CHARLTON HOUSE
Independent School

Nurturing excellence, embracing communities and inspiring futures

Complaints Policy

Reviewed and approved by the full governing body September 2026

To be reviewed by FGB September 2027

Date	Feb 2023	Feb 2024	Feb 2025	Sept 2026	
Reviewed by	FGB	FGB	FGB	Being reviewed by FGB	

Introduction

Charlton House Independent School aims to ensure that the whole community feels happy and secure when at school. There is an awareness, however, that things can go wrong and therefore welcomes suggestions and comments from parents, staff and pupils. We take seriously any concerns and complaints that may arise. Many concerns that parents have do not necessarily call for complaint, but should still be brought to the school's attention. Help can only be given about issues that are known. This policy is available on the school's website and a hard copy can be requested from the school's office. The procedure outlined below applies to complaints from parents, carers and those with parental responsibility for pupils currently registered at Charlton House Independent School.

Our complaints procedure aims to be:

- Impartial
- Non-adversarial
- Respectful
- Confidential
- Thorough

The School is committed to ensuring that all complainants are treated fairly and without discrimination. Reasonable adjustments will be made where required to ensure that individuals can access and participate fully in the complaints process in accordance with the Equality Act 2010.

Definition of Terms

Concern - *A concern is likely to require discussion, perhaps involving a teacher, pupil and parent, and it is hoped that it can be resolved quickly by such a discussion and appropriate action. A concern is dealt with through the normal daily structures of the School. If this does not resolve the concern, then it could become a complaint.*

Complaint - *A complaint will be treated as an expression of genuine dissatisfaction, which needs a response and is likely to arise when there are issues related to physical or emotional wellbeing, or over security, or when the School's stated aims or values are being ignored.*

A breach of the law will always constitute a complaint.

Any matter about which a parent of a pupil is unhappy and seeks action by the school is a complaint.

The following areas are not covered by the complaints procedure as they have their own policies or procedures:

- Admissions
- Fees or payments (covered by admissions terms and conditions)
- School re-organisation proposals
- Statutory assessments of special education needs (SEN)
- Safeguarding matters
- Suspension and permanent exclusion
- Whistle-blowing
- Staff grievances
- Staff discipline
- Curriculum
- Collective worship

Where a complaint includes matters covered by another statutory or School procedure, the School reserves the right to consider those matters under the appropriate process or to pause elements of the complaint until the relevant process has concluded.

Any complaints about external providers (i.e. extra-curricular clubs) should be addressed directly with the provider.

Complaints levelled at the Head Teacher are to be made in writing to the Chair of Governors. They will utilise the Governing Board's Complaints Panel and follow the process described below.

Complaints levelled at members of the Governing Board, including the Chair of Governors, are to be made in writing, marked "Private and Confidential", via the School Office. The complaint will be forwarded to an appropriate governor with no prior involvement in the matter, who will make arrangements for the complaint to be considered in accordance with this policy.

All written complaints (by letter or email) should be marked as *private and confidential*.

A complaint should be raised within three months of an incident, however, the School will consider complaints raised within up to twelve months if exceptional circumstances apply (e.g. matters of Safeguarding or Child Protection).

The Head Teacher will be informed of all complaints and their outcome.

A written record of all concerns and complaints is kept, no matter what stage of the procedure they are resolved.

The procedure outlined below applies to complaints from parents, carers and those with parental responsibility for pupils currently registered at Charlton House Independent School. Complaints from other individuals will be considered under the appropriate School policy or procedure, or at the discretion of the Head Teacher.

Complaints Procedure

The school will endeavour to deal with complaints within a reasonable time and in a courteous and efficient way, and where appropriate, will take action.

It is the school's policy that complaints should never rebound on children or the person making the complaint.

