Child Complaints Policy & Procedure

The Lioncare School | Pupil-focused procedure

Document Owner	Headteacher
Operational Lead	Headteacher or Nominated Complaints Officer
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Our promise to children: You have the right to be listened to. You can complain in the way that works best for you, ask someone to help you and contact someone outside the school. You will not be told off or treated unfairly for raising a concern or complaint.

1. Purpose

If a child feels worried, unhappy, unfairly treated or believes that something at school is wrong, they have the right to make this known. Adults at The Lioncare School have a responsibility to listen, take the child seriously and act where necessary. This policy explains how a child, or someone acting on their behalf, can raise a concern or complaint and what the school will do in response. The purpose of the procedure is to resolve concerns fairly and as quickly as possible, protect children from harm, support their participation in decisions that affect them and learn from complaints so that practice improves.

2. Scope and relationship with other procedures

This policy may be used by any child attending The Lioncare School and by another person raising a matter on a child's behalf. It covers concerns or complaints about school life, teaching or support, decisions, facilities, another child attending the school, bullying or discrimination, the conduct of a member of staff, school activities, or another matter for which the school is responsible.

This child-focused procedure complements the school's separate Complaints Policy and Procedure for Parents and Carers, which contains the formal arrangements required for independent schools. If a parent or carer makes or adopts a complaint in their own right, that policy will normally apply. The child's views will remain central and the child will not be required to repeat their account unnecessarily.

Some matters must be handled under another procedure. The school will explain this and help the child reach the right person:

- a concern that a child may have been harmed, may be at risk of harm, or an allegation about an adult will be dealt with under safeguarding procedures;
- a complaint about a linked children's home or residential care will be passed into that home's complaints procedure, with support for the child;
- statutory processes may apply to admissions, exclusions, Education, Health and Care Plans, data protection or examinations; and
- staff grievance, capability or disciplinary procedures are confidential and are not determined through this policy.

Using another procedure does not mean the child's concern is ignored. The school will record the route taken, keep the child appropriately informed and continue to provide support.

3. Legal and guidance framework

This policy reflects the Independent School Standards, Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026, the Equality Act 2010, applicable Children Act complaints and advocacy arrangements, data protection law and, where residential care is involved, the Children's Homes (England) Regulations 2015.

The procedure must be accessible. Reasonable adjustments and communication support will be provided where needed, including help with reading or writing, symbols or pictures, signing, assistive technology, a trusted adult or advocate, and additional time.

4. Principles

- The child's welfare and safety come first.
- A concern may be raised verbally, in writing, through behaviour or communication, or by another person. A complaint form is helpful but never compulsory.
- The child will be listened to sensitively and without judgement. Their account will be recorded accurately and checked with them in a way they can understand.
- The child will be asked what they would like to happen and involved in exploring possible solutions. This must never be used to dissuade them from making a formal complaint.
- Informal resolution is encouraged only where it is safe, appropriate and acceptable to the child. A child is not required to confront the person complained about.
- No person who is the subject of a formal complaint will investigate or decide it.
- Information will be shared only with people who need it to keep the child safe, investigate fairly or meet a legal duty. Absolute confidentiality cannot be promised.
- The child, their representative and anyone supporting them must not suffer any reprisal or disadvantage for raising a concern in good faith.
- The child will receive regular, understandable updates and an explanation of the outcome, subject to safeguarding, privacy and employment-law limits.

5. How a child can complain

A child can speak to any adult they trust at school. They may also tell a parent or carer, social worker, Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO), advocate, Independent Visitor, placing authority complaints officer or another trusted person. That person may make the complaint for them. The child can ask to speak privately and may have someone with them.

A concern should be raised as soon as possible, but a child will not be refused simply because time has passed. The school will consider the child's circumstances, the seriousness of the matter and whether a fair response remains possible. Anonymous concerns will be considered, although limited information may make investigation or feedback more difficult.

6. What the adult receiving the concern must do

1	**Listen and make the child safe** Listen calmly. Check whether anyone is in immediate danger or needs medical help. If so, act at once and follow safeguarding procedures.

2	**Record and check** Make a clear, factual note using the child's own words as far as possible. Explain why notes are needed and check the account with the child using an accessible method. Give the child or representative a copy unless this would create a safeguarding risk.
3	**Ask what the child wants** Ask what the child thinks could help and what outcome they would like. Explain that the school may still need to act to protect them or another child.
4	**Pass it on promptly** Inform the Headteacher, or in their absence a senior teacher, on the same day. Safeguarding concerns must be passed immediately to the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL).
5	**Arrange support** Offer help to use this procedure, complete the form, contact an external person or secure independent advocacy. Record agreed support and communication needs.

7. The complaints procedure

Stage 1 - Early or informal resolution

Where it is safe and the child agrees, the receiving adult or an appropriate senior member of staff will try to resolve the matter promptly. They may clarify what happened, restore communication, offer an explanation or apology, correct an error, agree support or make a practical change. The child's views and feelings will be taken seriously throughout.

