Complaints Policy & Procedure for Parents and Carers

The Lioncare School | Parent and Carer procedure

Document Owner	Headteacher
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Our commitment to parents and carers: We will listen carefully, treat concerns seriously, act fairly and explain what happens. A parent, carer, child or person supporting them will not be disadvantaged for raising a concern or complaint in good faith.

1. Purpose

The Lioncare School values open, respectful relationships with parents and carers. Most concerns can be resolved promptly through discussion, but parents and carers also need a clear route for a matter requiring formal consideration. This policy explains how to raise a concern or complaint, how the school will respond and how a parent or carer may request an independent panel hearing if they remain dissatisfied.

The procedure aims to resolve concerns fairly and as quickly as possible, protect children from harm, keep the child's welfare and views central, provide procedural fairness to everyone involved, and identify learning that improves the school's practice.

2. Scope and relationship with other procedures

This policy applies to complaints made by a parent or carer of a child currently registered at The Lioncare School about the provision of education or another matter for which the school is responsible. For this policy, 'parent' includes a person with parental responsibility and a person who has care of the child. A parent may authorise a representative to assist them, subject to appropriate identity and consent checks.

A complaint started while a child is registered will continue under this procedure if the child later leaves the school. The school may, at its discretion, use the procedure for another former-child or prospective-child matter, where doing so is fair and helpful, although the Independent School Standards do not require this procedure to cover complaints about a failure to admit a prospective child.

This procedure complements the Child Complaints Policy and Procedure. A child may use that procedure independently, and a parent or carer may raise or adopt a complaint in their own right under this policy. The two routes will be coordinated so that the child's voice remains central, information is shared lawfully and the child is not required to repeat their account unnecessarily.

Some matters are governed wholly or partly by another process. The school will explain the correct route and, where possible, help the complainant reach the right person:

- a concern that a child has been harmed, may be at risk of harm, or an allegation or low-level concern about an adult will be dealt with immediately under safeguarding procedures;

- a complaint about a linked Lioncare children's home or residential care will be directed to that home's complaints procedure;
- separate statutory or contractual processes may apply to admissions, exclusions, Education, Health and Care Plans, examination decisions, data protection, freedom of information or fee disputes;
- employee grievance, capability and disciplinary matters are determined under confidential employment procedures, although the complainant will be told the complaint outcome as far as lawfully possible; and
- a concern raised by an employee about wrongdoing may fall within the Whistleblowing Policy.

Using another procedure does not mean the concern is ignored. The school will record the route taken, take any necessary safeguarding or improvement action and provide appropriate updates, subject to confidentiality and legal restrictions.

3. Legal and guidance framework

This policy reflects Part 7 of the Schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, the Department for Education's Independent School Standards guidance (April 2026), Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026, the Equality Act 2010, the Education Act 1996 definition of 'parent', and applicable data protection law. Where residential care is involved, relevant Children Act complaints and advocacy arrangements and the Children's Homes (England) Regulations 2015 will also be considered.

The school will make this written procedure available to parents and carers. It will provide reasonable adjustments and communication support where needed, including accessible formats, help with reading or writing, an interpreter, signing, assistive technology, a trusted supporter or additional time.

4. Principles

- The child's welfare and safety come first.
- Concerns will be received courteously, considered objectively and addressed without avoidable delay.
- Informal resolution is encouraged where it is safe and appropriate, but it will not be used to prevent a parent from making a formal written complaint.
- The school will clarify the complaint, the outcome sought and any support or adjustment required.
- No person who is the subject of a formal complaint will investigate or decide it.
- Both the complainant and any person complained about will be treated fairly and given an appropriate opportunity to provide relevant information.
- Information will be shared only where necessary for safeguarding, fair investigation, legal duties or legitimate school management. Absolute confidentiality cannot be promised.
- A parent, child, representative, witness or supporter must not suffer reprisal or disadvantage for raising a concern in good faith.
- The school will give understandable updates and a reasoned outcome, while protecting private information about children and employees.

5. Who may complain and how to contact the school

A parent or carer may raise a concern in person, by telephone, by email or by letter using the school's published contact details. A Stage 1 concern may be oral or written. A Stage 2 formal complaint must be made in writing, but the school will help to record it where disability, language, literacy, communication needs or another reasonable circumstance makes this difficult. The complaint form in Appendix 2 is optional.