Stage 1 – Informal

1. It is hoped that most concerns and complaints will be resolved informally. We advise Parents to raise the issue with the member of staff most closely concerned with the matter as soon as possible. Please make an in-person appointment with this person to discuss the issue fully; this normally results in the matter being resolved immediately and to your satisfaction. Informal appointments can be made directly with the person most closely concerned with the matter, or via the school's office. The school's office may be contacted using the following details:

   admin@charltonhouseindependentschool.co.uk
   55-57 Midanbury Lane, Bitterne Park, Southampton, Hampshire, SO18 4DJ.
   023 80671739

2. The member of staff will make a record of the complaint. If the member of staff cannot resolve the matter alone, it may be necessary for them to consult a member of the Senior Leadership Team for

advice. In this instance they will inform the parent of the outcome to their concern or complaint within five working days.

3. You may ask to meet the Head Teacher directly to raise an informal concern or complaint. Again, the matter will normally be resolved quickly and to both parties' satisfaction. Occasionally, they may refer you back to the relevant member of staff, but there may be occasions when the Head Teacher feels it is appropriate to resolve the issue informally themselves. This is still considered to be under the Stage 1 process of informal resolution. In this instance the time frame to manage the complaint is likely to be immediate and feedback will be verbal, providing that a satisfactory outcome has been achieved. It is only when or if the Parent is not satisfied with an outcome that they should proceed to the Stage 2 of the Complaints Procedure.

Stage 2 – Formal

1. If your complaint cannot be satisfactorily dealt with on an informal basis, then the Parent should put their complaint in writing to the Head Teacher, using the form listed as Appendix 2. The Head Teacher may be contacted using the following details:

   head@charltonhouseindependentschool.co.uk
   55-57 Midanbury Lane, Bitterne Park, Southampton, Hampshire, SO18 4DJ
   023 80671739

A formal written complaint at Stage 2 should be sent no later than 10 working days after receiving the outcome of the Stage 1 complaint.

The Head Teacher will:

a. Acknowledge your complaint in writing within five working days.
b. Decide the appropriate course of action to take.
c. Inform you how the matter will be dealt with.
d. Carry out any necessary investigations.
e. Send a letter to explain the conclusion to you, along with reasons for it and any action being taken or proposed. Some details may need to be withheld if they relate to another staff member or pupil.

2. In most cases, the Head Teacher will arrange to meet with the Parent no later than ten working days after receiving the written complaint. The purpose of this meeting is to discuss the complaint, clarify any outstanding matters and allow any additional information to be provided before a final decision is reached.

Following any necessary investigation, the Head Teacher will provide a written outcome explaining:

- whether the complaint is upheld, partially upheld or not upheld;
- the reasons for the decision;
- any actions taken or proposed; and
- how the complainant may proceed to Stage 3 if they remain dissatisfied.

The Head Teacher will keep records of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint on CPOMs.

3. Your complaint will remain confidential and all information treated with respect. Knowledge of it will be limited to the Head Teacher and those directly involved. The Chair of Governors may have to be informed.

4. We cannot rule out the possibility of the need to make third parties outside the school aware of the complaint and possibly the identities of those involved. This would only be likely to be necessary where a child's safety is involved or an illegal act has occurred. You will be kept fully informed.

5. Information relating to specific complaints will be kept confidentially on file, we may not be able to pursue anonymous complaints unless exceptional circumstances apply (e.g. matters of Safeguarding or Child Protection).

6. Action, which needs to be taken under staff disciplinary procedures as a result of complaints, will be handled confidentially within school.

7. A Stage 2 process should not normally take more than twenty working days, including investigation. Occasionally school holiday periods, exceptional circumstances, unusually complex complaints, substantial volumes of documentation, concurrent statutory requests or other related processes may require a longer period. Where this occurs, the School will inform the complainant of the revised timescale and the reasons for the delay.

Following investigation, the Head Teacher may:

- Uphold all or part of the complaint;
- Decide that the complaint is not upheld;
- Recommend actions to resolve the matter;
- Recommend changes to School procedures or practice where appropriate.

The written outcome will explain the reasons for the decision and any actions arising from the investigation.

