will be monitored through the review of any complaints received and the outcomes of any investigations undertaken.

End of Policy Document