The complainant should provide, so far as they can: the child's name; what happened; relevant dates, people and documents; how the matter affected the child; what action has already been taken; the outcome sought; and any immediate safety concern or adjustment required. The school will not reject a complaint merely because every detail is not yet available.

A concern should normally be raised within three months of the event, or the last event in a series. The school may consider a later complaint where there is good reason for delay, the matter is serious, safeguarding is engaged or a fair response remains possible. A safety concern will never be delayed because of a time limit.

Anonymous information will be considered according to its seriousness, credibility and the school's ability to make enquiries. Limited information may restrict investigation and feedback.

6. Responsibilities and alternative routes

The Headteacher has operational responsibility for this procedure and may appoint a Nominated Complaints Officer, investigator or panel clerk. The Chair of The Lioncare School acting on behalf of the proprietor, Lioncare Ltd, remains responsible for ensuring that the policy is drawn up and effectively implemented.

Complaint concerns	Person or route responsible
A school matter or member of staff	Headteacher or a suitably independent investigator appointed by the Headteacher.
The Headteacher	The Chief Operating Officer or The Chair of The Lioncare School, with no prior material involvement.
The Chief Operating Officer or another senior leader	The Chair of The Lioncare School or another suitably independent person appointed on the Chair's behalf.
The Chief Executive Officer	The Chair of the Board of Directors of Lioncare Ltd, who will nominate a suitably independent person to investigate.
The Chair of The Lioncare School, the Chair of the Board, or several senior decision-makers	A person or panel appointed by or on behalf of the proprietor with sufficient independence and no prior involvement.

At every stage, alternative arrangements will be made if the usual decision-maker is involved, has a conflict of interest, has previously determined the substance of the matter or is unavailable for a period that would cause unreasonable delay.

7. Procedure and timescales

A 'school day' means a day on which the school is open to children for normal teaching. If a complaint is received during a school closure, it will be logged and urgent safeguarding action will be taken immediately; other procedural timescales will normally begin on the next school day. The school will use reasonable endeavours to progress matters during longer closures and will tell the complainant how the timetable is affected.

Stage	What happens	Normal timescale
Stage 1 – Early or informal resolution	The concern is discussed with an appropriate member of staff or senior leader and a practical resolution is explored.	Initial response or agreed next step within 5 school days.
Stage 2 – Formal written complaint	An uninvolved person investigates and provides a reasoned written outcome.	Acknowledge within 2 school days; outcome normally within 10 school days. Aim for a full response within 28 calendar days if additional time is required.
Stage 3 – Complaints Panel hearing	At least three uninvolved people, including one member independent of the management and running of the school, hear the complaint.	Request within 10 school days of Stage 2; hearing normally within 20 school days of the request; written findings normally within 5 school days after the hearing.

Important: A safeguarding concern, allegation about an adult or immediate safety issue goes straight to the safeguarding route. A parent does not have to complete informal resolution before the school takes protective action.

If a stated timescale cannot be met, the school will explain why, identify any interim action, give a revised date and provide proportionate updates. An external safeguarding, police, regulatory, legal or employment process may require this complaints procedure to pause or be adapted so that evidence or safety is not compromised.

8. Stage 1 – Early or informal resolution

A parent or carer should normally raise the concern with the member of staff closest to the issue, the child's teacher or the Headteacher. If the concern is about that person, or the parent would not reasonably feel able to approach them, it should be directed to the alternative person in section 6.

The receiving person will listen, establish whether urgent safeguarding action is required, clarify what happened and what outcome is sought, and decide who is best placed to respond. Possible early responses include an explanation, correction, apology, practical adjustment, additional support, restorative discussion where freely agreed, or referral under another procedure.

The school aims to provide an initial response or agree the next step within 5 school days. The concern and outcome will be recorded proportionately. If the parent remains dissatisfied, the concern is too serious for informal resolution, or the parent asks for a formal response, the matter may proceed to Stage 2.

9. Stage 2 – Formal written complaint

A Stage 2 complaint should be addressed to the Headteacher, or to the alternative person identified in section 6. It should explain why the Stage 1 response was unsatisfactory, or why the matter requires formal investigation. The school will acknowledge the complaint within 2 school days and confirm the issues to be investigated, the investigator, the procedure, any agreed adjustments and the anticipated response date.