If, after receiving the Stage 2 outcome, you remain dissatisfied because you believe the complaint was not investigated appropriately, relevant evidence was not considered, procedures were not followed correctly, or the conclusions were unreasonable in the circumstances, you may request a Stage 3 Panel Hearing

Stage 3 appeal will always be the final stage of this procedure.

Stage 3 – Panel Hearing

1. If a Parent is not satisfied with the outcome of a Stage 2 complaint, the Head Teacher will advise them to refer the matter to the Chair of Governors. They should use the attached complaints form (Appendix 2) and submit it within ten working days of receiving the Stage 2 decision. They must set out details of aspects of the complaint which they remain dissatisfied about and their grounds of appeal. Any supporting evidence which a parent wishes to rely on should also be provided, along with details of the outcome desired and confirmation as to whether they wish to attend a hearing. The Chair of Governors may be contacted using the following details:

governorholliss@charltonhouseindependentschool.co.uk
55-57 Midanbury Lane, Bitterne Park, Southampton, Hampshire, SO18 4DJ

The Chair of Governors will:

a. Acknowledge your complaint in writing within five working days.

b. Inform you how the matter will be dealt with and how matters will proceed.
c. Organise a panel hearing, normally within 10 working days of the acknowledgement.
    - Provide all relevant documentation to panel members and the complainant before the hearing.
    - Following the hearing, the panel will reach its decision and any recommendations.
    - The panel's decision and reasons will normally be sent to the complainant in writing within five working days of the hearing.
d. Ensure that the panel sends a letter to explain the findings and recommendations to you and, where relevant, the person complained about, along with reasons for it and any action being taken or proposed. (This will also be made available on the school premises for inspection by the proprietor and the Head Teacher.)
e. This should normally be managed within a period of twenty working days, starting from the date an acknowledgement of the complaint was sent. Factors including the availability of relevant parties, school closure periods, the complexity of the complaint, substantial supporting documentation, or concurrent statutory or regulatory processes may affect this timeframe. Where a revised timetable is required, the complainant will be informed in writing.
f. Ofsted and/or ISI will, on request, be provided with a written record of all complaints made during a specific period and the actions taken as a result of complaints. This will include whether they are resolved following a formal procedure, or proceed to a panel hearing.
g. The School will retain records of formal complaints for a minimum of three years. Records may be retained for longer where safeguarding, legal, insurance, employment, regulatory or other statutory requirements apply.

2. A Stage 3 complaint will be referred to the Governing Board complaints panel for consideration by the Chair of Governors. The Complaints Panel will consist of at least three persons not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint, one of whom shall be independent of the management and running of the School. The remaining panel members will be made up of Governors. Panel members will have had no prior involvement in the matters forming the subject of the complaint.

3. The purpose of the panel hearing is not normally to re-investigate the complaint, but to review the manner in which the complaint has been handled, consider whether the procedures were followed appropriately, and determine whether the conclusions reached were reasonable in all the circumstances. The panel may make findings and recommendations where it considers these to be appropriate.

4. You will be asked to present any papers you may have for circulation before the meeting. You may wish to be supported by a friend or relative. Legal representation will not normally be appropriate and if the complainant intends to bring a legal representative they should inform the School at least three working days prior to the hearing. If complainants decide not to attend the hearing, the panel will nevertheless consider the complaint in absentia, unless the complainant has indicated that they are now satisfied or do not wish to proceed further.

5. If possible, the panel will resolve the complaint immediately without the need for further investigation. Where further investigation is required, the panel will decide how it should be carried out. After due consideration of all facts it considers relevant, the panel will reach a decision and may make recommendations, which it shall complete within five working days of the hearing. The panel will write to the complainant informing them of its decision and the reasons for it. The panel's findings and, if any, recommendations will be sent in writing to the complainant, the Head Teacher, the Governors and, where relevant, the subject of the complaint.

