



Onside Education

Complaints

Policy

2025- 2026

1. Who Can Make a Complaint?

This Complaints Policy is informed by Part 7 of the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 and applies specifically to complaints raised by parents or carers of a child currently enrolled at an Onside Education provision, concerning matters directly related to their child.

Unless a complaint falls under a separate statutory process—such as appeals concerning exclusions or admissions—it will be handled in accordance with this procedure.

Any individual, including members of the public, may also raise a complaint regarding the provision of services or facilities by Onside Education. While the policy does not require us to formally cover complaints from individuals without parental responsibility or whose child is not enrolled, we are committed to managing such complaints with professionalism and efficiency. These cases may be addressed directly by Onside Education or escalated to the appropriate service lead where necessary.

Please note that we are unable to engage in discussion or provide feedback on matters relating to staff employment, safeguarding, or other confidential issues. Complainants will not be advised of any disciplinary actions taken in response to a complaint but will be informed that appropriate steps have been taken to address the issue.

Understanding the Difference Between a Concern and a Complaint

- A concern is defined as *“an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered important, for which reassurances are sought.”*
- A complaint is defined as *“an expression of dissatisfaction about actions taken, or a failure to act.”*

It is in everyone’s best interest to resolve concerns and complaints at the earliest possible stage. Many issues can be addressed effectively through informal resolution without needing to progress to the formal stages of this policy.

Onside Education treats all concerns and complaints with seriousness and aims to resolve matters promptly and fairly.

Should you feel uncomfortable raising a concern with a particular member of staff, your views will be respected. In such instances, the Programme Lead will arrange for another appropriate staff member to assist. Likewise, if the staff member involved is unable to address the concern, the Programme Lead will reassign the issue to another colleague—who may or may not be more senior. What matters most is the ability to manage the concern impartially and objectively.

We also recognise that some situations require a formal approach. In such cases, Onside Education will endeavour to resolve the issue internally, following the formal stages outlined in this procedure.

Confidentiality and Data Protection

All data related to complaints submitted under this policy will be treated as confidential. In handling this information, we adhere to the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018.

In certain cases, information related to a complaint may be disclosed if required by law or contractual obligations.

2. How to Raise a Concern or Make a Complaint

Concerns or complaints may be raised in person, in writing, or via telephone. A third party may also raise a concern on behalf of a complainant, provided they have the appropriate consent. We will require consent before discussing any personal matters with a third party.

For complaints from parents or carers regarding Onside Education staff (excluding the Programme Lead), please direct your complaint to the Programme Lead, via the Onside Education office. Any correspondence should be clearly marked "Private and Confidential".

If your complaint involves or relates to the Programme Lead (but not their response to a complaint), it should be addressed to the Director via email at: christian@u-educate.co.uk, clearly marked "Private and Confidential".

To support the process, a template complaint form is provided at the end of this document. If you require assistance in completing the form, please contact the Onside Education office. Alternatively, you may seek help from a third-party organisation such as the Citizens Advice Bureau.

Please note: Subject Access Requests (SARs) must be submitted separately via email to:

OnsideAP@u-educate.co.uk

In line with equality legislation, we are committed to making reasonable adjustments to support access to this procedure. This may include providing information in alternative formats, helping in making a formal complaint, or arranging meetings in accessible locations.

3. Anonymous Complaints

Anonymous complaints are not usually investigated. However, the Programme Lead or Directors (as appropriate) will determine whether an investigation is warranted based on the nature and seriousness of the complaint.

4. Timeframes for Raising a Complaint

Complaints should be raised ideally within ten school days of the incident, and no later than three months after the occurrence. Where a complaint involves a series of related incidents, it should be submitted within three months of the most recent incident.

Complaints made outside of this timeframe will only be considered in exceptional circumstances.

5. Complaints Received During School Holidays

Complaints received outside of term time will be treated as having been received on the first school day after the holiday period.

6. Scope of This Complaints Procedure

This procedure applies to all complaints concerning the provision of services or community facilities by Onside Education, except where separate statutory procedures apply, such as:

- Appeals regarding admissions
- Exclusion decisions
- Child protection concerns
- Staff grievance or disciplinary procedures
- Issues regarding the curriculum or collective worship (covered under separate regulations)

Exceptions	Who to Contact
Admissions to Onside Education provisions	Concerns about admissions should be handled through a separate process – the home school appeals policy.

Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation	<p>Complaints about child protection matters are handled under our Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy and in accordance with relevant statutory guidance.</p> <p>If you have serious concerns, you may wish to contact the local authority designated officer (LADO) who has local responsibility for safeguarding or the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) – information available on the Local Authority website.</p>
Exclusion of children from school	<p>Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at: www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions.</p>
Incidents outside of the Provision involving our pupils	<p>Incidents outside of the provision premises should be reported to the police immediately and we should be advised for information. We cannot discuss with or give parents or their representatives access to other pupils' records such as behaviour reports or sanctions as these are subject to GDPR and confidentiality.</p>
Whistleblowing	<p>We have an internal whistleblowing procedure for all our employees, including temporary staff and contractors. The Secretary of State for Education is the prescribed person for matters relating to education for whistle-blowers in education who do not want to raise matters direct with their employer. Referrals can be made at:</p> <p>www.education.gov.uk/contactus.</p> <p>Volunteer staff who have concerns about our provision should complain through Onside Educations complaints procedure. You may also be able to complain direct to the Local Authority or the Department for Education (see link above), depending on the substance of your complaint.</p>
Staff grievances	<p>Complaints from staff will be dealt with under Onside Educations internal disciplinary procedures.</p>
Staff conduct	<p>Onside Education expects all its employees to recognise their obligations to their provision, the public, pupils, and other employees and to always conduct themselves properly and in accordance with the Staff Code of Conduct and all other policies and procedures.</p> <p>Complaints about staff will be dealt with under the Onside Education disciplinary policy/procedures, if appropriate. Complainants will not be informed of any disciplinary action taken against a staff member as a result of a complaint. However, the complainant will be notified that the matter is being addressed.</p>

Complaints about services provided by other providers who may use provision premises or facilities	Complaints about staff will be dealt with under Onside Educations disciplinary procedures, if appropriate. Providers should have their own Complaints Procedure to deal with complaints about service. Please contact them directly
--	---

7. Interaction with Other Investigations

If elements of a complaint are under investigation by other bodies — such as the police, local authority safeguarding teams, or tribunals — this may affect our ability to follow the timescales outlined in this procedure. In such cases, the complaints process may be paused until those external investigations are complete. Where this applies, we will inform you and provide an updated timescale for the complaint procedure.

If a complainant initiates legal proceedings against Onside Education relating to the subject of their complaint, we reserve the right to suspend the complaints process until the legal matter has been resolved.

8. Resolving Complaints

At every stage of the complaints process, our aim is to seek a constructive resolution. Where appropriate, we may acknowledge that the complaint is fully or partially upheld. In such cases, we may offer one or more of the following responses:

- A formal apology
- A clear explanation of what occurred
- An admission that the situation could have been handled differently or more effectively
- An assurance that the issue will not happen again
- A summary of the steps taken to prevent recurrence
- A commitment to review relevant policies in light of the concerns raised

Please note: Financial compensation will not be offered as part of the complaints resolution process.

9. Withdrawal of a Complaint

If a complainant decides to withdraw their complaint, we will request written confirmation to formally close the matter.

10. Complaints from Members of the Public

Members of the public who wish to raise a concern relating to a provision should initially contact the Programme Lead. Contact details can be found on the Onside Education Website.

If the complaint concerns the Programme Lead, it should be submitted via email to: Christian@u-educate.co.uk, clearly marked “Private and Confidential”.

Please be aware that we are unable to discuss or provide information about staffing, confidential, or legal matters. Complaints of this nature will not be handled through the formal complaints procedure, as we are legally restricted from disclosing or discussing sensitive information.

While we may be limited in the feedback we can provide, we will give assurance that the matter has been noted and is being addressed. However, we will not disclose any disciplinary action taken as a result of a complaint.

11. Confidentiality

A written record will be maintained for all complaints, including the outcomes of Stage One, Stage Two, and Stage Three of the complaints process.

Onside Education will keep a record of each complaint, the actions taken, and the final resolution. This information is shared with the Director, with a monthly summary submitted to the Leadership Team (LT).

All correspondence, statements, and documentation relating to individual complaints will be treated as confidential, unless access is requested by the Secretary of State, is required for a provision inspection, or is otherwise legally mandated.

In line with data protection legislation, individual complaint details will be retained only for as long as necessary, in accordance with the circumstances and applicable laws.

Initial Informal Stage – Raising a Concern

Wherever possible, we encourage concerns to be raised and resolved informally. The purpose of this stage is to reach a resolution that is aligned with policy, reflects good practice, and is proportionate and appropriate.

Concerns should initially be directed to one of the following:

- The class teacher
- The Programme Lead

You may be signposted to relevant support services or offered mediation to help resolve the concern.

Expectations for Complainants

We expect all individuals raising concerns or complaints to:

- Treat staff, parents, and pupils with courtesy and respect
- Respect the well-being and privacy of pupils and staff
- Avoid the use or threat of violence, including damage to property
- Refrain from aggressive, abusive, or intimidating behaviour
- Ensure written communication is fact-based and avoids hostile or inappropriate language
- Recognise the workload and time constraints of provision staff
- Allow the provision a reasonable timeframe to respond to concerns
- Understand that resolving certain issues may take time

If these expectations are not upheld, Onside Education reserves the right to refuse to progress the complaint.

