MEPA ACADEMY

COMPLAINTS POLICY

Policy owner	Principal / Senior Attendance Champion
Approved by	Senior Leadership Team
Adopted	July 2026
Review date	July 2027, or sooner if guidance changes
Applies to	All pupils aged 11-16, parents/carers, staff and visitors undertaking attendance duties
School contact	attendance@mepaacademy.com | 01622 756644

Approved for publication subject to confirming the annual formal-complaints figure in section 14.

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1. Status, scope and purpose

MEPA Academy is an independent school. The proprietor is responsible for ensuring that this written complaints procedure is available to parents and is implemented effectively. The procedure provides the required three stages: informal resolution, a formal written complaint and a panel hearing.

For the statutory school procedure, "parent" includes a person with parental responsibility for a current pupil or a person who has care of that pupil. A complaint begun while the pupil is at the Academy may continue after the pupil leaves. The Academy may also use this procedure, with appropriate adaptations, for complaints from pupils, former pupils, adult learners and users of MEPA Studio or MEPA College, but those wider arrangements do not reduce the rights of parents of Academy pupils.

A concern may be raised without formality. A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction about an action taken, a failure to act, or the standard of service provided. The Academy will not require a complainant to use the word "complaint".

2. Principles and accessibility

- Complaints will be handled fairly, impartially, consistently and as quickly as the circumstances reasonably allow.
- No person who is the subject of a complaint, or who has had prior material involvement, will investigate it or determine its outcome.
- The Academy will listen to the complainant, clarify the issues and desired resolution, consider relevant evidence, and give reasons for its decision.
- A pupil will not be disadvantaged because they or their parent has raised a concern or complaint in good faith.
- Information will be shared only with those who need it to investigate, decide or meet legal duties. Absolute confidentiality cannot be promised where safeguarding, legal, regulatory or inspection duties require disclosure.
- Reasonable adjustments will be made for disability and other access needs. Complaints may be made with support, and the Academy will accept an alternative accessible format or help record a complaint where a parent cannot reasonably submit it in writing.
- The procedure is available on the Academy website and, on request, in hard copy, large print or an accessible/translated format.

3. Matters handled under other procedures

The Academy will identify the correct route promptly and tell the complainant where the matter will be handled. Where a complaint contains several issues, each issue may be routed under the procedure that applies to it.

Matter	Route
Immediate risk of harm or safeguarding concern	Safeguarding procedures; contact the DSL, local authority children's services or police as appropriate. See section 10.
Allegation that an adult working with children has harmed or may pose a risk to a child	Managing allegations procedure and consultation/referral to the local authority designated officer (LADO), as appropriate.
Pupil exclusion	The applicable exclusion/behaviour review process. A complaint about how that process was administered may be considered under this policy where appropriate.
Admissions decision	The admissions and any applicable appeal procedure; prospective parents are outside the minimum scope of Part 7.

Matter	Route
Special educational needs statutory decision	The relevant local authority or SEND Tribunal route. Service complaints within the Academy may still use this policy.
Public examination, assessment or awarding-body decision	The published exams complaints/internal appeals procedure and awarding-body rules.
Staff grievance, disciplinary matter or whistleblowing	The relevant employment procedure.
Data protection or information-rights complaint	Section 11 of this policy and the Academy privacy arrangements.

4. Making a complaint and time limits

Complaints should normally be raised within three months of the event complained about or, where there is a series of related events, within three months of the last event. The Academy may accept a later complaint where there is a good reason for delay and it remains possible to investigate fairly.

A complaint may be made in person, by telephone, by email or in writing. Formal Stage 2 complaints and Stage 3 requests must be recorded in writing, but the Academy will provide reasonable assistance or accept an agreed written record where necessary for accessibility.

"Working day" means a weekday during the Academy term, excluding bank holidays and Academy closure days. The Academy will act reasonably during holidays and will not use closure periods to obstruct a complaint. If a deadline cannot be met, the complainant will be told why and given a revised date.

5. Who will handle a complaint

Complaint concerns	Stage 1 / Stage 2 handler
A member of staff	Relevant line manager or a senior leader who is independent of the events.
A senior leader	Principal or a person appointed by the Principal who has had no prior involvement.
The Principal	Proprietor. If the Principal and proprietor are the same person, the Head of Academy will arrange a suitably independent investigator/decision-maker on behalf of the proprietor.
The proprietor or the proprietor and Principal together	A suitably independent person appointed on behalf of the proprietor, followed by a compliant independent panel if requested.

Complaints must not be assigned to the person complained about. Where there is a conflict of interest or reasonable perception of bias, another suitably independent person will be appointed.

6. Stage 1 — informal resolution

1. Raise the concern with the relevant member of staff or the Head of Academy. A parent is not required to approach a member of staff directly if they would feel uncomfortable doing so or the matter is serious.
2. The Academy will acknowledge the concern within three working days and identify who will respond.

