MEPA STUDIOS

COMPLAINTS POLICY

Policy owner	Principal
Approved by	Senior Leadership Team
Adopted	July 2026
Review date	July 2027, or sooner if guidance changes

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

1. Status, scope and purpose

MEPA Studios is a performing arts training provider offering extracurricular classes, workshops, rehearsals, performances and related activities. This policy explains how concerns and complaints about the services provided by MEPA Studios will be handled. It applies to parents/carers, participants (including adult participants), customers and others directly affected by Studios activities. A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction about an action, omission or standard of service; no particular wording is required.

MEPA Studios uses a three-stage process: informal resolution, formal written complaint and an independent review panel. This is an organisational complaints process and is not presented as the statutory independent-school complaints procedure applicable to MEPA Academy.

2. Principles and accessibility

Complaints will be treated fairly, respectfully, impartially and without unnecessary delay. A person who is the subject of a complaint, or has had material prior involvement, must not decide its outcome. We will listen to the complainant, establish relevant facts, consider evidence and explain decisions. No participant will be penalised for raising a concern in good faith. Information will be shared only when necessary, subject to safeguarding and legal obligations. Reasonable adjustments, communication assistance and accessible formats will be provided where needed. The policy will be available to customers on request and through the Studios' normal information channels.

3. Matters handled under other procedures

Safeguarding concerns or allegations about adults working with children: refer immediately to the designated safeguarding lead and applicable safeguarding/allegations procedures; seek advice from children's services, the local authority designated officer (LADO) or police as appropriate.

Staff grievances, disciplinary matters or whistleblowing: follow the relevant employment procedure.
Data protection concerns: use the data protection complaint route in section 11.

Fees, refunds, bookings and cancellations: consider the applicable terms and conditions alongside this complaints process; this policy does not remove consumer rights.

Injury, health and safety or serious incidents: activate incident reporting and any urgent safety response immediately; a related service complaint may also be investigated.

Competition, examination or external awarding-body decisions: use any applicable external appeal procedure; Studios service issues may still be considered here.

4. Making a complaint and time limits

Concerns should normally be raised within three months of the incident, or the last incident in a related series. Later complaints may be considered where there is a reasonable explanation and a fair investigation remains possible. A concern may be raised in person, by telephone, by email or in writing. Stage 2 and Stage 3 requests should be recorded in writing, with assistance provided where necessary.

For this policy, "working day" means Monday to Friday excluding bank holidays and published Studios closure days. We will communicate revised deadlines if circumstances prevent a response on time.

5. Who will handle a complaint

A complaint about a class teacher, tutor or member of staff should initially go to the relevant manager or another senior member of the Studios team. Complaints about a manager should go to a senior leader not involved in the matter.

Complaints about the most senior Studios leader or business owner will be referred to a suitably independent person appointed to investigate and decide the formal stage. A conflict of interest requires reassignment.

6. Stage 1 — informal resolution

1. Raise the concern with the relevant member of staff or Studios management. Nobody is required to approach the person complained about where this is uncomfortable or inappropriate.
2. MEPA Studios will normally acknowledge the concern within three working days.
3. The handler may discuss the matter with relevant people, examine available information and propose an agreed practical resolution. Mediation is voluntary.
4. A written Stage 1 response will normally be provided within ten working days, outlining the concern, findings and any appropriate action.
5. If dissatisfied, request Stage 2 in writing within ten working days of the response; reasonable extensions may be accepted.

7. Stage 2 — formal written complaint

1. Send a written complaint to MEPA Studios management, or the designated independent contact if management is the subject of the complaint.
2. Explain what happened, the steps taken, why the previous response is disputed and the outcome sought. An incomplete form will not prevent consideration of an understandable complaint.
3. Receipt will normally be acknowledged within three working days, identifying the investigator and issues under review.
4. The investigator may interview relevant people and examine records, while allowing any person complained about a fair opportunity to respond. The complainant may bring a supporter to meetings.
5. A written decision will normally be issued within fifteen working days, giving findings, reasons, appropriate remedies and the Stage 3 route.
6. A Stage 3 request should be made within ten working days of the Stage 2 response; reasonable late requests may be considered.

8. Stage 3 — independent complaints review

1. A request should explain the disputed findings and desired outcome; acknowledgement will normally be sent within three working days.
2. A review hearing will normally be arranged within twenty working days, with reasonable attendance arrangements including remote attendance where suitable.
3. A panel of at least three people will be appointed, none directly involved in the complaint, including at least one person independent of MEPA Studios management and operations.
4. The complainant may attend with a friend, relative or supporter. A young participant may be heard where appropriate to their age, welfare and wishes.
5. Documents will normally be shared at least five working days before the hearing. The panel may consider the case on written evidence if attendance is declined after reasonable arrangements are offered.
6. The hearing will be private, respectful and focused on the issues. The panel may uphold, partly uphold or reject the complaint and recommend proportionate action.

