ALMA EDUCATION

Complaints Policy

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Statement of Intent

Alma Education is committed to a culture of openness, transparency and continuous improvement. Concerns and complaints from learners, families, commissioning schools and local authorities are taken seriously and handled promptly, fairly and without detriment to the young person or the relationship with the complainant.

Alma Education recognises that concerns and complaints, when handled well, provide valuable insight that strengthens the quality of provision. All complaints are reviewed by the Director of Education and, where appropriate, the Advisory Board, to identify patterns and drive improvement.

This policy sets out how concerns and complaints are raised, investigated and resolved, and the rights of complainants at each stage. The commissioning body retains full legal accountability for the young person's education; where a complaint relates to provision arranged by the commissioning body, Alma Education will cooperate fully with any investigation.

Legislation and Statutory Guidance
Education Act 2002
Children Act 1989
Children Act 2004
Equality Act 2010
Human Rights Act 1998
UK GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018
Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014
Independent School Standards Guidance (Apr 2026)
Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026
Non-School AP Voluntary National Standards (Aug 2025)

1. Who Can Make a Complaint?

This complaints procedure is not limited to parents, carers or commissioning schools. Any individual, including members of the public, may raise a complaint regarding any aspect of the services or provision Alma Education offers.

Unless a concern is covered by a separate statutory process, for example, appeals relating to admissions or exclusions, it will be managed in accordance with this complaints procedure.

2. The Difference Between a Concern and a Complaint

A concern is an expression of worry or doubt about an issue considered important, where reassurance is sought.

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction, however communicated, regarding actions taken or a perceived lack of action.

Alma Education recognises that it is in everyone's best interests for concerns and complaints to be addressed and resolved at the earliest possible stage. Many matters can be dealt with informally, without progressing to the formal stages of this procedure. All concerns are taken seriously and every reasonable effort will be made to resolve issues promptly and effectively.

If a complainant feels uncomfortable raising a concern with a particular member of staff, their wishes will be respected and an alternative member of the Alma Education team will be arranged.

3. How to Raise a Concern or Make a Complaint

A concern or complaint may be raised in person, in writing, or by telephone. Concerns and complaints may also be submitted by a third party acting on behalf of the complainant, provided appropriate consent has been given.

In the first instance, concerns should be directed to the learning mentor involved. Where necessary, the matter will be escalated to the Director of Education. If the issue cannot be resolved informally, the next step is to submit a formal complaint.

Complaints about members of the Alma Education team should be addressed to the Director of Education. Where a complaint concerns the Director of Education directly, it should be submitted in writing to the Chair of the Advisory Board.

Where a complaint about the Director of Education includes a safeguarding concern or allegation, Alma Education will follow statutory safeguarding procedures without delay and refer to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) or other relevant agencies as required. Safeguarding concerns will be managed separately from this complaints procedure where appropriate.

4. Anonymous Complaints

Alma Education will not normally investigate anonymous complaints. However, the Director of Education, or the Advisory Board where appropriate, will determine whether the complaint warrants investigation based on the nature and seriousness of the concerns raised.

5. Time Scales

Complaints must be raised within three months of the incident or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within three months of the last of these incidents. Alma Education will consider complaints made outside of this time frame if exceptional circumstances apply.

6. Complaints Received Outside of Term Time

Complaints received during school holiday periods will be treated as having been received on the first working day after the holiday period.

7. Scope and Exceptions

This procedure covers all complaints about any provision or services offered by Alma Education, other than complaints that are dealt with under separate statutory procedures.

The following matters are outside the scope of this complaints procedure:

Safeguarding and child protection matters: Complaints involving a child protection concern are handled under Alma Education's Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy and in accordance with statutory guidance. Serious concerns may also be raised with the LADO or the relevant multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH).

Staff grievances: Complaints from staff are handled under Alma Education's internal grievance procedures. Complainants will not be informed of any disciplinary action taken against a staff member, but will be notified that the matter is being addressed.

Matters under investigation by external bodies: If the police, local authority safeguarding teams or a Tribunal are investigating aspects of a complaint, this may affect timescales or result in the procedure being suspended until those investigations conclude.

Legal proceedings: If a complainant commences legal action against Alma Education in relation to their complaint, Alma Education will consider whether to suspend this procedure until those proceedings have concluded.

In line with equality legislation, Alma Education will consider and implement reasonable adjustments where needed to ensure all individuals can access and follow this complaints procedure. This may include providing information in alternative formats or arranging support for individuals making a formal complaint.

8. Resolving Complaints

At each stage of the procedure, Alma Education seeks to resolve the complaint fully and fairly. Where appropriate, Alma Education will acknowledge that a complaint is upheld in whole or in part.

Resolution may include one or more of the following:

- An explanation of what happened and why
- An acknowledgement that the situation could have been handled differently
- An assurance that the matter will not recur
- An explanation of the steps taken or to be taken, with timescales

- A review of relevant procedures in light of the complaint
- An apology

9. Withdrawal of a Complaint

If a complainant wishes to withdraw their complaint, Alma Education will ask them to confirm this in writing. Email is acceptable.