3. The handler may speak with the parent and relevant staff, review readily available information and consider mediation where all parties agree. Mediation is voluntary and does not remove the right to proceed to Stage 2.
4. A written Stage 1 response will normally be provided within 10 working days of receipt. It will summarise the issue, the steps taken, the conclusion and any action that can appropriately be disclosed.
5. If dissatisfied, the parent may proceed to Stage 2 by writing to the Principal within 10 working days of the Stage 1 response. The Academy may extend this period where reasonable.

7. Stage 2 — formal written complaint

1. Send the complaint to the Principal using the contact details in section 15. If the complaint concerns the Principal/proprietor, use the alternative contact stated in section 5.
2. State the relevant facts, the steps already taken, why the response was unsatisfactory and the outcome sought. Lack of perfect detail will not prevent the Academy from considering a complaint it can understand.
3. The Academy will acknowledge receipt within three working days, identify the investigator/decision-maker and confirm the issues to be investigated.
4. The investigator may meet or speak with the complainant and other relevant people, review records, and give a person complained about a fair opportunity to respond. The complainant may be accompanied at a meeting by a supporter. Legal representation is not normally necessary, but a reasonable request will be considered.
5. The decision-maker will provide a written response normally within 15 working days of receipt. It will address each material issue, explain the findings and reasons, state any action or remedy that can appropriately be disclosed, and explain how and by when to request Stage 3.
6. If dissatisfied, the parent may request a panel hearing within 10 working days of the Stage 2 response. A late request may be accepted where there is a good reason.

8. Stage 3 — complaints panel hearing

1. The Stage 3 request should explain why the Stage 2 response is disputed and what outcome is sought. The Academy will acknowledge it within three working days.
2. A hearing will normally be held within 20 working days of the request. The Academy will offer reasonable dates and arrangements to facilitate attendance, including remote participation where appropriate and agreed.
3. The panel will consist of at least three people appointed by or on behalf of the proprietor. None will have been directly involved in the matters complained about. At least one member will be independent of the management and running of the Academy.
4. The parent may attend and be accompanied by a friend, relative or supporter. A pupil may attend where appropriate, taking account of age, understanding and welfare. Legal representation is not an automatic right but a reasonable request will be considered.
5. The panel will still be convened and will decide the complaint on the available information if the parent chooses not to attend or, after reasonable arrangements have been offered, is unable to attend.
6. The parties will normally receive the papers at least five working days before the hearing. New material will be circulated fairly and the panel may adjourn if more time is needed.
7. The hearing is private. The chair will explain the process, ensure each party can present their position and ask or respond to relevant questions, and keep the discussion respectful and focused.
8. The panel will review the handling and merits of the complaint, may make findings on each issue, and may make recommendations to the proprietor. It may uphold, partly uphold or reject the complaint.

9. Panel decision and outcomes

The panel's written findings and recommendations will normally be issued within five working days of the hearing. A copy will be provided to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about. A copy will also be made available for inspection on the Academy premises by the proprietor and the Principal.

The panel decision is the final stage of the Academy procedure. Outcomes may include an explanation, apology, practical remedy, correction of an error, review of a decision where the Academy has power to do so, staff learning, a policy or process change, or another proportionate action. Privacy and employment duties may limit the detail shared about action concerning another person.

10. Safeguarding and allegations

A safeguarding concern will not wait for completion of the complaints procedure. It will be referred immediately to the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) and handled under the safeguarding policy. Where appropriate, the Academy will contact children's social care, the LADO, police or another relevant agency. Call 999 if a child is in immediate danger.

The Academy may pause or adapt the complaints investigation where continuing could prejudice a safeguarding, criminal, regulatory or employment investigation. The complainant will be told as much as can lawfully and safely be disclosed, kept updated where possible, and the complaint will resume when appropriate.

11. Data protection complaints

A person may make a complaint about the Academy's handling of personal data by contacting the Principal and marking the correspondence "Data protection complaint". The Academy will provide a clear way to complain and will not insist on a particular form where the complaint can be understood.

- Receipt will be acknowledged within 30 calendar days, including during school closure periods.
- Appropriate enquiries will begin and be completed without undue delay. The complainant will be kept informed where the investigation is ongoing.
- The outcome will be communicated without undue delay, with an explanation of the conclusion and relevant next steps.
- Identity or authority may be checked only where reasonably necessary.
- A complainant who remains dissatisfied may complain to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) at ico.org.uk.

Where the same matter is both a parental complaint under the Independent School Standards and a data protection complaint, the Academy will operate the procedures together so that the requirements and timescales of both are met.

12. External routes after the school procedure

The Department for Education (DfE) is the regulator for independent schools. It does not normally re-investigate an individual complaint or overturn the panel's decision, but it may consider whether the Academy has failed to meet the Independent School Standards. A parent may use the GOV.UK school complaints form after completing the Academy procedure, or sooner where the regulator accepts that this is appropriate.

