

Concerns & Complaints Policy: USPA

Approved by: Alessandro Capozzi, Director of Operations (Inspired Online Schools)

Donald Ball, Head of School (USPA)

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Vision

The Inspired Philosophy

As part of the Inspired Group, we are guided by the philosophy of the Inspired group:

- A child's education is the single most important consideration for any parent or carer.
- At Inspired, we believe that it is an individual's total educational experience that instils the knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and values that they will carry with them for life.
- We believe that this set of knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and values, instilled by education, will form the basis of how we approach the future.

Inspired schools believe that these are the foundations on which we build and plan our lives. At USPA, we welcome students with varied plans, from elite performance, professional sports, attending university or just seeking more flexibility to pursue personal goals. Being part of Inspired allows us to cater for our rich and varied student community through an inclusive and positive approach that maintains high expectations of all our students with their own aspirations.

Aims

The USPA mission is simple: to provide a world-class education that adapts to the unique needs and aspirations of each student, enabling them to thrive in an ever-changing world and preparing them for wherever their journey may lead. With experienced and highly qualified teachers, a personalized support team, a robust curriculum designed to inspire learners, and a welcoming community, we aim to equip our students to excel with the best skills, knowledge, relationships, and confidence. Fundamentally, our vision is to reimagine what school looks like, because our students learn anytime, anywhere, and on their terms.

Both welcome students with a variety of prior education experiences and with varied aims. This is fundamental to what we do. Our vision is to be a flexible home for all students and so we seek to offer a curriculum and experience that allows students to pursue learning interests, fits around other priorities and gives students the structure needed to work towards their goals. We seek to create the conditions for this, namely a purposeful learning environment, the ability to focus and challenge oneself and a sense of safety and value for every child.

We aim to develop a community based on these pillars

- Accountability: confidence and independence are built through experiences that teach ownership and resilience.
- Flexibility: Built to meet the needs of students and the demands of an ever-changing educational landscape.
- Excellence: our instruction model empowers students to engage deeply, think critically, and grow at a pace that works for them.
- Human Connection: USPA is an online school, but our community is present in every learning space, from soccer stadiums to living rooms. We are welcoming and we foster a culture of genuine care and connection.

Policy Statement

USPA is committed to providing a high-quality service for our families, partners, and clients. To continually improve the quality of our school, we aim to listen and respond to feedback provided by the members of our school community. This policy does not pertain to complaints brought by staff members and grievance procedures should be followed in the event of staff complaints.

We acknowledge that concerns and complaints will be raised predominantly by parents and carers. However, there may be instances where other school stakeholders may wish to raise a concern or make a complaint in line with this policy. There are some instances, where parents and/or carers are mentioned, which also includes school partners or clients.

This policy will seek to ensure that feedback and complaints are dealt with fairly and comprehensively. We will aim to:

- Handle complaints and feedback promptly, consistently, respectfully, and confidentially

- Address all the points at issue and provide an effective and prompt response
- Respect complainants' desire for confidentiality
- Keep complainants informed of the progress of the complaints process
- Respond to complaints appropriately and consistently, with explanations and/or apologies where appropriate
- Learn from feedback and complaints and use them to improve the overall quality of the service provided by our school

Safeguarding concerns should be brought to the attention of the Designated Safeguarding Leads, per the Safeguarding Protocol.

Safeguarding Lead	Carrie McGillicuddy [Head of Student Welfare]
Safeguarding Lead	Donald Ball [Head of School]

To support the complaints process, we will ensure we publicize the existence of this policy and make it available on the school websites.

Throughout the process, we will be sensitive to the needs of all parties involved, and make any reasonable adjustments needed to accommodate individuals.

Where a party feels unable to raise a complaint to USPA staff following the process below, they must address it to the Director of Operations, Inspired Online Schools.

Director or Operations	Alessandro Capozzi (alessandro.capozzi@inspirededu.com)
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This policy does not cover complaints regarding staff grievances and the staff code of conduct.

Definitions

A concern is defined as “an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought”. Most issues raised are concerns rather than complaints. USPA leadership is committed to resolving such concerns swiftly and effectively without recourse to the formal procedures outlined below.

A complaint is defined as “an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action”

Roles and Responsibilities

Please see the roles and responsibilities of each party, potentially involved in a complaint, at the end of this document.

