

Data Protection Complaint Procedure

June 2026

Registered in England & Wales - Cognita Schools Limited No. 02313425
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1. Purpose and scope

1.1 This procedure sets out how Cognita and its schools handle complaints relating to the processing of personal data, ensuring compliance with:

- UK GDPR;
- Data Protection Act 2018 (including Section 164A);
- Relevant Information Commissioner's Office ("ICO") guidance; and
- Relevant Independent School Standards coming into force June 2026.

This procedure **operates separately from the general complaint procedure.**

1.2 This procedure applies to complaints from any individual, including, but not limited to:

- Parents
- Pupils
- Employees
- Applicants
- Website users or other third parties

Either in a current or former capacity.

1.3 It covers complaints relating to personal data, specifically:

- Use or disclosure
- Accuracy
- Retention or deletion
- Data Subject Access Requests ("DSARs") and other data rights
- Alleged breaches of the UK GDPR or Data Protection Act 2018

1.4 This process is designed to be accessible and easy to use.

2. Relationship with General Complaint Procedure

2.1 Data protection complaints must not be handled under the General Complaint Procedure.

2.2 Where a complaint includes both general and data protection issues:

- The matters will be split and handled separately
- The data protection elements will be referred to the Data Protection Office ("DPO")

2.3 The DPO is responsible for:

- Managing and investigating complaints
- Ensuring compliance with statutory timeframes

- Meeting legal obligations
- Escalation where required

2.4 Schools must:

- Promptly escalate any data protection complaint to the DPO
- Cooperate fully with investigations

3. How to make a complaint

3.1 Complaints will be accepted through any reasonable means (verbal, email, or in writing) and may be submitted:

- By email: DPO@cognita.com
- Via school reception or administration (who must escalate immediately to DPO@cognita.com)

3.2 Complaints do not need to be in a particular format or use legal terminology. However, to assist efficient processing of the complaint, it should include (where possible):

- Name and contact details
- Description of the issue
- Relevant dates
- Any supporting documentation

4. Initial Handling and Acknowledgement

4.1 All complaints must be logged upon receipt by DPO.

4.2 The complainant will receive an acknowledgement **within five (5) working days** of DPO receiving the complaint (and no later than 30 days as required by law).

4.3 The acknowledgement will:

- Confirm receipt
- Outline next steps
- Provide indicative timelines

5. Investigation

5.1 The DPO/Legal team will:

1. Assess the nature of the complaint;
2. Gather relevant information (including from the relevant school or department);
3. Identify any legal or regulatory issues; and
4. Determine whether:
 - A breach has occurred
 - Remedial action is required which may include, where appropriate: rectification, restriction or deletion of personal data; improvements to systems, processes or policies; staff training or disciplinary action; provision of information or apologies to the complainant; and any other steps necessary to mitigate risk, ensure compliance, and prevent recurrence.

5.2 Where appropriate, the investigation may include:

- Reviewing systems and records;
- Interviewing staff; and/or
- Assessing compliance with policies.

6. Timeframes

6.1 Complaints will be responded to **without undue delay**.

6.2 Where linked to data subject rights (e.g. DSARs), statutory deadlines under UK GDPR will apply (typically **one calendar month**).

6.3 Complainants will be kept informed of progress where appropriate.

6.4 If additional time is required:

- The complainant will be informed
- Reasons for delay will be explained

7. Outcome and response

7.1 The final response will:

- Address each issue raised
- Explain findings clearly
- Set out any actions taken, including:
 - Rectification or deletion of data
 - Changes to procedures
 - Staff training or disciplinary measures (if relevant)

8. Escalation rights

8.1 If the complainant is not satisfied, they will be informed of their right to:

- Escalate internally (if applicable), and/or
- Lodge a complaint with the ICO

9. Recordkeeping

9.1 Cognita will:

- Maintain a record of all complaints, investigations, and outcomes
- Retain records in accordance with the retention policy
- Ensure auditability for regulatory purposes

10. Relationship with Data Breach Procedures

10.1 If a complaint identifies a potential personal data breach:

- It will be assessed under Cognita's data breach reporting process
- The ICO will be notified where legally required

11. Publication

11.1 This procedure will be published on school websites and referenced in privacy notices.

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