Ofsted does not resolve individual disputes. It may consider qualifying concerns that raise serious, wider issues affecting the school, usually after local complaint routes have been completed. Safeguarding concerns should be reported to the appropriate safeguarding authority or police, not delayed for an Ofsted complaint.

Useful official links: DfE school complaints form | Ofsted complaints information | ICO

13. Records, confidentiality and retention

The Academy will keep a written record of every complaint made under Stage 2, showing whether it was resolved following the formal procedure or proceeded to a panel hearing, and the action taken by the Academy as a result, regardless of whether the complaint was upheld.

Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except where disclosure is required by law, requested by the Secretary of State, or requested by a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the Education and Skills Act 2008. Relevant panel findings and recommendations will be available for inspection on the premises by the proprietor and Principal as required by the Independent School Standards.

Complaint records will normally be retained securely for seven years after closure, unless safeguarding, litigation, insurance, regulatory, employment or other legal requirements justify a different period. Records will be access-controlled and disposed of securely at the end of the applicable period. Complaint information will not be kept solely in the pupil's ordinary student file where that would give unnecessary access.

14. Publication and annual complaints number

This policy will be published and maintained on the Academy website and supplied to parents on request. The Academy will also publish or otherwise provide to parents the number of complaints registered under the formal Stage 2 procedure during the preceding school year, updating the figure annually.

Preceding school year	Number of formal Stage 2 complaints
2025–26	0

Governance action: confirm the figure against the complaints register before adoption/publication. This is the only factual field intentionally left for local confirmation.

15. Contacts

Role	Contact
Principal and proprietor — Mandy Ellen	01622 756644 | mellen@mepatraining.com
Vice Principal and DSL — Emma Finch	01622 756644 | efinch@mepatraining.com
Head of Academy / alternative route for complaints about the Principal — Lewis Muir	01622 756644 | lmuir@mepatraining.com
Accounts — Marie Quiban	01622 756644 | accounts@mepatraining.com

Complaints may also be delivered in person to Academy reception. Correspondence should be clearly marked "Private and confidential — complaint".

Appendix A — complaint information checklist

A complainant does not have to use a form. The following information helps the Academy investigate promptly:

- name and preferred contact details;
- name of the pupil and relationship to them, where relevant;
- what happened, including dates and people involved;
- the steps already taken and any response received;
- relevant documents or other evidence;
- the outcome sought;
- any reasonable adjustment, communication or support need.

The Academy will acknowledge the complaint even if some information is unavailable and will ask proportionately for what is needed.

Reference framework

- Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, Schedule, Part 7
- Department for Education: Independent School Standards guidance (April 2026)
- ICO: How to deal with data protection complaints

Complaints Procedure At A Glance

Stage	Step	What happens / deadline
STAGE 1 Informal resolution	**Who to contact**	Relevant member of staff or Head of Academy. A parent need not approach the person concerned if this would be uncomfortable or the matter is serious.
	Acknowledgement	Within 3 working days.
	Response	Written Stage 1 response normally within 10 working days of receipt.
	If unresolved	Request Stage 2 in writing within 10 working days of the Stage 1 response.
STAGE 2 Formal written complaint	**Action**	Send the written complaint to the Principal. If it concerns the Principal/proprietor, use the alternative route in the policy.
	Acknowledgement	Within 3 working days; the Academy will identify the investigator/decision-maker and confirm the issues.
	Investigation / meeting	Relevant enquiries and meetings as needed. The complainant may be accompanied by a supporter.
	Response	Written decision normally within 15 working days of receipt, with findings, reasons and the Stage 3 route.
	If dissatisfied	Request a Stage 3 panel hearing within 10 working days of the Stage 2 response.
STAGE 3 Complaints panel hearing	**Request**	Explain why the Stage 2 response is disputed and the outcome sought.
	Acknowledgement	Within 3 working days.
	Hearing	Normally within 20 working days of the request. The panel has at least 3 members; none previously involved and at least 1 independent of the Academy's management and running.
	Attendance and papers	Parent may attend and be accompanied. Papers normally issued at least 5 working days before the hearing.
	Decision	Written findings and recommendations normally within 5 working days after the hearing.
	After the final stage	The Academy procedure is complete. A parent may raise an alleged standards failure with the

[redacted]		Department for Education; Ofsted only considers qualifying wider school concerns.

Working day: a weekday during Academy term, excluding bank holidays and Academy closure days. If a deadline cannot be met, the complainant will be told why and given a revised date.

Complaints Form

Your name:
Student's name:
Your relationship to student:
Your address and postcode:
Your daytime telephone number:
Your evening telephone number:
Your email address:
Your complaint is: (if you have more than one complaint, please number these)
What action have you already taken to try and resolve your complaint(s) in accordance with Stage 1 of the academy's complaints procedure? (Who did you speak to and what was the response?)

What would you like as an outcome from your complaint(s)?

Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, give details here:

Your signature…… Date ……

All functions of the complaints procedure must adhere to the requirements of the Data Protection Act 2018 and the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

Office use:

Date received ……

Date acknowledgement sent ……

Responsible member of staff ……