

FEEDBACK AND COMPLAINT POLICY

Policy Title	Feedback And Complaint Policy
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Feedback and Complaint Policy

1. Introduction

Small Steps is committed to providing high-quality services within GEMS Education schools and values feedback from all individuals within the Small Steps community. This policy outlines the process for addressing concerns and complaints to ensure they are resolved effectively and promptly.

2. Purpose of the Policy

The purpose of this policy is to establish a clear and structured process for handling complaints and feedback, ensuring that all concerns are addressed in a timely and constructive manner. This policy aims to promote transparency, accountability, and continuous improvement in the services provided by Small Steps.

3. Aims & Objectives

Small Steps prioritizes addressing all informal concerns and complaints promptly to prevent escalation into formal complaints. A parent or guardian seeking to raise a clinical or operational issue can initially approach the Case Supervisor or Center Manager, followed by escalation to the Program Director, COO and/or CEO of Small Steps, Assistant Head Teacher, and finally the Principal of the host schools. The primary objective at each stage is to resolve the complaint at its origin.

- It is likely that a problem will become more difficult to solve when more people and teams become involved.
- Small Steps' case supervisors, supported by the Operations team, facilitate immediate resolution through mediation, providing advice, information, and discussing sustainable solutions or procedural adjustments.
- If concerns are brought directly to senior leaders like the Program Director or CEO, parents may be encouraged to first discuss these with the relevant case supervisor before arranging a meeting.
- All actionable complaints are documented, along with the corresponding response actions.

4. Roles and Responsibilities

The responsibility for resolving all issues and complaints lies with Small Steps. It is important for parents to be aware that anonymous complaints will generally not be investigated under the Parents Complaint Procedure unless there are exceptional circumstances. Such circumstances include concerns related to imminent health and safety or safeguarding. In these cases, Small Steps will act swiftly to take appropriate measures. This may involve engaging the school, external agencies or conducting an internal review to gather corroborative evidence, potentially leading to a formal investigation.

Small Steps is committed to maintaining a safe and supportive environment for all stakeholders. In instances where anonymous complaints do not fall under exceptional circumstances, Small Steps encourages individuals to come forward with their concerns openly to facilitate a transparent and effective resolution process. This approach helps ensure that all complaints are addressed comprehensively and that appropriate actions are taken to uphold the well-being of students and staff.

5. Policy Components and Implementation

A. Complaints About a Small Steps Staff Member

Informal Stage:

Complaints can be directed to the Case Supervisor through various channels, including phone calls, email, MS Teams, messages, or in-person appointments. Many concerns can be addressed through simple clarification or by providing relevant information, and it is our experience that most complaints are resolved at this informal stage. The Case Supervisor will strive to resolve the issue immediately and, if necessary, liaise with or redirect the matter to the appropriate teams, such as operations, accounts, or HR, to address the issues as promptly as possible. A written record of the complaint will be maintained only if the complainant specifically requests it or if the Case Supervisor considers it necessary. If the complainant unreasonably refuses to attempt an informal resolution, the procedure may be terminated. Should the complaint remain unresolved after meeting with the Case Supervisor, the complainant is encouraged to schedule a meeting with the Program Director.

Formal Stage:

If a complaint is not resolved informally, it must be submitted in writing to the Program Director, who will oversee the investigation. Formal complaints can be lodged using a Microsoft form accessible via a QR code, registering the complaint in the Small Steps Complaints Log. This log is available for review by the leadership team, school, and inspectors. The Program Director, with assistance from the Case Supervisor, will gather necessary evidence and begin the investigation promptly, concluding within 10 school days. Upon conclusion, both the complainant and the staff member involved will be informed in writing of the outcome. Possible outcomes are:

- Insufficient evidence to reach a conclusion, so the complaint cannot be upheld.
- The concern is not substantiated by the evidence.
- The concern is substantiated in part or in full, with details of any action the school may take, though specifics about individual staff or student actions will remain confidential.
- The matter has been fully investigated, and appropriate procedures are being followed, which are strictly confidential.