6. If your complaint has still not been resolved, you may wish to seek independent legal advice. You may also contact ISI 0207 600 0100 or via email complaints@isi.net, or Ofsted 0300 123 4666. Complainants

may contact these bodies at any stage through the complaints process. Ofsted should also be contacted if it appears that there seems to be a possible breach of the EYFS requirements.

7. Any complaint that raises safeguarding concerns may be referred immediately to the Designated Safeguarding Lead and, where appropriate, external agencies. In such circumstances, safeguarding procedures may take precedence over the complaints process.

   If a child appears to be at risk, the school's Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy and guidelines will be followed, as will, the guidelines of Southampton (or Hampshire) Children's Safeguarding Partnership. In these cases, both the parent and relevant staff will work with the school's Designated Safeguarding Lead, governors and also with Ofsted/ISI to ensure a proper investigation of the complaint, followed by appropriate action.

After considering the complaint, the Panel may:

- Dismiss the appeal and uphold the Stage 2 decision;
- Uphold all or part of the appeal;
- Recommend further investigation;
- Recommend actions to resolve the complaint;
- Recommend changes to School policies, procedures or practice.

The decision of the Complaints Panel is final and concludes the School's internal complaints procedure.
The entire Stage 3 process should normally be completed within twenty working days of the acknowledgement being issued.

Persistent correspondence

Where repeated attempts are made to raise substantially the same complaint after all stages of the procedure have been exhausted, the School may determine that the matter has been concluded.

The School may also take reasonable steps to manage persistent, unreasonable or abusive correspondence where this places a disproportionate burden on School resources. Any such decision will be made fairly and proportionately and will not prevent legitimate concerns from being considered appropriately.

AI-Assisted, Complex and/or Extensive Complaints Submissions

The School recognises that complainants may choose to use artificial intelligence (AI) tools or other external assistance when preparing correspondence or complaints. Complaints will not be treated differently solely because AI or other support tools have been used in their preparation.

However, where complaints contain exceptionally large volumes of information, extensive supporting documentation, multiple allegations, lengthy correspondence, or material generated through AI-assisted processes that requires significant review and verification, the School may require additional time to consider the matters raised thoroughly and fairly.

In addition, where a complainant submits multiple requests or processes concurrently, including but not limited to complaints, Subject Access Requests (SARs), requests for erasure, requests for rectification, Freedom of Information requests (where applicable), safeguarding concerns, regulatory referrals, or other formal enquiries, the School will manage each matter in accordance with its separate legal and procedural obligations. Whilst the School will endeavour to progress matters as efficiently as possible, the existence of multiple simultaneous processes may affect the timescales for investigating and responding to a complaint.

In such circumstances:

- The School reserves the right to extend the timescales set out within this policy where it is reasonable and necessary to do so.
- Any extension will be proportionate to the complexity and volume of information submitted.
- The complainant will be informed in writing of the revised timescale and the reasons for the extension.
- The School may ask the complainant to clarify the specific issues being raised and identify the outcome sought in order to support an efficient and fair investigation.
- The School may, where appropriate, group related issues together to avoid unnecessary duplication of investigation.
- Where another statutory, legal, safeguarding or regulatory process is ongoing, the School may determine that certain aspects of a complaint cannot be considered until that separate process has concluded.

The School's objective is to ensure that all complaints are considered fairly, impartially and thoroughly, whilst maintaining a timely and effective process for all parties.

Recording Complaints and Confidentiality

Following resolution of a complaint, the school will keep a written record of all concerns and complaints made during Stage 1, 2 or Stage 3 of the procedure, and any action taken by the school regardless of whether the complaint was upheld or not.

Complaint records will be maintained in accordance with the School's Data Protection Policy, Records Retention Schedule, UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018.

Written records, statements and correspondence relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except where the secretary for state or a body conducting an inspection under section 162A of the 2002 Act, as amended, requests access to them. Ofsted and ISI will also be supplied, on request, with a written record of all complaints made during any specified period and the action taken as a result of the complaint.