10. Stage 1: Informal Resolution

In the first instance, anyone with a concern is encouraged to raise it directly with the learning mentor or member of the Alma Education team involved, with the aim of resolving the matter informally. This can be done in person, by telephone or by email.

If the complainant is satisfied with the way their concern has been addressed and agrees with the decision reached, they are asked to confirm this in writing (email is acceptable) to the Director of Education. The complaint procedure stops at this point.

11. Stage 2: Formal Complaint

If the complainant remains unsatisfied following Stage 1, they may submit a formal complaint to the Director of Education. This may be done in person, in writing or by telephone.

The Director of Education will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge receipt in writing within 5 working days. The acknowledgement will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, what remains unresolved and what outcome the complainant would like to see.

During the investigation, the Director of Education (or a delegated investigator) will:

- Interview those involved in the matter and those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish
- Keep a written record of any meetings or interviews
- Consider all relevant records and information
- Liaise with the complainant to clarify what would put things right

The Director of Education may uphold the complaint in whole or in part, or dismiss it. Where the complaint is upheld, appropriate action will be taken and, where relevant, changes to procedures will be recommended to prevent recurrence.

A formal written response will be provided within 10 working days of receipt of the complaint. If this deadline cannot be met, the complainant will receive an update and a revised response date.

12. Stage 3: Advisory Board Review

If the complainant remains unsatisfied following Stage 2, they may request a review by the Advisory Board. This request must be made in writing, stating the nature of the complaint, how it has been handled to date and the reason the complainant remains dissatisfied.

The Advisory Board will acknowledge all written complaints within 21 days of receipt and arrange a meeting to discuss the complaint with the complainant. The meeting will be chaired by a member of the Advisory Board along with at least one other member and an independent panel member who is not involved in the management or running of Alma Education.

After hearing all the evidence, the Advisory Board will make a decision and inform the complainant of the outcome in writing.

The complainant may bring a relative or friend to the meeting for support. Legal representation is not generally encouraged at this stage, though there may be occasions where it is appropriate, for example if a member of the Alma Education team is called as a witness and wishes to be supported by union representation.

13. Next Steps

If the complainant considers that Alma Education did not handle their complaint in accordance with this published procedure, or that Alma Education acted unlawfully or unreasonably in the exercise of its duties under education law, they may contact the Department for Education after completing Stage 3.

The Department for Education will not normally reinvestigate the substance of a complaint or overturn decisions made by Alma Education. It will consider whether Alma Education has adhered to education legislation and any statutory policies connected with the complaint.

Contact the Department for Education:
Online: www.gov.uk/contact-dfe
Telephone: 0370 000 2288
Post: Department for Education, Piccadilly Gate, Store Street, Manchester, M1 2WD

Complainants may also contact Ofsted if they have concerns about the quality of provision that have not been resolved through this procedure:

Ofsted, Piccadilly Gate, Store Street, Manchester, M1 2WD. Tel: 0300 123 1231

14. Roles and Responsibilities

The Complainant

Complainants will receive a more effective response if they:

- Explain the complaint in full as early as possible

- Cooperate with Alma Education in seeking a resolution
- Respond promptly to requests for information or meetings
- Treat all those involved in the complaint with respect
- Refrain from publicising the details of their complaint on social media and respect confidentiality

The Investigator

The investigator's role is to establish the facts relevant to the complaint. The investigator will:

- Conduct a comprehensive, open and fair consideration of the complaint
- Interview the complainant sensitively to establish what has happened and who has been involved
- Interview members of the Alma Education team and any other relevant individuals
- Consider all relevant records and information
- Keep notes of all interviews and meetings
- Ensure all papers produced during the investigation are kept securely
- Prepare a comprehensive report setting out the facts, identifying solutions and recommending courses of action

The Advisory Board

The Advisory Board ensures that:

- There is a clear and accessible route for raising concerns about the Director of Education
- The Stage 3 panel is independent, impartial and seen to be so
- No panel member has had prior involvement in the complaint or the circumstances surrounding it
- The aim of the Stage 3 meeting is to resolve the complaint and achieve resolution
- Outcomes of complaints are reviewed to inform continuous improvement in leadership and practice

The Advisory Board is aware that many complainants will feel nervous in a formal setting. Extra care will be taken where the complainant is a young person. The panel will ensure the young person does not feel intimidated, their views are given equal consideration to those of adults, and that any support they need to present their complaint is arranged in advance. The welfare of the young person is the paramount consideration throughout.

15. Monitoring and Review

This policy is reviewed annually by the Director of Education and the Advisory Board, or sooner if required by changes in legislation or statutory guidance. Any necessary amendments will be communicated to all staff. This policy was approved by Melanie Steel, Director of Education, in August 2026 and is due for review in August 2027.