The investigator will be impartial and will not have been the subject of the complaint or materially involved in the events or Stage 1 decision. The investigator may:

- meet or speak with the complainant and allow them to provide relevant information;
- obtain the child's views in a safe and accessible way, taking account of age, understanding, wishes and welfare;
- speak with staff, children or other relevant people and review records, policies, correspondence, CCTV or specialist advice where lawful and proportionate;
- provide a fair opportunity for a person complained about to understand and respond to the substance of the allegations; and
- consider whether safeguarding, disciplinary, data protection or another procedure must run alongside or instead of the complaints process.

The investigation is a fact-finding and school-improvement process, not a court hearing. Findings will be made on the balance of probabilities, having considered the available reliable information.

A written response will normally be sent within 10 school days. It will identify the issues considered, state whether each element is upheld, partly upheld, not upheld or redirected, explain the reasons, describe action or recommendations that can properly be shared, and explain how to request Stage 3. Confidential child, safeguarding and employment information will not be disclosed merely because it relates to the complaint.

Where a full response cannot be completed within 10 school days, the complainant will receive an update and a revised date. The school will aim to provide the full response within 28 calendar days unless an external process or exceptional complexity makes that impossible.

10. Stage 3 – Complaints Panel hearing

10.1 Requesting a panel

If the parent or carer remains dissatisfied, they may request a panel hearing in writing within 10 school days of the Stage 2 response. The request should state the unresolved grounds, the outcome sought and any reasonable adjustments or support required. A late request may be accepted where there is good reason and a fair hearing remains possible.

The panel clerk will acknowledge the request, confirm the scope of the hearing and make reasonable arrangements intended to facilitate the parent's attendance. The hearing will normally take place within 20 school days of the request. If the proposed date cannot be achieved, the clerk will explain why and give the earliest reasonable alternative.

10.2 Panel membership and independence

The panel will be appointed by or on behalf of The Chair of The Lioncare School and will consist of at least three people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint. At least one panel member will be independent of the management and running of The Lioncare School. The independent member will not be an employee, a member of the governing or proprietorial body, or another person involved in managing the school; a regular professional adviser to the school will not normally be treated as independent.

Panel members must declare actual or apparent conflicts of interest. The clerk will record the membership and the basis on which the independence requirement is met.

10.3 Papers, attendance and support

The complainant and the school will be invited to provide relevant written material by the date set by the clerk. The clerk will circulate the panel bundle to the parties and panel, normally at least 5 school days before the hearing. Late evidence will be admitted only where this is fair and gives the other party a proper opportunity to respond.

A parent may attend and be accompanied by a relative, friend, advocate, interpreter or another supporter. The supporter may assist the parent, but there is no automatic right for a legal representative to make

representations on the parent's behalf. Any request for legal representation should be made in advance so the panel can decide fair arrangements. The school may also be represented or supported on an equivalent basis.

The child will not be required to attend or confront a person complained about. Their views may be presented in writing, through an advocate, by recorded or remote means, or in a separate supported session where the panel considers this safe and appropriate. The child's welfare and communication needs will guide the arrangement.

If a parent chooses not to attend, or does not attend after reasonable attempts to facilitate attendance, the panel hearing will still take place and may proceed on the written material. The clerk will retain evidence of the arrangements offered.

10.4 Conduct of the hearing

The hearing will be private, respectful and non-adversarial. The Panel Chair will explain the process, confirm the complaint and desired outcome, allow each party to present their position and answer questions, and ensure that panel members can test the relevant information. The Panel Chair may adjourn if further information, an adjustment or safeguarding advice is needed.

The panel will review whether the complaint was investigated fairly, whether relevant evidence was considered, whether conclusions were reasonable and whether suitable action was taken. It may make its own findings on the complaint and recommendations for individual remedy or wider school improvement. The panel will not determine confidential employment sanctions or replace a statutory appeal body.

10.5 Decision and finality

The panel's written findings and recommendations will normally be issued within 5 school days after the hearing. A copy will be provided to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about. The findings and recommendations will also be available for inspection on the school premises by the proprietor and the Headteacher.

The Stage 3 decision is the final stage of the school's internal parent and carer complaints procedure. The outcome letter will identify any available external route. An external body may consider regulatory compliance or its own statutory remit; it will not necessarily rehear or overturn the school's decision on an individual complaint.