Principles for Investigating a Complaint

When the school is investigating a complaint, we will aim to clarify:

- What has happened
- Who was involved
- What the complainant feels would put things right

Time Scales

Any complaint must be raised by the complainant within two calendar months of the incident or issue. If the complaint pertains to a series of related incidents, the complainant must raise their complaint within two calendar months of the last incident.

The school may consider exceptions to this timeframe in circumstances where there are valid reasons for not raising the complaint at the time, and the complaint can still be investigated in a fair manner for all involved.

If the school are unable to meet the time scales set out in this policy, we will:

- Set new time limits with the complainant
- Send the complainant details of the new target date and explain the delay

Stages of the Complaint Process

All concerns or complaints will be addressed using the following process to ensure clarity, consistency and resolution.

Please note that any concerns about the conduct of a USPA staff member that brings into question their suitability to work with children or raises that their actions or lack of action have put a young person at risk of harm must be raised directly to the Head of School. Such complaint's must not be raised with the colleague or other colleague not listed here. If the allegation is against the Head of School it must be raised with the Director of Operations or the CEO immediately.

If another member of staff receives an allegation, or is aware of the information, they will immediately inform the staff listed above.

Stage 1**Informal Concern**

- The majority of concerns are resolved at this stage by Learning Coaches, Faculty or other teams

Stage 2**Informal Concern for Leadership**

- If unresolved, concern escalated to the Leadership of the relevant team.
- Our Complaint Form may be used to ensure all facts are gathered.

Stage 3**Formal Complaint**

- In a rare case a complaint is unresolved at stage 1 or 2, a Formal Complaint Form is submitted.
- A formal investigation by a suitable member of leadership who has not dealt with the complaint up to that point

Stage 4**Appeal**

- A panel of leaders not previously involved will review the handling of the complaint, including one independent of the running of USPA.

Stage 1: Informal Concern

USPA takes concerns and complaints seriously. We will make every effort to resolve the matter quickly. It may be that providing clarification on a particular issue or providing additional information will resolve the issue at hand.

The complainant should raise the concern as soon as possible with our school team, using this policy for guidance.

Stage 1 is to seek to resolve via an ‘informal’ route. ‘Informal’ does not mean less rigorous, rather it means without a formal process and full investigation to seek a quick and acceptable resolution.

In the first instance USPA parents and carers should bring their concerns to

- (a) The Teacher (faculty) in the relevant subject area
- (b) Their Learning Coach
- (c) Their Learning Specialist

Concerns about a specific subject or course can be communicated to the teacher, who will review professionally and carefully, seeing advice as required. If the concern pertains to the conduct of the teacher, this must be addressed to the Department Head of USPA faculty or the Head of School.

Learning Coaches are the advocates of our students, able to support them in all aspects of the USPA experience. Concerns about a student’s experience at USPA can be addressed to the Learning Coach who will seek to resolve or escalate as required.

Stage 2: Informal Concern for Leadership

Where concerns persist or are not resolved at stage 1, the concern should be addressed to an appropriate leader, for example

- (a) the Head Learning Coach
- (b) the Department Head (Faculty)
- (c) the Head of Student

In some cases, the Head of School may pick up the complaint.

Most remaining concerns will be satisfactorily resolved at this stage by school leadership, with relevant feedback given to the complainant. Please note, that the school will determine the relevant details to feedback, protecting both confidentiality and the need for resolution.

At this stage, a Complaints Form may be required to be completed by the complainant to ensure full details are gathered.

All informal and formal complaints will be logged on the relevant internal Complaints Log.

Stage 3: Formal Complaint

A formal complaint can be raised by the complainant via our complaints form, which can be requested from the school. The complainant will usually be offered the complaints form if they express that the informal processes have not resolved the matter.

If the complainant requires assistance in raising a complaint, they should contact the school.

The school will acknowledge the formal complaint within three working days. The school will usually provide an informed response within 15 working days.

The Head of School or appropriate senior leader nominated from Inspired Online Schools, will act as “investigator” to carry out this process. An investigation will be arranged and the final determination on the complaint will be made by Head of School or nominated leader. In many cases, the written response will set out the actions that have been taken in relation to the issues identified. Please note, that the investigator will determine the relevant details to feedback, protecting both confidentiality and the need for resolution.

The “investigator” may request to speak with the complainant via telephone or video conference for more information. The cooperation of the complainant is requested to ensure the timely resolution of the complaint.