Informal Resolution of Complaints

We anticipate that the majority of complaints can be resolved informally. For example, dissatisfaction relating to teaching, pastoral care, or administrative errors (such as billing issues) can usually be addressed directly by the relevant member of staff.

Allegations involving discrimination, harassment, or victimisation are regarded as serious matters and should immediately proceed to Stage One of the formal complaints procedure.

Behavioural or Disciplinary Issues

Concerns regarding sanctions or disciplinary measures taken against a pupil should first be raised with the staff member who issued the sanction, before escalating to the senior leadership team. Please note that we cannot discuss sanctions or behaviour matters relating to other pupils.

Onside Education will collaborate with the complainant to try and resolve the issue constructively. Only after the informal stage has been fully explored and completed should a complaint move to Stage One of the formal process.

Our aim, throughout, is to reach a satisfactory and fair resolution with the parent or guardian.

Stage One – Formal Complaint

Formal complaints should be directed to the Programme Lead, unless the complaint relates specifically to the Programme Lead, in which case please see the guidance further below.

Complaints should be submitted in writing, ideally using the Onside Education Complaints Form (Appendix A), and sent directly to the Onside Education Office.

When raising a formal complaint, the complainant should clearly:

- Outline the main issue(s)
- Explain what outcome they are seeking
- Provide any relevant evidence or supporting information

The Onside Education office will record the date the complaint is received and will acknowledge it in writing (either via letter or email) within two school days. Please note that:

- Complaints received outside of term time will be treated as received on the first school day following the holiday
- Complaints submitted over the weekend will be processed on the next school day

Investigation Process

Upon receipt, an appointed investigator will:

- Clarify the nature of the complaint
- Confirm any points that remain unresolved
- Understand the resolution the complainant is seeking

If appropriate, the investigator may suggest a face-to-face meeting to better understand the issues raised.

The investigator will then compile a comprehensive report for the Programme Lead, setting out the findings, recommended solutions, and suggested actions to resolve the matter.

Note: The Programme Lead may delegate the investigation to a senior member of staff; however, the final decision and outcome will be determined by the Programme Lead.

Communication and Response

During the investigation, the following may occur (where necessary):

- Interviews with the complainant
- Interviews with the individuals involved in the complaint (who may be accompanied if they wish)
- Interviews with witnesses or those with relevant knowledge

A written response will be issued to the complainant within ten school days of receipt of the complaint.

If Onside Education is unable to meet this deadline, an update will be provided with a revised response date.

The response will include:

- An overview of the actions taken during the investigation
- A clear explanation of the decision reached and the reasons for it
- Any actions Onside Education will take to address or resolve the issue (if appropriate)

Escalation

The complainant will be advised on how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied.

If the outcome of Stage One is not satisfactory, a request to proceed to Stage Two may be submitted within ten school days of receiving the decision.

If the Complaint Concerns the Programme Lead

If the complaint is about the Programme Lead, it must be submitted to the Leadership team via the director:

christian@u-educate.co.uk

Please mark correspondence as 'Private and Confidential'

In this case, the complaint will be handled at Stage One by a Director.

Following their investigation, a formal written response will be provided.

If a complaint is submitted directly to the director without going through the Onside Education process, the complainant will be asked to complete the Onside Education Complaint Form (Appendix A) and submit it to Onside Education. A complaint only becomes formal and eligible for Directors involvement once all prior resolution attempts have been completed.

Suspension of Process

The complaints process may be paused in the following circumstances:

- A police investigation is ongoing
- New concerns or complaints are added mid-process
- A Subject Access Request (SAR) is submitted, which is needed to progress the complaint

In such instances, Onside Education will notify the complainant of the delay and will not be held responsible for any resultant postponements.

Absolutely — here's the professionally rewritten Stage Two – Formal Complaint section, keeping the same meaning but aligning with the tone and style of your earlier sections for a cohesive policy document:

Stage Two – Formal Complaint

If a complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome at Stage One, they may escalate the complaint to Stage Two, which involves review by the Education Director. This can be done in person or in writing (preferably using the Onside Education Complaint Form) and submitted via Head Office.

Onside Education will:

- Record the date of receipt
- Acknowledge the complaint in writing (by letter or email) within two school days

Complaints received over a weekend will be processed on the next school day.

Clarification and Investigation

In the written acknowledgement, the Education Director will:

- Clarify the nature of the complaint
- Identify what issues remain unresolved
- Understand the desired outcome from the complainant

A face-to-face meeting may be considered if appropriate.

Note: The Director may appoint another member of the Onside Educations Senior Leadership Team to carry out the investigation, but the final decision and outcome will rest with the Director.

There may be cases where a complaint is escalated directly from the informal stage to Stage Two at the discretion of the Senior Team.