11. Complaints about staff or senior leaders

Any concern about an adult's conduct 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 person complained about will not investigate or decide the formal complaint. A decision about restriction of duties or suspension will be made only by the authorised manager following appropriate safeguarding and HR advice. Suspension is a neutral measure and is not automatic. The complainant will receive as much information about progress and outcome as can safely and lawfully be shared, but private employment information, including any disciplinary sanction, will not ordinarily be disclosed.

12. Safeguarding and urgent action

If a complaint indicates that a child is suffering or likely to suffer harm, staff 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 will listen, make an accurate record, avoid leading questions and pass the information to the school's Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL). Emergency services must be contacted if anyone is in immediate danger.

Safeguarding information may need to be shared without parental agreement where this is necessary to protect a child or comply with law. The school will explain what can be shared about the action taken, but it cannot disclose information that may place someone at risk or compromise a statutory investigation.

13. The child's voice, participation and support

A complaint made by a parent may concern matters experienced directly by the child. The school will take the child's wishes, feelings, age, understanding, communication needs and welfare into account. The child will be asked what support they need and, where appropriate, what they would like to happen. Their view is important but does not transfer responsibility for decisions from the adults responsible for their safety and education.

The child may be supported by a parent or carer, social worker, Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO), advocate, Independent Visitor or another trusted person. The school will coordinate with the Child Complaints Policy and Procedure and will avoid unnecessary repetition of the child's account.

14. Outcomes, remedies and organisational learning

A complaint or an individual element may be upheld, partly upheld, not upheld or redirected to another procedure. Where appropriate, the response may include:

- an explanation, acknowledgement, apology or correction;
- additional support, a practical adjustment, restorative work or a change to an individual plan;
- review of teaching, communication, supervision, a policy, risk assessment or environment;
- staff guidance, training, management action or referral under a confidential employment procedure; and
- monitoring to confirm that agreed action has been completed and sustained.

An apology or service improvement does not in itself amount to an admission of legal liability. Dissatisfaction with an outcome does not by itself show that the investigation was inadequate, but the outstanding concern must be recorded and considered at the next available stage.

15. Records, confidentiality, data protection and monitoring

The Complaints Officer will maintain a central written record of all Stage 2 complaints, whether they are resolved at the formal stage or proceed to a panel, and of action taken by the school regardless of whether the complaint is upheld. The record will include the complaint, acknowledgement, investigation material, decisions, action, review or panel outcome and relevant child feedback.

Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the Education and Skills Act 2008 requests access, or where another lawful safeguarding, regulatory, legal or data protection reason requires disclosure. Records will be stored securely and retained in accordance with the organisation's retention schedule.

Where a complaint is also a complaint by a data subject about the school's processing of personal data, the school will facilitate the complaint, acknowledge it within 30 days, take appropriate steps to investigate it without undue delay and communicate the outcome promptly, in accordance with section 164A of the Data Protection Act 2018. The school may use this procedure provided those data protection duties are met.

The Headteacher will monitor the number, nature, stage, outcome and timeliness of complaints; recurring themes; equality and accessibility issues; actions completed; and organisational learning. An anonymised summary will be reported to The Chair of The Lioncare School at least annually. Personal information will not be included unless necessary and lawful.

16. Protection from reprisals and fair conduct

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

The school expects communication to remain respectful. A complainant's distress, persistence or disagreement will not be treated as misconduct. Where contact becomes abusive, threatening, discriminatory, excessively repetitive or materially obstructs the school's work, a senior leader who has not been central to the complaint may set proportionate communication arrangements, such as a single point of contact or agreed frequency. This will not remove the right to a fair decision on new, relevant information or prevent urgent safeguarding concerns being raised.

17. Withdrawal, duplicate complaints and collective concerns

A complainant may withdraw a complaint at any stage. The school will confirm the withdrawal in writing, but may continue safeguarding, regulatory, employment or improvement action where necessary. If substantially the same complaint has already completed this procedure, the school may provide the earlier decision and decline to repeat the process unless significant new evidence or a materially different issue is raised.

Where several parents raise the same or closely connected issue, the school may coordinate the investigation or invite an agreed representative, while protecting confidentiality and each parent's right to explain any distinct impact on their child.

18. Help and routes outside the school

Parents and carers are encouraged to complete the school procedure where it is appropriate to do so. This does not prevent anyone from contacting emergency, safeguarding, police, regulatory or data protection bodies at any time where their remit is engaged.