9. Panel decision and outcomes

Written findings and any recommendations will normally be issued within five working days after the hearing. This concludes MEPA Studios' internal complaints process. Outcomes may include an explanation, apology, correction, service improvement, a review of an applicable decision, staff training, or another appropriate remedy. Information about another person's employment or private circumstances may not be disclosed.

10. Safeguarding and allegations

Any immediate risk to a child or vulnerable person must be addressed without waiting for the complaints process. Inform the Studios' designated safeguarding lead promptly and contact the police or children's social care as appropriate. Call 999 in an emergency. Allegations against adults working with children must be handled under the relevant safeguarding and allegations procedures, including LADO consultation where required. The complaints process may be paused where it could prejudice safeguarding, police or employment enquiries; updates will be given where lawful and appropriate.

11. Data protection complaints

Complaints about the use, accuracy, disclosure or security of personal information should be marked "Data protection complaint" and sent to Studios management or the designated privacy contact. The Studios will acknowledge receipt within 30 calendar days, investigate without undue delay and communicate an outcome and next steps. Identity checks will be proportionate. Individuals may raise unresolved concerns with the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO): ico.org.uk. Data protection requests and complaints will be handled in line with applicable UK data protection legislation.

12. External routes

After the Studios procedure, customers may seek independent advice about consumer rights from Citizens Advice consumer service and, where appropriate, Trading Standards. Data protection concerns may be referred to the ICO. Safeguarding concerns may be reported to local authority children's services or police at any time. Where activities take place under a specific awarding, competition or professional body, its own complaint or appeal arrangements may also apply. MEPA Studios is not describing the DfE independent-school complaint route or Ofsted school complaint process as a general route for its extracurricular activities.

13. Records, confidentiality and retention

MEPA Studios will keep a secure record of formal Stage 2 complaints, including the issues raised, investigation, outcome, whether the matter proceeded to Stage 3, and actions taken. Information will be accessible only to authorised personnel and disclosed where legally necessary. Complaint records will normally be retained for seven years after closure, subject to the Studios' retention schedule and any safeguarding, legal, insurance or regulatory need for a different period. Records will be securely disposed of when no longer needed.

14. Publication and monitoring

The Studios will make this policy available to participants, parents/carers and customers and review complaint themes regularly to improve services. An annual summary of formal complaints may be produced for management review. Unlike the Academy's independent-school policy, this Studios policy does not claim a statutory requirement to publish the number of formal school complaints.

15. Contacts

Stage 1: relevant class teacher or MEPA Studios management.
Stage 2: MEPA Studios management — published email and telephone to be confirmed.
Stage 3: independent review request through MEPA Studios management, or an alternative independent contact where management is the subject of the complaint.
Safeguarding: MEPA Studios designated safeguarding lead — name and direct contact to be confirmed before publication.
Mark written complaints "Private and confidential — complaint".

Appendix A — complaint information checklist

Please include, where available: your name and preferred contact details; participant's name and relationship to them (if relevant); class or activity concerned; dates and description of what happened; people involved; steps already taken and any response; relevant documents; outcome sought; and any accessibility or support requirements. A complaint will still be considered if some information is unavailable.

Complaints procedure at a glance

Stage 1 — Informal: acknowledge within 3 working days; written response normally within 10; request Stage 2 within 10 working days.
Stage 2 — Formal: acknowledge within 3 working days; written decision normally within 15; request Stage 3 within 10 working days.
Stage 3 — Review panel: acknowledge within 3 working days; hearing normally within 20; papers normally 5 working days beforehand; written findings normally within 5 working days after the hearing.

Appendix B — complaints form

Complainant name: _____
Participant name (if applicable): _____
Relationship to participant: _____
Address / postcode: _____
Telephone: _____ Email: _____
Class, workshop or activity concerned: _____

Please describe your complaint (include relevant dates):
_____
_____
_____

What steps have you already taken and what response did you receive?
_____
_____

What outcome would you like?
_____
_____

Documents attached: _____
Accessibility / support requirements: _____
Signature (optional): _____ Date: _____

For office use: Date received: _____ Acknowledged: _____
Assigned handler: _____ Stage: _____ Closed: _____