The Investigation Process

The appointed investigator will:

- Conduct interviews with relevant individuals and/or those involved in the complaint (participants may be accompanied, if they wish)
- Maintain a written record of all meetings or interviews
- Compile a comprehensive report for the Director, outlining key facts, potential solutions, and recommended actions

Response and Timescales

A written response will be sent to the complainant within ten school days of receiving the Stage Two complaint.

If more time is required to complete the investigation, Onside Education will:

- Notify the complainant
- Provide a revised response date

The written outcome will:

- Detail all investigative steps taken
- Explain the decision and the reasons for it
- Include any actions Onside Education will take to resolve the matter, where appropriate

The complainant will also be advised of how to proceed if they remain dissatisfied and wish to escalate to Stage Three.

Complaints About Directors

If the complaint concerns a Director a suitably qualified independent person or Trustee will be appointed to carry out the actions in Stage Two.

Such complaints should be submitted to the Leadership Team at:

OnsideAP@u-educate.co.uk

If the complaint is:

- Jointly about the Director
- About the entire Leadership Team
- About a majority of the Leadership Team

Then Stage Two will be escalated to the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Onside Education.

Any resolution will follow the principles outlined in Section 7. No financial compensation will be offered as a result of a complaint.

Pausing the Procedure

The complaints process may be paused if:

- New complaints or concerns are introduced mid-process
- A Subject Access Request (SAR) is made which is necessary to proceed

In such cases, Onside Education will notify the complainant of the delay. Onside Education cannot be held responsible for any resulting impact on timescales.

Stage Three – Panel Hearing

If a complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage Two, they may escalate the complaint to Stage Three, which represents the final stage of the complaints procedure.

The purpose of the panel hearing is to:

- Facilitate reconciliation, where possible

- Address and put right anything that may have gone wrong

A request to proceed to Stage Three must be submitted to the Leadership Team within ten school days of receiving the Stage Two outcome.

A panel clerk—usually a member of the Leadership Team—will be appointed to:

- Coordinate the logistics and paperwork for the hearing
- Take official notes/minutes during the session

Please note: The Leadership Team will administer the process and collect the relevant information from Onside Education for the hearing. They cannot respond to queries regarding the details of the complaint or specific individuals.

Arranging the Panel Hearing

- The Leadership Team will record the date of receipt and issue a written acknowledgement within two school days.
- If a complaint is received over a weekend, it will be processed on the next school day.

The Leadership Team will work to arrange the panel hearing within fifteen school days of the Stage Three request. The complainant will be notified of the date and time of the hearing.

If the complainant cannot attend, the clerk will keep them informed. If the complainant declines three proposed dates without good reason, the clerk reserves the right to proceed with the hearing in their absence, based on written submissions.

Escalation of Specific Complaints

- If the complaint involves the Leadership Team, the entire Leadership Team, Stage Three will be escalated to the CEO of Onside Education.
- Complaints about an Ambassador or group of Ambassadors will be escalated to the Leadership Team.

Where the complaint concerns:

- A director or the Leadership Team: the panel will consist of three independent members
- An Ambassador or Ambassador group: the panel will include at least one Director and up to two independent members

The Panel Composition

The hearing will be conducted by a three-member panel, including a senior staff member with no prior involvement in the complaint.

Ambassadors from Onside Education involved in the complaint will not sit on the panel to ensure impartiality.

If there are not enough Ambassadors available from other sites, the panel clerk will seek independent panel members (e.g., Senior leadership) from other local schools or provisions.

Support and Representation

The complainant may bring a support person (e.g., a friend or relative) to the hearing.

Legal representation is not generally encouraged for either party. However, if legal representation is necessary, the complainant must notify the Governance Team before the hearing pack is circulated.

Example: A Onside Education staff member called as a witness may request support from their union or legal representative.

Media representatives are not permitted to attend.

Pre-Hearing Process and Documentation

At least five school days prior to the hearing, the clerk will:

- Confirm the date, time, and venue of the meeting with the complainant
- Request any final written submissions for the panel

All documentation will be collated by Onside Education and distributed to all parties by the Governance Team five school days in advance.

The complainant may submit relevant documents directly to the clerk. Covert recordings made without consent will not be accepted as evidence.

Scope of the Panel Hearing

- The panel will not consider new complaints at this stage.

- Additional complaints in the same category may be considered at the directors discretion if doing so supports resolution.

The hearing will be held in private. Electronic recordings are only permitted if required due to disability or special needs and must have the prior consent of all parties. Consent will be recorded in the minutes.

Panel Decision and Outcome

After reviewing all evidence, the panel may:

- Uphold the complaint, in full or in part
- Dismiss the complaint, in full or in part

If the complaint is upheld, the panel may:

- Decide on appropriate actions to resolve the complaint
- Recommend changes to Onside Education's systems or procedures to prevent recurrence

Any resolution will align with Section 7 of this policy. No financial compensation will be offered as a result of the complaint.

