Phoenix Arch School

Kind, Curious, Creative and Collaborative

Complaints Policy and Procedures

Revised draft October 2026

School	Phoenix Arch School
Approval body	Governing Body
Approval date	December 2026
Effective date	December 2026
Review date	One year after approval
Policy owner	Headteacher
Contact route	School office, marked Private and Confidential for the appropriate recipient. The office will provide the current Clerk to Governors contact details on request.

Phoenix Arch School is committed to listening to concerns, keeping children safe and working constructively with families. We will consider complaints fairly, explain our decisions and use what we learn to improve. Raising a complaint will not disadvantage a pupil or their family.

The revised procedure has three stages: informal resolution, formal investigation and a governing body review panel. It replaces the previous five-stage process from its effective date. For complaints already underway, the school will explain and agree a fair transition without removing an existing opportunity for review.

Key Message: The school strongly believes that most concerns can be resolved quickly and effectively through a face-to-face meeting with the Headteacher, where clear, focused discussion leads to practical solutions.

1 Who can complain and what this policy covers

Anyone may raise a complaint about the school's provision, services or facilities, including parents, carers and other service users. A concern is an issue that may be resolved through discussion; a complaint expresses dissatisfaction requiring a response. The school will clarify the appropriate stage rather than rely solely on the label used.

Concerns about school premises lettings should first be raised with the Bursar. If unresolved, they enter the formal stage below. Independent providers using school premises normally handle complaints about their own services; the school will still consider matters within its responsibility.

2 Other procedures and safeguarding

Type of complaint	Who to contact	Procedure
School provision or services	Class teacher or relevant staff member; then Headteacher	Use Stages 1 to 3 of this policy.
Admissions	Relevant admissions authority or Brent SEND team for EHC placement matters	Use the applicable admissions or statutory appeal route.
EHC assessment or plan decisions	Brent Council SEND service	Local authority process and SEND Tribunal appeal rights where applicable.
School SEND support or reasonable adjustments	Class teacher, SENCO or Headteacher	School complaints procedure for matters within the school's responsibility; statutory rights remain available.
Child protection or immediate risk	DSL; Chair or LADO where the concern involves the Headteacher	Safeguarding procedures and referral to children's social care, LADO or police as appropriate. Urgent action must not wait.
Suspension or permanent exclusion	Headteacher or Clerk for the relevant representation route	Statutory exclusion representation and review arrangements.
Staff grievance or whistleblowing	Contact named in the relevant staff policy	Staff grievance or whistleblowing procedure.
Parent complaint about staff conduct	Headteacher; Chair via Clerk if about Headteacher	Complaint considered with disciplinary or safeguarding procedures where necessary; employment details remain confidential.
Headteacher or governors	Chair or an impartial governor via Clerk	Use section 5 to ensure independent handling and review.
Personal data or CCTV data handling	School Data Protection Officer	Data protection complaints arrangements and ICO rights; school will explain applicable timescales.
Premises hire or independent provider	Bursar for school lettings; provider for its own service	School procedure for school responsibilities; provider's procedure for its own service.

Where a complaint involves several routes, the school will explain who is responsible for each part and coordinate its response. Parents can seek impartial SEND advice through SENDIASS. Separate procedures will not delay urgent safeguarding action.

3 Access support and fair treatment

Concerns may be raised in person, by telephone, by letter or by email. Formal complaints should normally be recorded in writing, but the school will help a person who needs support to do this. The complaint form is optional. A representative may act with the complainant's permission.

The school will discuss reasonable adjustments and communication needs. These may include help to record the complaint, an interpreter, accessible information, extra time, a support person, telephone or online meetings. A face-to-face meeting is encouraged where helpful but is not a compulsory condition for making or escalating a complaint.

Everyone will be treated respectfully. The school will consider the substance of a complaint, including criticism, without prejudging motives. Pupils' views will be sought in ways suited to their age, understanding and communication needs, without placing unnecessary demands on them.

4 Raising concerns and timescales

Please explain what happened, relevant dates, who was involved, any steps already taken and the outcome you would like. Relevant documents help us understand the concern. If a complaint is unclear, we will offer support and agree a summary of the issues for investigation.

Complaints should normally be raised within three months of the incident or the last incident in a related series. Later complaints will be considered where circumstances justify this, including new evidence, disability, safeguarding concerns or a reasonable explanation for delay. Reasons for not accepting a late complaint will be given with the available review route.

A school day means a day when the school is open to pupils. For routine complaints received during holidays, the school-day timetable starts on the first day of the next term or half term. Urgent safeguarding matters will be addressed without waiting. Where a deadline cannot be met, we will explain why, provide a revised date and keep the complainant informed.

Anonymous complaints will be assessed for seriousness and available evidence. The Headteacher, or Chair where appropriate, will decide whether investigation is warranted. Anonymous safeguarding information will not be disregarded.

5 Who handles the complaint

Concerns about classroom matters should normally begin with the class teacher. The SENCO, Deputy Headteacher or Headteacher can assist where needed. Formal complaints about staff other than the Headteacher, or about school practice, go to the Headteacher through the school office.

Complaints about the Headteacher go to the Chair of Governors through the Clerk. Complaints about an individual governor, including the Chair or Vice Chair, go to the Clerk for allocation to an appropriately skilled governor who has no conflict of interest.