The aim is to agree an initial response within 5 school days. The outcome will be recorded and explained to the child. If the child is not satisfied, the matter is too serious for informal resolution, or the child asks for a formal response, it will move to Stage 2.

Stage 2 - Formal complaint

The Headteacher will appoint a Complaints Officer or suitable investigator who has not been involved in the matter. The child does not have to complete a form, but will be offered the form, writing or communication equipment, a quiet place and any help they need. The record will set out the complaint, relevant people or events, what the child would like to happen and the support they have requested.

The school will acknowledge the formal complaint within 2 school days and explain who will deal with it, what will happen next and when the child can expect an update. The investigator may speak with the child and other relevant people, review records and seek specialist advice. The child may be accompanied by a trusted adult or advocate.

A written or otherwise accessible response will normally be provided within 10 school days. It will say what was considered, whether the complaint was upheld in full, in part or not upheld, the reasons, any action that can properly be shared, and how to request a review. If this timescale cannot be met, the child and their representative will be told why and given a revised date. The school will aim to give a full response within 28 calendar days unless a safeguarding, police, regulatory or other external process makes that impossible.

Stage 3 - Senior review

If the child remains unhappy, they or their representative may ask for a review within 10 school days of the Stage 2 response. The Chief Operating Officer, or another senior person appointed by The Chair of The Lioncare School who has not previously been involved, will review whether the complaint was considered fairly, relevant evidence was addressed, the reasons were sound and appropriate action was taken. They may arrange a meeting if this would help.

The review outcome will normally be given within 10 school days. It is the final stage of this pupil procedure. If a parent or carer has adopted the complaint, the school will explain any remaining stage available under the separate Parents and Carers Complaints Policy, including any complaints panel process.

Important: A child may go straight to Stage 2, ask for outside help or make a safeguarding report at any time. They never have to try informal resolution first.

8. Complaints about staff or senior leaders

Any concern about the conduct of an adult will be assessed immediately to decide whether it is a safeguarding allegation, a low-level concern, a complaint about professional practice or an employment matter. The school will follow Keeping Children Safe in Education and its safeguarding procedures, including referral or consultation with the local authority designated officer (LADO), children's social care or police where required. The complaints procedure will pause or be adapted if continuing it could compromise another investigation.

A person complained about will not investigate or decide the formal complaint. A complaint about the Headteacher will be referred to The Chief Operating Officer or The Chair of The Lioncare School. A complaint about The Chief Operating Officer or another senior leader will be referred directly to The Chair of The Lioncare School. A complaint about The Chief Executive Officer will be referred directly to The Chair of the Board of Directors of Lioncare Ltd who will nominate a suitably independent person to investigate on their behalf. Appropriate alternative leadership and management arrangements will be made where necessary.

Any decision about restriction of duties or suspension will be made by the authorised manager after appropriate safeguarding and HR advice. Suspension is a neutral measure and is not automatic. The child will be told as much about progress and outcome as can lawfully and safely be shared, but confidential employment information will not be disclosed.

9. Safeguarding and urgent action

If a complaint indicates that a child is suffering or likely to suffer harm, the adult must follow the Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy immediately. The child must not be asked to investigate, prove the concern or repeatedly recount it. Staff should listen, make an accurate record, avoid leading questions and pass the information to the schools' Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL). If a child is in immediate danger, emergency services must be contacted.

A child may ask for information to be kept secret, but staff cannot promise this where someone may be unsafe. The adult will explain, as gently and clearly as possible, what must be shared, with whom and why.

10. Informing families and professionals

The Headteacher, Complaints Officer or DSL will decide who must be informed, taking account of the child's wishes, welfare, age and understanding, confidentiality, parental responsibility and legal duties. Depending on the circumstances, this may include the child's parent or carer, social worker, IRO, placing authority, advocate, another relevant manager within the organisation, or an external safeguarding agency. The child will be told before information is shared wherever it is safe and appropriate to do so.

11. Outcomes and learning

A complaint may be upheld, partly upheld or not upheld. Where appropriate, the response may include an explanation, apology, correction, restorative work, additional support, a change to an individual plan, staff guidance or training, review of a policy or risk assessment, environmental changes, or referral under

another procedure. An apology or service improvement does not in itself amount to an admission of legal liability.

The child will be asked whether they feel listened to, whether the explanation makes sense and whether anything remains unresolved. Dissatisfaction does not by itself mean the investigation was inadequate, but it must be recorded and considered.

12. Records, confidentiality and monitoring

The Complaints Officer will keep a central record of the complaint, action taken at each stage, the outcome and the child's feedback. Relevant material will be placed on the child's education record only where this is necessary and proportionate. Records will be stored securely, retained in line with the organisation's retention schedule and made available to inspectors or authorities where legally required. Copies will be shared only where there is a lawful and necessary reason.