After the Hearing

- A written outcome letter will be issued to the complainant.
- The letter will include guidance on how to escalate the matter to the Department for Education (DfE) if they remain dissatisfied.

A record will be maintained of:

- All complaints received
- Whether they were resolved early or proceeded to a panel hearing
- Any actions taken in response

All records, correspondence, and statements will remain confidential, except when disclosure is required by the Secretary of State or a legal inspection under Section 109 of the Education and Skills Act 2008.

Complaints Escalated to / About Onside Education, the CEO, Trustee or Ambassador

If a complaint is escalated to Onside Education (referred to here as "the Trust"), or if a complainant wishes to raise a concern directly about Onside Education, the complaint should be submitted to the CEO via onsideAP@u-educate.co.uk for investigation.

The CEO will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing within two school days of receiving the formal written request. This acknowledgment will confirm that the matter is being handled under Stage Two of the complaints procedure and will outline a date by which a full response will be provided.

Following the investigation, the CEO will respond in writing within ten school days. If this is not possible, the CEO will inform the complainant within five school days, explaining the reason for the delay and providing a revised response date.

If the complaint concerns the CEO, it will be investigated by the Chair of the Onside Education Trust Board. In cases where the complaint is about the Chair, it will be referred to the Vice Chair for investigation.

Note: Where the Chair of the Trust Board investigates a complaint, they will issue the outcome letter directly to the complainant, with a copy sent to the CEO.

The Governance Team clerk will inform the complainant of the proposed date for the hearing. Every effort will be made to convene the meeting within ten school days. If this cannot be achieved, the clerk will communicate the expected timeframe and keep the complainant updated.

If the complainant declines three proposed hearing dates without a valid reason, the clerk will decide when to proceed. In such cases, the meeting will take place in the complainant's absence, based on written submissions from both parties.

If the complaint concerns the Chair and Vice Chair, the entire Board, or the majority of the Board, Stage Three will be heard by an independent panel. This may include an Ambassador from another Onside Education provision or a Trustee/Governor from another provision or school.

The Complaint Panel

The Stage Three panel will consist of three independent members, none of whom will have been previously involved in the events leading to the complaint, nor in handling it at earlier stages. One panel member will be independent of Onside Education's governance and operations (i.e. not a staff member). This person may be an ambassador or a representative from a different provision or school.

Complainants are welcome to bring a friend or relative to the panel hearing for support. While legal representation is not usually encouraged, it may be permitted in exceptional

circumstances. If legal representation is intended, the Governance Team must be informed before hearing packs are distributed.

If an Onside Education employee is called as a witness, they may be accompanied by a union representative or legal advisor.

Note: Concerns about staff conduct are not handled through this complaints process. These will instead be reviewed under the relevant staff disciplinary policies, and outcomes will not be disclosed to the complainant.

Media representatives are not allowed to attend complaint hearings.

Prior to the Meeting

At least five school days before the hearing, the clerk will:

- Confirm and notify the complainant of the date, time, and venue, ensuring accessibility and mutual availability where possible.
- Request that any additional written materials for the panel be submitted no later than five school days prior to the meeting.

All written materials will be collected by the relevant Onside Education team and distributed by the Governance Team to all involved parties at least five school days before the meeting.

The panel will not normally accept covertly recorded evidence obtained without the informed consent of all parties. Additionally, new complaints or unrelated evidence will not be considered at this stage. Any new concerns must begin at the informal stage of the complaints process.

However, at Onside Educations discretion, additional complaints of the same nature may be included to support resolution efforts.

All hearings are conducted in private, and recordings are not permitted unless a complainant has a disability or special needs requiring it. Consent from all parties must be secured in advance and will be recorded in the hearing minutes.

Panel Decisions

The panel will review all submitted materials and may decide to:

- Uphold the complaint in full or in part.
- Dismiss the complaint in full or in part.

If the complaint is upheld (in full or in part), the panel will:

- Determine the appropriate actions to resolve the complaint.
- Recommend changes to Onside Education systems or procedures to prevent recurrence.

No financial compensation will be offered in response to complaints.

The outcome letter will include instructions on how to contact the Department for Education (DfE) if the complainant is dissatisfied with how the complaint has been handled by Onside Education.

Record Keeping

A detailed written record will be maintained for all complaints, noting whether they were resolved informally, at the panel stage, and documenting any actions taken.

All correspondence, statements, and related records will remain confidential, except in cases where disclosure is requested by the Secretary of State or an inspection authority under Section 109 of the 2008 Education Act.

Next Steps

If a complainant believes that Onside Education has not handled their complaint in accordance with the published complaints procedure, or that it has acted unlawfully or unreasonably in the exercise of its duties under education law, they may contact the Department for Education (DfE) after Stage Three has been completed.