We expect complaints to be drafted by a human, based on facts, evidenced in fact and communicated with clarity. All details submitted, including claims and evidence, must be understood by the complainant submitting the complaint. Where references to law or guidance are made, full reference to access must be provided. Inaccurate references may result in some or all of the complaint being deemed false.

The aim is to resolve the complaint as quickly, and as satisfactorily, as possible. In some cases, a settlement agreement may be issued for signing by both parties.

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 3, the complainant will be required to inform the school, within three working days, by contacting the Head of School (unless the complaint pertains to the Head of School, in which case the response should go to the Director of Operations, Inspired Online Schools. The request to move to Stage 4 (Appeals Panel) will be sent to the relevant teams. USPA will confirm, in writing, the decision on whether to convene the Appeals Panel within ten working days. The school's complaints log is updated to reflect this.

Stage 4: Appeals Panel

The Appeals Panel will convene to consider any complaints that have reached Stage 4 of this process. The panel will be led by at least two senior leaders who have not previously been directly involved in the handling of the complaint and at least one independent of the management and running of the service.

The panel aims to impartially resolve the complaint and to achieve reconciliation between USPA and the complainant.

The panel will usually hear the Stage 4 complaint within fifteen working days of its receipt. The complainant may be accompanied to this meeting and should inform the identity of their companion in advance.

The panel should record their findings and recommendations, share these with the complainant, and store them such that they can be available for inspection at a later date.

The panel can:

- dismiss the complaint in whole or in part
- uphold the complaint in whole or in part
- decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint
- recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures

All parties should be notified of the panel's decision, in writing, within three working days of the panel hearing. As appropriate, a settlement agreement may be provided by the school and signed by both parties.

The school's complaints log will be updated to reflect this.

The Appeals Panel hearing is the last stage in the complaints process.

Unreasonable and Unreasonably Persistent Complaints

USPA respects that most complaints raised will be valid, and therefore we will treat them seriously. However, a complaint may become unreasonable if the person:

- has made the same complaint before, and it has already been resolved by following the school's complaints procedure
- makes a complaint that is obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific, defamatory, or repetitive
- knowingly provides false information
- is not drafted with care or an unreasonable lack of clarity about the issue
- insists on pursuing an unfounded complaint, or out of the scope of the complaint's procedure
- pursues a valid complaint, but in an unreasonable manner e.g., refuses to articulate the complaint clearly and succinctly so it can be followed and understood; is unreasonably lengthy due to the inclusion of unnecessary content; refuses to cooperate with this complaint's procedure; provides excessive and unrelated detail, or insists that the complaint is dealt with in ways that are incompatible with this procedure and the time frames it sets out
- changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation goes on and makes a complaint designed to cause disruption, annoyance, or excessive demands on school time
- seeks unrealistic outcomes or a solution that lacks any serious purpose or value

In the event of the above occurring, the school will take reasonable steps to address the complainant's concerns and will provide a clear statement of the school's position, and the options available to the complainant.

If the complainant continues to contact USPA in a disruptive way, we may put the following strategies in place:

- give the complainant a single point of contact via an email address
- limit the number of times the complainant can make contact, such as a fixed number per term
- ask the complainant to engage a third party to act on their behalf
- put any other strategy in place as necessary

We may stop responding to a complainant when all these factors are met:

- we believe we have taken all reasonable steps to help address their concerns
- we have provided a clear statement of our position and their options
- the complainant contacts us repeatedly, and we believe they intend to cause disruption or inconvenience

Where we stop responding, we will inform the individual that we intend to do so. We will also explain that we will still consider any new complaints they make. In response to any serious incident of intimidation, aggression, violence, harassment we will immediately inform law enforcement and communicate our actions in writing. This may include barring communications with USPA personnel.

Duplicate Complaints

If we have resolved a complaint under this procedure and receive a duplicate complaint on the same subject from a partner, family member or other individual, we will assess whether there are aspects that we had not previously considered, or any new information we need to consider.

If we are satisfied that there are no new aspects, we will inform the new complainant that we have already investigated and responded to this issue, and that the local process is complete. If there are new aspects, we will follow this procedure again.

Complaint Campaigns

Where the school receives a large number of complaints about the same topic or subject, especially if these come from complainants unconnected to the school, we may respond to these complaints by:

- Publishing a single response on our website
- Sending a template response to all of the complainants

If the complainants are not satisfied with the response from USPA or wish to pursue their complaint further, the normal procedures will apply.