Organisation or route	Purpose / contact
Emergency services	Call 999 if someone is in immediate danger. Contact police on 101 where a crime may have been committed but there is no immediate emergency.
Local authority children's social care / LADO	Use the relevant local authority's published safeguarding contacts if a child may be at risk or an allegation concerns an adult working with children.
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 – independent schools	After the school procedure, the Department for Education may consider a report that the school has failed to meet the Independent School Standards. Current contact routes are published on GOV.UK.
Information Commissioner's Office	A person dissatisfied with the handling of a data protection matter may use the current complaint route published at ico.org.uk.

Placing authority / social worker / IRO / advocate	Where a child is looked after or placed by a local authority, the parent or child may also seek help through the child's professional network or applicable local authority complaints route.

19. Linked policies and procedures

- Child Complaints Policy and Procedure
- 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, Schedule, Part 7; Department for Education, Independent School Standards: Guidance for Independent Schools (April 2026); Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026; Equality Act 2010; Education Act 1996, section 576; Data Protection Act 2018, including section 164A; Children Act 1989 and applicable representations arrangements; Children's Homes (England) Regulations 2015, regulation 39; current GOV.UK guidance on complaints about independent schools and Ofsted.

Appendix 1: Parent and carer guide – what happens next

Need to raise something? Tell the school as soon as you can. We will check safety first, listen carefully and explain the route, support and timescale.

Step	What you do	What the school does
1. Raise the concern	Speak or write to the relevant member of staff, teacher or Headteacher.	Listen, check immediate safety, clarify the concern and record it proportionately.
2. Try early resolution	Explain what happened and what outcome would help.	Aim to respond or agree the next step within 5 school days.
3. Make a formal complaint	Write to the Headteacher or appropriate alternative person. You may use Appendix 2.	Acknowledge within 2 school days, appoint an uninvolved investigator and normally respond within 10 school days.
4. Ask for a panel	If still dissatisfied, request Stage 3 within 10 school days and identify the unresolved grounds.	Arrange a panel of at least three uninvolved people, including one independent member, normally within 20 school days.
5. Receive the final outcome	Attend with a supporter if you wish, or provide written submissions.	Send the panel's findings and recommendations normally within 5 school days of the hearing.

Remember: You may ask for reasonable adjustments, accessible information, an interpreter or a supporter. Serious safety concerns do not wait for a complaints stage.

Appendix 2: Formal complaint form

You do not have to use this form. The school will help you record a formal complaint if you cannot complete it because of disability, language, literacy, communication needs or another reasonable circumstance. Please attach additional pages or documents if needed.

Section A – About you and the child

Parent/carer name	
Child's name	
Relationship to child	
Preferred contact details	Address / email / telephone:
Communication or accessibility support	Please tell us about any reasonable adjustment, interpreter, format or supporter required:

Section B – Your complaint

What happened?	Please describe each issue as clearly as you can:
When and where?	Dates, times and locations, if known:
Who was involved or witnessed it?	
How did this affect the child?	

Is anyone unsafe or needing help now?	Yes / No / Not sure. Details:
What has already been done?	Include any Stage 1 discussion and response:
What outcome would you like?	
Documents attached	Please list:

Section C – Confirmation

Name	
Signature	
Date	
Received by school	Name: Date/time:
Route agreed	Stage 2 / Safeguarding / Data protection / Other procedure

Appendix 3: Stage 3 panel checklist

This checklist supports consistent administration. It does not replace the requirements in section 10.

Check	Requirement	Completed / evidence
Request	Written request received, date recorded and unresolved grounds clarified.	
Acknowledgement	Acknowledged; scope, support and reasonable adjustments confirmed.	
Panel membership	At least three members; none directly involved; at least one independent of management and running; conflicts declared.	
Hearing arrangements	Reasonable date, format and venue offered to facilitate parent attendance; child welfare considered.	
Accompaniment	Parent informed of right to attend and be accompanied.	
Papers	Submission deadline set; relevant bundle circulated normally at least 5 school days before hearing.	
Hearing	Private, respectful and non-adversarial; both parties heard; notes retained.	
Decision	Findings and recommendations recorded against each ground; reasons are clear.	
Distribution	Copy sent to complainant and, where relevant, person complained about; available for proprietor and Headteacher inspection.	
Actions	Action owner, due date and monitoring arrangements recorded.	