The DfE will not normally re-investigate the substantive issues of the complaint or overturn the decisions made by Onside Education. Instead, it will assess whether the Trust has complied with relevant education legislation, statutory policies, and Part 7 of the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

Complainants may refer their case to the DfE by:

- Completing the online form: www.education.gov.uk/contactus
- Writing to:

Department for Education

School Complaints Compliance Unit

Piccadilly Gate

Store Street

Manchester

M1 2WD

Managing Serial and Unreasonable Complaints

(Including Unreasonable or Persistent Contact Not Directly Associated With, or Resulting From, Formal Complaints)

Dealing With Vexatious, Persistent, or Unreasonable Complaints

Onside Education is committed to handling all concerns and complaints fairly and impartially. In rare cases where complaints become vexatious, persistent, or unreasonable, and all stages of the complaint's procedure have been exhausted, the CEO will inform the complainant in writing that the process is now complete and closed.

If a complainant's approach becomes harassing, intimidating, or otherwise unacceptable, Onside Education reserves the right to seek legal advice. Onside Education holds a duty of care to its staff, and under no circumstances are employees expected to tolerate abusive, threatening, or offensive behaviour.

While Onside Education aims to offer a high-quality service and maintain open communication, there are circumstances in which Onside Education may need to limit contact with a complainant. This would occur only where behaviour is deemed unreasonable or detrimental to the complaint process or school operations.

Onside Education considers the following behaviour to be unreasonable:

- Refusal to clearly articulate the complaint, specify grounds, or identify desired outcomes, even with support.
- Refusal to cooperate with the complaints process.
- Failure to accept that certain matters fall outside the scope of the complaint's procedure.
- Insisting on resolution methods incompatible with the procedure or best practices.
- Introducing trivial or irrelevant matters to be considered.
- Demanding responses to excessive volumes of minor or repetitive queries, often on unrealistic timelines.

- Making unjustified complaints against staff involved in handling the issue and demanding their replacement.
- Changing the core complaint during the investigation.
- Repeatedly submitting the same complaint, even after proper investigations and conclusions.
- Refusal to accept the outcome of the complaint after the procedure has been correctly followed, including referral to the DfE.
- Seeking outcomes that are unrealistic or unreasonable.
- Making excessive demands on staff time via prolonged or complex communications.
- Threatening, abusing, or using offensive or discriminatory language.
- Knowingly submitting false or misleading information.
- Publishing inappropriate content on social media or public forums.

Complainants are encouraged to limit their communications regarding their complaint while it is being processed. Repeated contact via letter, phone, email, or text during an ongoing investigation can delay a resolution.

A complaint may also be deemed unreasonable if made:

- Maliciously or with the intent to cause disruption.
- Aggressively or using intimidation, threats, or violence.
- With abusive, offensive, or discriminatory language.
- Falsely or with fabricated evidence.
- Through inappropriate public channels such as social media or newspapers.
- In a way that is unjustified, inappropriate, or a misuse of the formal complaint's procedure.

Communication Strategy for Persistent Correspondents

If an individual's behaviour causes a significant level of disruption, regardless of whether they have raised a formal complaint, Onside Education may implement a tailored communication strategy to manage the situation effectively. For example:

- Restricting the individual to a single point of contact via a designated email address

- Limiting the number of times they are permitted to make contact, such as a fixed number per academic term

When determining the appropriate strategy, Onside Education will consider all relevant circumstances of the case and the nature of the complaint, rather than focusing solely on the complainant. Factors that will be considered include:

- Whether the complaint has a reasonable basis
- The history and context of the complaint, including any supporting evidence
- Whether the time and cost of investigating the complaint are proportionate to the issues raised
- Whether investigating the complaint is likely to result in disproportionate or unjustified disruption, distress, or irritation
- Any unexplained delays in raising the issue
- Whether the desired outcome is beyond the scope of the complaint's procedure (e.g. compensation, damages, or fee refunds)
- Any signs the complaint is being made for an improper purpose

Wherever possible, a senior member of staff—such as the Programme Lead or Director—will seek to discuss concerns informally with the complainant before designating their conduct as 'unreasonable'.

If the disruptive behaviour continues, the Programme Lead will write to the complainant to explain why their behaviour is considered unreasonable and will request a change. Where excessive contact persists, resulting in significant disruption, Onside Education may implement a formal communication plan, specifying:

- The acceptable method(s) of communication
- The frequency of permitted contact

This plan will be reviewed after six months.

In response to any serious incident involving aggression or violence, we will contact the police immediately, inform the Department for Education (DfE) where relevant, and document all actions taken in writing. Such incidents may result in the individual being barred from entering Onside Education premises.

Complaint Campaigns

At times, Onside Education may become the subject of a complaint campaign, where a large volume of complaints is received:

- All based on the same subject matter
- From individuals with no direct connection to Onside Education

In these circumstances, Onside Education may:

- Issue a standard response to all complainants
- Publish a statement on our website and refer complainants to it for further information

We will review the concerns raised in the campaign and provide reassurance that the matter is being taken seriously and addressed appropriately.

Appendix A: Stage One Complaint Form

Please complete and return to the Onside Education Office, who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

Your name:
Pupil's name (if relevant):
Your relationship to the pupil (if relevant):
Address:
Postcode:
Contact numbers, please state preferred contact time:
Email address:
Please give details of your complaint, including whether you have spoken to anybody at Onside Education about it.
What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?

--

Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details.

Signature:

Date:

Official use

Date acknowledgement sent:

By who:

Complaint referred to:

Action taken:

Date:

Appendix B: Stage Two Complaint Form

Please complete and return to the Onside Education Office, who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

Your name:
Pupil's name (if relevant):
Your relationship to the pupil (if relevant):
Address:
Postcode:
Contact numbers, please state preferred contact time:
Email address:
Detail of complaint:
Why was the Programme Lead (or representative's) response not satisfactory? What further actions would the Director need to consider resolving this complaint?

--

Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details.

Signature:

Date:

Official use

Date acknowledgement sent:

By who:

Complaint referred to:

Action taken:

Date:

Appendix C: Roles and Responsibilities

Complainant

The complainant can help ensure a more effective response to their concerns by:

- Explaining the complaint clearly and in full, as early as possible
- Cooperating with Onside Education in working towards a resolution
- Responding promptly to requests for information, meetings, or clarification
- Requesting support or assistance where needed
- Treating all individuals involved with courtesy and respect
- Refraining from publicising details of the complaint on social media and respecting confidentiality

Investigator

The designated investigator is responsible for establishing the facts of the complaint through a fair and transparent process. Their duties include:

- Conducting a comprehensive and impartial investigation by:
 - Sensitively and thoroughly interviewing the complainant to understand what happened and who was involved
 - Interviewing relevant staff, students, and others involved
 - Reviewing records and any other relevant documentation
 - Analysing all available information
- Liaising with the complainant and the Complaints Co-ordinator, where appropriate, to clarify what the complainant feels would resolve the issue
- Preparing a detailed report for the Programme Lead or Director that outlines the facts, identifies potential solutions, and recommends appropriate actions

The investigator should:

- Approach interviews with an open mind and be persistent in uncovering relevant details
- Take accurate notes or arrange for an independent note-taker to record discussions

- Ensure all documentation is securely stored during the process and in preparation for any potential appeal
- Remain aware of and adhere to procedural timeframes
- Present a full and objective report to the Programme Lead or Complaints Panel

The **Programme Lead / Director** will then decide whether to uphold or dismiss the complaint and will inform the complainant accordingly, including escalation options if necessary.

Complaints Co-ordinator

(This may be the Programme Lead or another staff member providing administrative support)

The Complaints Co-ordinator should:

- Keep the complainant informed at each stage of the complaints process
- Liaise with relevant parties (e.g. staff, Programme Lead, CEO, Chair of the Trust, Clerk) to ensure the procedure runs smoothly
- Be mindful of issues related to:
 - Sharing of third-party information
 - Additional support for complainants, such as interpretation services or support for children/young people
- Maintain accurate records throughout the process

Clerk to the Panel

The Clerk serves as the main contact for the complainant and the panel and should:

- Ensure all parties are aware of their legal rights and responsibilities, including those under education legislation, the Equality Act 2010, Freedom of Information Act 2000, Data Protection Act 2018, and UK GDPR
- Arrange the date, time, and venue for the hearing, ensuring accessibility and convenience for those involved
- Collate and distribute all relevant documentation (e.g. Stage 1 paperwork, submissions) to attendees within the agreed timeframe
- Record and circulate minutes of the proceedings

- Notify all parties of the panel's decision

Panel Chair

The Panel Chair, appointed in advance of the meeting, is responsible for ensuring:

- All parties are invited (via the Clerk) to submit any further information by a set deadline
- The meeting is conducted in an informal and respectful manner
- Complainants who are unfamiliar with formal settings, particularly children/young people, feel comfortable and supported
- The remit of the panel is clearly explained
- All written materials are shared, provided this does not breach confidentiality or data protection rights

If new, relevant issues arise during the meeting, the Chair should offer all parties the opportunity to respond—this may involve a short adjournment.

The Chair should also ensure that:

- Both the complainant and Onside Education have the opportunity to present their cases
- All issues are fully addressed
- Clear findings of fact are made
- The panel acts independently and without bias
- No member of the panel has a vested interest in the outcome or has been involved at an earlier stage
- The meeting is accurately minuted
- They liaise with the Clerk throughout the process

Panel Member

Panel members should:

- Ensure the process is, and is seen to be, independent and impartial
- Not have had any previous involvement in the complaint or surrounding circumstances

The aim of the panel should be to **resolve the complaint and foster reconciliation** between Onside Education and the complainant, although this may not always be possible. The panel may instead need to establish facts and make appropriate recommendations.