If the complainant is not satisfied with the resolution, they may request a review by the CEO and/or COO of Small Steps. This request must be in writing, specifically stating any perceived procedural failures. If still unsatisfied, they may request a further review by the Head of Primary/Secondary Inclusion or the Assistant Head Teacher. Upon conclusion, the complainant and the staff member will be informed in writing of the outcome, which will be one of the

previously listed possibilities. This structured approach ensures thorough and fair consideration of all complaints, promoting a supportive and responsive environment within Small Steps.

B. Complaints About a Case Supervisor and/or Center Manager

Informal Stage: Complaints regarding the Case Supervisor and/or Center Manager can be made directly via phone call, email, MS Teams, message, or in-person appointment with the Program Director. Many concerns can be resolved through simple clarification or providing relevant information. The Program Director will attempt to resolve the issue immediately and, if necessary, liaise with the appropriate teams to address the matter promptly. A written record of the complaint will be maintained only if requested by the complainant or deemed necessary by the Program Director. If unresolved, the complainant should escalate to the Small Steps CEO or COO.

Formal Stage: Unresolved complaints must be submitted in writing to the CEO or COO of Small Steps. Formal complaints can be lodged using a Microsoft form via a QR code, registering the complaint in the Small Steps Complaints Log. This log is available for review by the leadership team, school, and inspectors. The CEO or COO will investigate promptly, concluding within 10 school days, and inform all parties in writing of the outcome:

- Insufficient evidence to uphold the complaint.
- Concern not substantiated by evidence.
- Concern substantiated in part or full, with action details (excluding specifics about individuals).
- The matter is fully investigated, with appropriate procedures followed confidentially.

Unsatisfied complainants may request a review by the Small Steps Advisory Board and School Assistant Head Teacher or Head of Inclusion, detailing procedural failures.

C. Complaints About the Program Director

Informal Stage: Complaints regarding the Program Director can be made via phone call, email, or in-person appointment with the Small Steps CEO or COO. Many concerns can be resolved through simple clarification or providing relevant information. The CEO or COO will attempt to resolve the issue immediately and, if necessary, liaise with appropriate teams. A written record of the complaint will be maintained if requested or deemed necessary. If unresolved, escalate to the Assistant Head Teacher or Head of Inclusion of the host school.

Formal Stage: Unresolved complaints must be submitted in writing to the School Assistant Head Teacher or Head of Inclusion, or by arranging a meeting directly with them. If the matter is not resolved, and if both parties agree, then a third party may be invited to act as a mediator at a further meeting. The investigation will be attempted to conclude within 10 school days and inform all parties in writing of the outcome:

- Insufficient evidence to uphold the complaint.
- Concern not substantiated by evidence.
- Concern substantiated in part or full, with action details (excluding specifics about individuals).
- The matter is fully investigated, with appropriate procedures followed confidentially.

Unsatisfied complainants may request a review by the Small Steps Advisory Board, detailing procedural failures.

D. Complaints About Small Steps Leadership or the CEO/COO

Informal Stage: Complaints regarding Senior Leadership or the CEO/COO can be made via phone call, email or in-person appointment with the Assistant Head Teacher or Head of Inclusion of the host school. The School Assistant Head Teacher will attempt to resolve the issue immediately and liaise with appropriate teams. If the matter is still not resolved, if both parties agree, then a third party may be invited to act as a mediator at a further meeting. A refusal, unreasonably, to attempt an informal resolution may result in the procedure being terminated forthwith.

Formal Stage: If the complaint is not resolved at the informal stage the complainant must put the complaint in writing and pass it to the School Vice Principal of the host school. The written complaint should include all the details that might assist the investigation. The School Vice Principal will collect other evidence as is deemed necessary. This may include the interviewing of witnesses and others. The Assistant Head Teacher and CEO/COO of Small Steps will then be invited to meet with the School Vice Principal, separately, to present any written or oral evidence in response. When the investigation has been concluded then the Assistant Head Teacher, Small Steps and the complainant will be informed in writing of the outcome. Details of individual action taken in respect of a member of staff will not be given.

The outcome will be one of the following:

- There is insufficient evidence to reach a conclusion, so that the complaint cannot be upheld.
- The concern is not substantiated by the evidence.
- The concern was substantiated in part or in full. Details will then be given of any action the School and Small Steps may be taking in response to the complaint. Details of individual actions taken in respect of a member of staff or another student/parent will not be given.
- The matter has been fully investigated and appropriate procedures are being followed, which are strictly confidential.