This record will state whether the complaint was resolved at a preliminary stage or progressed to a panel and will be retained by the school. All complaints that reach a formal written stage will be recorded in the summary log kept on file in the school. This log will be made available for inspection on the school premises by the proprietor and the Head Teacher to the Secretary of State or to inspectors from appropriate bodies such as Ofsted/ISI conducting an inspection under S109 of the 2008 Act. The school will keep a written record of all complaints (written or not) together with a record of the outcomes of such complaints. This will be reviewed regularly by the Head Teacher and Chair of Governors and be made available to inspection bodies.

In addition to the procedures above:

- If Parents and/or carers of children in the EYFS do not think that the school meet the EYFS requirements and are still dissatisfied following the process outlined above, they may raise the issue directly with the ISI or Ofsted:

    - Independent Schools Inspectorate, CAP House, 9-12 Long Lane, London, EC1A 9HA
      0207 6000 100 or complaints@isi.net
      Raising a concern about a school

    - Ofsted, Piccadilly Gate, Store Street, Manchester. M1 2WD
      0300 123 4666

CIE@ofsted.gov.uk
https://complain.ofsted.gov.uk/

This policy is made available to all parents, staff and pupils.

- All written records of complaints are reviewed annually by both the Head Teacher and the Chair of Governors. In the year 2025/26 there was one formal complaint under this procedure and one panel hearing.

- Complaints are resolved either to the complainant's satisfaction, or with an otherwise appropriate outcome which balances the rights and duties of pupils, staff and parents.

- The Chair of Governors may be contacted using the following details:
  governorholliss@charltonhouseindependentschool.co.uk
  55-57 Midanbury Lane, Bitterne Park, Southampton, Hampshire, SO18 4DJ.

Related Guidance and Legislation

This policy has been prepared with reference to:

- The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, Part 7: *Manner in Which Complaints Are Handled*.
- Department for Education, *Independent School Standards Guidance* (current edition).
- Equality Act 2010.
- UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) and Data Protection Act 2018.
- Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Statutory Framework (where applicable).

The Governing Body of Charlton House Independent School will review this policy annually, or sooner if there are any legislative changes. The Governing Body of Charlton House Independent School will also review this policy following a complaint panel meeting to ensure that it met the requirement to provide a clear, fair and efficient complaints procedure.

Appendix 1. Timelines

Charlton House Independent School

Complaints Procedure: Process & Timescales

1 STAGE 1 - INFORMAL

Concern Raised → Discuss with Staff → Outcome
Immediate to 5 working days
If unresolved, proceed to Stage 2

2 STAGE 2 - FORMAL COMPLAINT

Written complaint within 10 days
Acknowledgement within 5 days
Meeting/investigation within 10 days
Written outcome issued
Completed within 20 working days

3 STAGE 3 - GOVERNORS PANEL

Appeal within 10 days of Stage 2 outcome
Acknowledgement within 5 days
Panel hearing within 10 days
Decision letter within 5 days
Completed within 20 working days

OVERALL JOURNEY

Stage 1 → Stage 2 → Stage 3 → Final Internal Decision

Love One Another

Appendix 2. Complaints Form

Name of complainant:	
Contact details:	Address:
	Telephone:
	Email:
Preferred Contact Method and day/time	
Outline of your complaint and how it has affected you (the complainant)/ pupil: Please identify the specific issues you wish the School to investigate and provide only documentation relevant to those issues. Where multiple concerns are raised, the School may ask for clarification in order to ensure a fair and efficient investigation.	
Have you discussed the matter already with a member of staff, if so, who? What was discussed? What was the outcome/resolution/actions agreed?	

What resolution(s) are you seeking? Action to be taken, if any?	
Signature:	
Date:	

For School / Chair of Governor's use:

Date received:	
Date acknowledged and by whom:	
Complaint Outcome; Upheld or Not Upheld	
Summary of action taken:	