Panel members should be aware that:

- Many complainants may feel anxious in a formal setting—empathy and sensitivity are essential
- Special care is required when a child or young person is the complainant or is attending the hearing

If the complainant is a child/young person:

- Ensure they feel safe and not intimidated
- Give their views equal weight to those of adults
- Offer support where needed to help them express their views
- Liaise with the parent to determine which parts of the meeting the child/young person should attend—though the panel reserves the right to make decisions based on the child’s best interests

The welfare of the child or young person is paramount.

Appendix D: Hearing the Complaint at the Complaints Appeal Panel Hearing

The purpose of the Complaints Appeal Panel hearing is to seek resolution of the complaint and, wherever possible, achieve reconciliation between the Provision and the complainant. The hearing should be held in private and conducted in as informal a manner as possible, while still maintaining a clear structure.

In the interest of natural justice, any previously undisclosed relevant evidence or new witnesses introduced during the hearing may result in an adjournment, to allow all parties adequate time to review and respond. The Chair will determine whether an adjournment is appropriate.

Meeting Structure

A time limit for the hearing will be set by the Chair, bearing in mind that the panel will have had an opportunity to review the complaint documentation in advance. The meeting's objective is to explore the complaint, understand the steps taken so far, and allow both parties to present their perspectives. The panel will then consider all evidence and determine:

- Whether to uphold or dismiss the complaint
- The reasoning behind their decision
- Any appropriate actions or recommendations

Suggested Order of Proceedings

(Please note: the sequence and participants may be adjusted depending on the nature of the complaint.)

1. Welcome and Introduction

The Chair welcomes all parties, introduces the panel members, and explains the structure of the hearing.

2. Summary by the Investigator

The Chair invites the investigator to provide an overview of the complaint and the findings from their investigation.

- Panel members may ask the investigator questions.
- The complainant may also ask the investigator questions.

3. Statement from the Complainant

The complainant is invited to provide a summary and share any additional relevant points.

- Panel members may ask the complainant questions.

- The Chair will then invite the Programme Lead (or representative) to ask any relevant questions.

4. **Response from the Programme Lead (or Representative)**

The Programme Lead (or representative) is invited to respond to the complaint.

- At the Chair's discretion, the Programme Lead may call upon relevant staff members to support the response.
- The panel and the complainant may question the Programme Lead and any staff members present.

5. **Final Statements**

- The Programme Lead (or representative) is invited to make a final summary statement.
- The complainant is then invited to provide their concluding summary.

6. **Conclusion of the Hearing**

The Chair explains that the panel will now consider all of the information presented.

- All parties, except the panel members, are asked to leave.
- The panel deliberates, makes a decision, and determines any recommendations or actions to be taken.
- A written decision will be provided to both parties (and, where applicable, to the individual subject to the complaint), including any recommendations.

Note:

The Chair may intervene if previously presented information is unnecessarily repeated, to ensure the meeting remains focused and efficient.

Code of Conduct for Panel Hearings

Our aim is to resolve complaints in partnership with parents and carers, within the framework of our policies. We therefore expect all parties to behave with courtesy, calmness, and respect at all times.

The hearing may be paused, adjourned, or concluded if inappropriate behaviour occurs. Onside Education maintains a **zero tolerance** policy towards:

- Harassment
- Bullying

- Discrimination
- Aggressive or abusive behaviour (verbal or physical)

The following actions are not tolerated and may lead to removal from the Onside Education premises:

- Use of offensive language or swearing towards staff, parents, pupils, or visitors
- Any form of physical aggression, including pushing or shoving
- Verbal abuse or insults directed at others
- Racial abuse or sexual harassment

Onside Education reserves the right to take appropriate action to maintain a safe and respectful environment for all.

Appendix E: Confidential and Non-Parental Complaints

Please be advised that we are unable to provide comment or information regarding personnel matters, confidential issues, or legal proceedings. Complaints of this nature fall outside the scope of the formal complaints procedure, as we are not permitted to discuss or disclose confidential information.

Where a concern of this type is raised with Onside Education, we will provide reassurance that the matter is being reviewed internally. However, we cannot enter into dialogue, nor provide updates or feedback regarding the outcome.

Please note:

Complainants will not be informed of any disciplinary action taken against a staff member as a result of a complaint. The complainant will, however, be notified that the matter has been considered and addressed in line with our internal procedures.

Standard Response for Non-Parental Complaints, Public Correspondence, or Complaints Campaigns

*Thank you for your email. We are aware of concerns regarding [insert relevant matter]. We take any allegations of [insert nature of allegation] extremely seriously.

The matter is currently being reviewed in accordance with our internal procedures.

Please note that we will not be entering into further correspondence on this matter. *