Record Keeping

USPA maintains a record of the progress of all concerns and complaints, including information about actions taken at all stages, the stage at which the complaint was resolved, and the final outcome. Records will also include copies of letters, emails, and notes relating to the complaint. Records will be treated as confidential and will only be viewed by those involved in investigating the complaint or on the Appeals Panel. The data may also be made available in the event of a school inspection.

Parental Responsibility

Conflict between estranged parents over the application of parental responsibility is a common cause of complaints made to schools. Understanding and dealing with issues relating to parental responsibility contains specific advice about how to approach issues concerning parental responsibility.

Learning from Concerns and Complaints

The school's Leadership Team will review any underlying issues raised through concerns and complaints to determine whether there are any improvements that the school can make to its procedures or practice to help prevent similar events in the future.

Policy Monitoring

The school's Leadership Team will monitor the effectiveness of this policy to ensure concerns and complaints are handled properly. From the records held, the school will be able to determine the number and nature of the concerns and complaints raised. This policy will be reviewed every two years, or earlier if required.

Appendix 1 Roles and Responsibilities

Complainant

The complainant will receive a more effective response to the complaint if they:

- explain the complaint in full as early as possible
- submit details of the complaint clearly, in a format that can be reasonably understood
- ensure they understand how details and evidence submitted relate to their complaint
- cooperate with the school in seeking a solution to the complaint
- respond promptly to requests for information or meetings or agree to the details of the complaint
- ask for assistance as needed
- treat all those involved in the complaint with respect
- refrain from publicizing the details of their complaint on social media and respect confidentiality (please also see our Social Media policy) F

Investigator

The investigator's role is to establish the facts relevant to the complaint by:

- providing a comprehensive, open, transparent, and fair consideration of the complaint through:
- sensitive and thorough interviewing of the complainant to establish what has happened and who has been involved
- interviewing staff and children/young people and other people relevant to the complaint
- consideration of records and other relevant information
- analysing information
- liaising with the complainant, as appropriate, to clarify what the complainant feels would put things right

The investigator should:

- conduct interviews with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning
- keep notes of interviews or arrange for an independent note taker to record minutes of the meeting
- ensure that any papers produced during the investigation are kept securely pending any appeal
- be mindful of the timescales to respond
- prepare a comprehensive report for the relevant manager or senior leaders, or Appeals Panel that sets out the facts, identifies solutions and recommends courses of action to resolve problems

Appeals Panel Chairperson

The panel's chair, who is nominated in advance of the complaint meeting, should ensure that:

- both parties are asked to provide any additional information relating to the complaint by a specified date in advance of the meeting
- the meeting is conducted in an informal manner, is not adversarial, and that, if all parties are invited to attend, everyone is treated with respect and courtesy
- complainants who may not be used to speaking at such a meeting are put at ease. This is particularly important if the complainant is a child/young person
- the remit of the Appeals Panel is explained to the complainant
- written material is seen by everyone in attendance, provided it does not breach confidentiality or any individual's rights to privacy under relevant legislation

If a new issue arises it would be useful to allow everyone to consider and comment upon it; this may require a short adjournment of the meeting

- both the complainant and the school are allowed to make their case and seek clarity, either through written submissions ahead of the meeting or verbally in the meeting itself
- the issues are addressed
- key findings of fact are made
- the panel is open-minded and acts independently
- no member of the panel has an external interest in the outcome of the proceedings or any involvement in an earlier stage of the procedure
- minutes of the meeting are taken

Appeals Panel Member

Appeals Panel members should be aware that:

- the meeting must be independent and impartial and should be seen to be so
- the aim of the meeting should be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant. We recognise that the complainant might not be satisfied with the outcome if the meeting does not find in their favour. It may only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations.
- many complainants will feel nervous and inhibited in a formal setting
- parents/carers often feel emotional when discussing an issue that affects their child
- extra care needs to be taken when the complainant is a child/young person and present during all or part of the meeting:
 - careful consideration of the atmosphere and proceedings should ensure that the child/young person does not feel intimidated
 - the Appeals Panel should respect the views of the child/young person and give them equal consideration to those of adults
 - if the child/young person is the complainant, the panel should ask in advance if any support is needed to help them present their complaint. Where the child/young person's parent is the complainant, the panel should allow the parent to say which parts of the meeting, if any, the child/young person needs to attend.
 - the parent should be advised that agreement might not always be possible if the parent wishes the child/young person to attend a part of the meeting that the panel considers is not in the child/young person's best interests.
 - the welfare of the child/young person is paramount.