The Headteacher will monitor the number, nature and outcomes of complaints, timescales, recurring themes, equality considerations and learning. An anonymised summary will be reported to the Chair of The Lioncare School at least annually. A complaint may be withdrawn, but the school may still take safeguarding or improvement action where needed.

13. Protection from reprisals

Reprisals, intimidation or unfavourable treatment because a child or representative raised a concern in good faith are prohibited. Any indication of reprisal by an employee will be addressed under safeguarding and employment procedures and may result in disciplinary action. Concerns about reprisals by a person outside the organisation will be assessed and referred for safeguarding or legal advice where appropriate.

14. Help outside the school

A child does not have to make a complaint through the school before speaking to a trusted person outside it. Staff will support contact and help the child obtain an advocate where appropriate. Options include:

Who Can Help	How They Can Help / Contact
Social worker, IRO, placing authority complaints officer, parent/carer, advocate, Independent Visitor or another trusted person	Use the contact details in the child's plans or ask staff for help.
Help at Hand - Children's Commissioner for England	Free advice for children in care, living away from home or working with social services: 0800 528 0731.
Childline	Free confidential support: 0800 1111.
Ofsted - concerns about a service it inspects or regulates	0300 123 4666 or CIE@ofsted.gov.uk. Ofsted may use information for inspection or regulation but does not usually resolve an individual school dispute.
Department for Education - private schools	After the school procedure, DfE may consider a report of a major failure to meet the Independent School Standards, although it does not determine individual disputes.
Urgent safety	Call 999 if someone is in immediate danger. Contact the local council children's social care service or police on 101 if a child

	may be at risk or a crime may have been committed.

15. Linked policies and procedures

- Complaints Policy and Procedure for Parents and Carers
- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy
- Low-Level Concerns and Managing Allegations procedures
- Behaviour Policy and Procedures
- Anti-Bullying arrangements
- SEND Policy
- Equality and Accessibility policies
- Data Protection Policy and Privacy Notices
- Staff Disciplinary Procedure
- Whistleblowing Policy
- Relevant Lioncare children's home complaints procedure

Authoritative references

Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014; Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026; Equality Act 2010; Children Act 1989 and representations arrangements; Data Protection Act 2018; Children's Homes (England) Regulations 2015, regulation 39; current GOV.UK guidance on complaints about private schools and Ofsted; Children's Commissioner Help at Hand.

Appendix 1: Child-friendly guide

Something does not feel right? Tell an adult you trust. You will be listened to and you will not get into trouble for speaking up.

You can complain about...

- something that happened in a lesson, at break, on a trip or during another school activity;
- the way another pupil or an adult behaved;
- bullying, discrimination, unfair treatment or not getting the help you need;
- something that made you feel unsafe, worried, angry or unhappy; or
- anything else about school that you think should change.

You can tell...

any adult you trust at school, your parent or carer, social worker, IRO, advocate, Independent Visitor or another trusted person. You can speak, write, draw, use pictures or symbols, communicate through your behaviour, or ask someone else to explain for you.

What will happen?

1	**1. We listen** An adult will listen carefully; check you are safe and write down what you tell them.
2	**2. You have choices** We will ask what you would like to happen and who you want to support you.
3	**3. We act** We may try to sort it out quickly or arrange a formal investigation. Serious safety concerns go straight to the safeguarding team.
4	**4. We keep you updated** We will explain what is happening in a way you understand. You can ask questions at any time.
5	**5. We explain the outcome** We will tell you what was decided and what can be done. Some private information about other people cannot be shared.
6	**6. You can ask for a review** If you are still unhappy, you or someone helping you can ask a senior person who was not involved to review it.

Remember: You can have a trusted adult or advocate with you. You do not have to face the person you complained about. You can contact someone outside school at any time.

Appendix 2: Child complaint form

You do not have to use this form. You can tell an adult in another way. An adult you trust may complete it with you or for you, using your own words as far as possible.

Section A - About you and your complaint

Child's name	
Name of person helping, if any	
How would you like us to communicate with you?	
Who would you like to support you?	
What happened?	
When and where did it happen?	
Who was involved or saw what happened?	
How did this affect you?	
What would you like to happen?	
Is anyone unsafe or needing help now?	Yes / No / Not sure. Details:

Section B - Initial response by the receiving adult

Date and time received	
Received by	
Child's account checked with them?	Yes / No Explain any communication support used:
Immediate safety or medical action	
Passed to Headteacher/senior teacher	Date and time:
Passed to DSL, if safeguarding	Date and time:

Copy offered to child/representative	Yes / No If no, record reason:
Stage/route agreed	Informal / Formal / Safeguarding / Other procedure

Section C - Progress, outcome and child's feedback

Complaints Officer/investigator	
People or records consulted	
Updates given	Dates and method:
Outcome	Upheld / Partly upheld / Not upheld / Other route
Reasons and action that can be shared	
Date outcome explained	
Does the child feel listened to?	Yes / Partly / No Comments:
Is anything still unresolved?	
Review requested?	Yes / No Date:
Record completed by	Name: Date: