



Educate U

Complaints Policy

Approved by: Susan Evans Director of Education

Date: 15/03/21

Last reviewed on: 04/08/22 (Susan Evans), 02/09/23 (Sarah Paoletti, Headteacher), 03/03/24 (Sarah Paoletti)

Next review date: 02/03/25

Complaints Policy

Concern or a complaint

At Educate U we work closely with our prospective families, families, children, agencies, professional and have an clear channels of communication with the school to discuss with any issues as they arise. We strongly believe that **open dialogue** is the best and most effective way of working through difficulties, but we do also recognise that it is important to have a transparent and effective formal way of raising concerns or making a complaint. We take all complaints and concerns seriously and make every effort to resolve them quickly and efficiently.

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

A complaint may be generally recognised as 'an expression or statement of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action'.

If you have a concern or complaint, please speak to the headteacher or other members of the Senior Leadership (Deputy Headteachers) who will endeavor to work with you to resolve the issue, but if this is not possible, please follow the Complaints Procedure.

Anyone can make a complaint about our provision or services that Educate U provides.

Complainants will be given the opportunity to complete the complaints procedure in full, unless we possess clear evidence that the complaint meets the serial complaint criteria.

Complaint procedure

Our complaint procedure is simple to understand and use. It is impartial and is non-adversarial. It enables a full and fair investigation and respects confidentiality. It will address all the points at issue and provides an effective response and appropriate redress. It provides information to the Senior Leadership team and the Central Advisory Team (CAT) so that services can be improved.

Complaints will be considered and resolved as quickly, and efficiently as possible. We will give realistic and reasonable time limits for actions within each stage.

First Stage - Informal

1. If you are concerned about your child's education, you must first talk to your child's teacher or the school's Parent / Carer Connection, Mark Brown, to raise a concern or complaint. Mark's email address is mark@educate.co.uk and he is available every morning from 09:30 – 10:10am for dedicated time which is available for parent and carer contact.
2. If step 1 fails to resolve the issue, please follow up with a written complaint via letter or email to office@educateu.co.uk. This will be passed to the class teacher or a designated staff member to investigate. You must allow at least five days for the designated staff member to respond.

Second stage - Formal

1. If you are not satisfied with the response you receive at the First Stage, you must talk to the Headteacher.
2. You must write to the school, outlining your concerns and what you would like the school to do to help you with the matter.
3. The school will acknowledge your complaint within five days. You must allow at least 20 days for the designated person to investigate the problem and respond.

Third Stage - Formal

1. If you are not satisfied with the response you receive at stage two, you can complain to the Board of Directors – Sue Evans or Hayley Tucker
2. You will need to write to the Directors and address the letter as care of the school. The letter must outline the reason(s) for your complaint and why you are still not happy.
3. The school will acknowledge your complaint within five days. You must allow at least 20 days for the Directors to investigate the problem and respond.

Fourth Stage - Formal

If you are not satisfied with the response you receive at Stage Three, you can complain to Educate U's Central Advisory Team (CAT). Depending on the nature of the complaint, will affect which CAT member you will contact. This is the final stage.

- You will need to write to the CAT to tell them why you are still unhappy.
- The CAT member will acknowledge your complaint within 10 days.

Educate U is externally monitored and supported by a Central Advisory Team who replaced the school's monitoring committee in February 2024. The Central Advisory Team are contracted to support the school and business at a strategic or operational level in various sectors of expertise.

School Improvement

- Shaun Jarvis, School Improvement Partner

Safeguarding

- Gavin Howe, Child Protection Barrister.

Human Resources

- Nicky Gleadow, Human Resources

Finance

- Peter Fry, Senior Accountant.

Please request contact details from office@educateu.co.uk

We will comply with our obligations under the Equality Act 2010. It's common practice to ask for complaints to be made using a complaint form or in writing. However, complainants may have communication preferences due to:

- Disabilities
- Learning difficulties
- Literacy
- English as an additional language or language barriers

We will therefore allow alternative methods of contact.

A complaint may be made:

- In person, by telephone or in writing
- By a third party acting on behalf of the complainant
- Educate U will ensure that we have written consent from the complainant before disclosing information to a third party.

We will take brief notes and minutes to prevent any later challenge or disagreement over what was said, brief notes of meetings and telephone calls. These will be kept securely and copies of any written response will be added to the record, and we will be recording all meetings.

If there are communication difficulties, we may allow the use of recording devices to ensure the complainant is able to access and review the discussions at a later point. All parties would need to agree in advance to being recorded.

Educate U is responsible for ensuring there is a fair and reasonable purpose for allowing complainants to record meetings and will consider the following statements.

- How any decision to allow recordings may affect any third parties called to act as witnesses.
- How the impact and consequences on the individuals involved in the complaint in the event recordings are lost or leaked.
- To allow audio or video evidence.

Complainants should make sure they obtain informed consent from all parties present before recording conversations or meetings. Evidence and recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without informed consent of Educate U

will not be allowed for use in the complaints procedure and covert recordings could involve legal proceedings.

Extension of Timescales

Where further investigations are necessary and the clear published timescales cannot be met, we will:

- Set new time limits
- Send the complainant details of the new deadline and explain the delay
- Allow a reasonable timeframe for complaints to be raised after an incident arises

Communicating decisions

Educate U is committed to ensuring that we are rational, reasonable, fair and proportionate in all our decision making.

All final outcome decisions made by Educate U will also be made in line with the principles of administrative law. This means a decision is *lawful - it complies with education and other law, including human rights and equality law, such as the Human Rights Act 1998 and the Equality Act 2010.*

We will communicate decisions in writing to the complainant.

Recording complaint progress

We will:

- Record the progress of the complaint and the final outcome.
- Appoint the Headteacher as being responsible for these records and make sure the data is kept secure.
- Abide by the General Data Protection Regulations (EU) 2016/679 (GDPR) and as such our data must not be kept longer than is necessary.

Complainants may have a right to copies of these records under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act 2018 and GDPR. In this instance we would take advice from our legal advisors.

As a school we are data controllers in our own right, governing bodies will decide for themselves how long they keep records, unless statutory regulations apply.

Independent review

We are confident that the Central Advisory Team will deal with complaints impartially. However, details of complaints should not be shared at any stage while they are still being considered, in case a complaints committee needs to be organised.

Handling complaints fairly

We will ensure that complainants are treated fairly and offered a chance to state their case either in person or in writing, at each stage of the procedure.

Complainants can request an independent complaints committee if they believe there is likely to be bias in the proceedings. They should provide the Headteacher with evidence of bias in support of their request. We will make every effort to make the process fair and just.

When we have made reasonable attempts to accommodate complainants with dates for complaint meetings and they refuse or are unable to attend, we will:

- Convene meetings in their absence
- Reach a conclusion in the interests of drawing the complaint to a close
- Communicating the outcome

We will inform the complainant of:

- The conclusion and reasons for any decisions in writing
- Any further rights of appeal

Copies of the minutes will be issued to the complainant.

Bias in the proceedings

We will ensure that all meetings are fair. Any persons who have a conflict of interest will not take part in the complaints process, including proceedings, independent meetings and with the CAT. If there's any reasonable doubt as to a person's ability to act impartially, they should withdraw from considering the complaint. Where a CAT member has a financial interest in any related matter, they should also withdraw.

When making a decision we will not act with any bias we will follow the principle that *justice must not only be done but be seen to be done*.

An acknowledgement that the school could have handled the situation better is not the same as an admission of unlawful or negligent action.

Whistleblowing

We have an internal whistleblowing procedure for our employees, including temporary staff and contractors.

All safeguarding concerns will implement the Child Protection and Safeguarding policy.

Complainants who remain dissatisfied

Educate U will always do their best to be helpful to people who contact us with a complaint or concern or request for information. However, there will be occasions when, despite all stages of the complaint procedure having been followed, the complainant remains dissatisfied.

When a complainant tries to re-open the same issue, we will inform them that the procedure has been completed and that the matter is now closed.

If the complainant contacts us again on the same issue, the correspondence may then be viewed as 'serial' or 'persistent'. Educate U will mark a complaint as 'serial' for exercising their right to refer their complaint to their MP, regardless of which stage the complaint has reached.

We will, as a company, record when to stop responding. The decision to stop responding will not be taken lightly. This will happen when we are able to say yes to any of the following.

- We have taken every reasonable step to address the complainant's concerns.
- The complainant has been given a clear statement of Educate U's position and their options.
- The complainant contacts us repeatedly, making substantially the same points each time.
- The case to stop responding is stronger if we agree with one or more of these statements:
 - The letters, emails, or telephone calls received by the complainant are often or always abusive or aggressive.
 - The complainant makes insulting personal comments about or threats towards staff.
 - We have reason to believe the individual is contacting us with the intention of causing disruption or inconvenience.

We will ensure that we do not stop responding just because the complainant may be viewed as difficult to deal with or asks complex questions.

Communication strategy for persistent correspondents

If an individual's behaviour is causing a significant level of disruption, regardless of whether they have raised a complaint, Educate U will implement a tailored communication strategy. For example, we will:

- restrict the individual to a single point of contact via an email address.

- limit the number of times they can make contact, such as a fixed number of contacts per term.
- However, regardless of the application of any communication strategy, we will provide parents and carers with the information they are entitled to under The Education (Pupil Information) (England) Regulations 2005, within the statutory time frame.

Educate U will make sure that we have acted reasonably and consider any new complaint. We recognise that anyone has the right to raise a new complaint at any time and failure to respond could result in the school failing to act reasonably.

Reviewing Our Complaints Procedure

We will review this policy yearly to ensure that all legislative changes and new guidance are included.

We have produced this policy in accordance with Section 29(1) of the Education Act 2002

In line with Section 29(1)(b) of the Education Act 2002, we will publicise our complaints procedures on our website. Copies can be obtained from the office.