Unsatisfied complainants may request a review by the School Principal/CEO, detailing procedural failures.

E. Complaints about the Primary/Secondary Head of Inclusion or SEN Teachers:

Informal Stage:

Any complainant is usually expected to arrange to speak directly with the Assistant Head Teacher or Head of Inclusion of the host school. Many concerns can be resolved by simple clarification of the provision of information. If the matter is not resolved, if both parties agree, then a third party may be invited to act as a mediator at a further meeting. A refusal, unreasonably, to attempt an informal resolution may result in the procedure being terminated forthwith.

Formal Stage:

If the complaint is not resolved at the informal stage, the complainant must put the complaint in writing and pass it to the School Vice Principal. The written complaint should include all the details that might assist the investigation. The complainant will be invited to meet with the School Vice Principal to present oral evidence or to clarify the complaint. The School Vice Principal will collect such other evidence as is deemed necessary. This may include the interviewing of witnesses and others. The Assistant Head Teacher or Head of Inclusion and SEN Teacher or Head of Primary/Secondary Inclusion will then be invited to meet with the Vice Principal, separately, to present any written or oral evidence in response. When the investigation has been concluded then the Assistant Head Teacher, Head of Primary/Secondary Inclusion and the complainant will be informed in writing of the outcome. Details of individual action taken in respect of a member of staff will not be given.

The outcome will be one of the following:

- There is insufficient evidence to reach a conclusion, so that the complaint cannot be upheld.
- The concern is not substantiated by the evidence.
- The concern was substantiated in part or in full. Details will then be given of any action the School may be taking in response to the complaint. Details of individual actions taken in respect of a member of staff or another student/parent will not be given.
- The matter has been fully investigated and appropriate procedures are being followed, which are strictly confidential.

Unsatisfied complainants may request a review by the Small Steps Advisory Board and the School Principal/CEO, detailing procedural failures.

E. Complaints about the Assistant Head Teacher or Head of Inclusion

Informal Stage:

Any complainant is usually expected to arrange to speak directly with the School Vice Principal of the host school. Many concerns can be resolved by simple clarification of the provision of information. If the matter is not resolved, if both parties agree, then a third party may be invited to act as a mediator at a further meeting. A refusal, unreasonably, to attempt an informal resolution may result in the procedure being terminated forthwith.

Formal Stage:

If the complaint is not resolved at the informal stage, the complainant must put the complaint in writing and pass it to the School Principal/CEO. The written complaint should include all the details that might assist the investigation. The complainant will be invited to meet with the School Principal to present oral evidence or to clarify the complaint. They will collect such other evidence as is deemed necessary. This may include the interviewing of witnesses and others. The Vice Principal, Assistant Head Teacher, Small steps will then be invited to meet with the School Principal/CEO, separately, to present any written or oral evidence in response. When the investigation has been concluded then the School Vice Principal, Assistant Head Teacher or the Head of Inclusion, Small Steps and the complainant will be informed in writing of the outcome. Details of individual action taken in respect of a member of staff will not be given.

The outcome will be one of the following:

- There is insufficient evidence to reach a conclusion, so that the complaint cannot be upheld.
- The concern is not substantiated by the evidence.
- The concern was substantiated in part or in full. Details will then be given of any action the School may be taking in response to the complaint. Details of individual actions taken in respect of a member of staff or another student/parent will not be given.
- The matter has been fully investigated and appropriate procedures are being followed, which are strictly confidential.

Unsatisfied complainants may request a review by the GEMS Corporate Head of Inclusion detailing procedural failures.

F. Complaints about School Principal/CEO: For detailed procedures and communication protocols, please refer to the GEMS Founders Complaint Procedures and Policy 2023-2024. This document outlines the specific steps and review processes for handling complaints related to the School Principal/CEO or GEMS Senior Leadership Team.

6. Formal lines of communication

Small Steps requests that complaints be formally communicated via telephone, email, or in person by appointment. Our social media accounts on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Google and Instagram are for celebrating community achievements, and we ask parents to respect these spaces for positive engagement, not for lodging complaints.

7. Monitoring and review

This policy has been discussed and agreed upon by Small Steps and GEMS Founders School for implementation. Regular monitoring and review will ensure the policy remains effective and responsive to the needs of our community.