Where a complaint concerns the Chair and Vice Chair jointly, most or all governors, or there is no suitable impartial governor, the Clerk will arrange independent investigation and review with appropriate governance or local authority advice. Panel members must have had no previous involvement. The subject of a complaint will not investigate or determine it.

Please use these routes rather than approaching individual governors informally, which could compromise their ability to review the complaint later.

6 Stage 1 Informal resolution

Raise the concern with the appropriate member of staff. We will seek to understand it, discuss practical solutions and record agreed actions. Where needed, a meeting with a senior leader or the Headteacher will be offered.

We aim to acknowledge the concern within five school days and provide an outcome within ten school days. If unresolved, or if informal discussion is unsuitable because of the seriousness or subject of the complaint, the matter can proceed to Stage 2. There is no requirement to repeat informal meetings indefinitely.

7 Stage 2 Formal investigation

Send the formal complaint to the appropriate recipient in section 5. Explain the unresolved issues and desired outcome. We will acknowledge it within five school days, confirm who will investigate and clarify the scope. Where necessary, an independent investigator may be appointed.

The investigator will examine relevant records, speak with those involved as needed, consider the complainant's evidence and give those complained about an opportunity to respond. Meetings and significant decisions will be recorded. Information will be shared only where necessary and lawful.

A written outcome will normally be sent within twenty school days of receiving the formal complaint. It will address each agreed issue, explain findings and reasons, and identify any remedy or improvement. Possible outcomes include an explanation, acknowledgement of a mistake, apology, corrective action or review of a procedure. The response will explain how to request Stage 3.

If another agency's investigation or legal proceedings affect the complaint, the school will assess whether any specific part needs to pause to avoid prejudice. It will explain the reason, scope and review date for any pause. Unaffected matters and urgent protective action will continue where possible.

8 Stage 3 Governing body review panel

If dissatisfied with Stage 2, write to the Clerk within ten school days of the written outcome. Identify the findings or handling you dispute and what remains unresolved. Exceptional circumstances and reasonable adjustments will be considered for late requests.

The Clerk will acknowledge the request within five school days and aim to arrange a panel within twenty school days. Any delay will be explained with a revised timetable. The panel will have three impartial members, normally governors, with no prior involvement in the complaint. Independent governors or an entirely independent panel will be arranged where necessary.

The complainant will normally be invited to a private hearing and may bring a friend, relative or representative. An accessible alternative, including written representations, may be agreed. The Clerk will seek suitable dates, explain the process and confirm arrangements at least five school days beforehand.

Relevant papers will normally be shared with the parties and panel at least five school days before the hearing, subject to lawful redaction. Late evidence will be considered fairly and may require an adjournment. The panel will address the complaint considered at Stage 2; separate new issues will normally begin at the appropriate earlier stage.

The Chair will introduce the panel, explain its remit and allow both parties to present their accounts, respond and ask relevant questions through the Chair. The panel may hear relevant witnesses and request further information. A clerk will keep a written record. Parties withdraw together while the panel deliberates.

The panel can uphold or dismiss the complaint in whole or in part, require further investigation, identify appropriate remedies and recommend improvements. Decisions are made by majority, on the evidence available. A reasoned written decision will normally be sent within ten school days of the hearing, including actions and external escalation information.

If a complainant cannot attend, the Clerk will consider their reasons and adjustments before rearranging or proceeding on the papers. The school will not treat non-attendance alone as withdrawal. Recordings of meetings require prior agreement, including consideration of reasonable adjustments. Relevant evidence already recorded will be assessed case by case for fairness, safeguarding and data protection.

9 Use of artificial intelligence when making a complaint

Complainants may use AI tools, including ChatGPT, to help organise their thoughts, improve wording, translate or summarise information. Using AI does not make a complaint less valid and will not, by itself, lead to rejection or restrictions.

The complainant should read the final submission and check that it accurately describes their concern. Dates, quotations, allegations and references to law or guidance should be checked. Explain the specific events and the outcome sought; avoid unnecessary repetition or unrelated material. It is not necessary to include legal arguments to have a concern considered.

Please protect privacy when using external AI services. Avoid entering identifiable information about children, staff or other families, or confidential school documents, into public AI tools. Remove identifying details where possible.

If a submission is lengthy or unclear, the school will help identify the key issues and may ask for clarification or an agreed summary. It will retain the original and will not refuse to consider a genuine concern solely because of its length, writing style, legal references or suspected AI use. Relevant SEND, equality and safeguarding concerns will be addressed through the appropriate route.

School staff must follow approved information security and data protection arrangements if using AI to assist with administration. They must not place confidential complaints material into unapproved tools. A responsible person will check any AI-assisted work, and decisions about complaints will be made by people considering the evidence.

10 Managing unreasonable behaviour and repeated correspondence

The school will distinguish the merits of a complaint from the way someone communicates. Being persistent, dissatisfied, emotional or critical, raising several concerns or using AI does not alone amount to unreasonable behaviour.

Action may be needed where contact becomes threatening, abusive or harassing, or its frequency and nature substantially prevent a fair investigation or disrupt school work despite attempts to agree workable arrangements. The Headteacher, or Chair where the Headteacher is involved, will assess the evidence and the person’s needs.

Normally we will explain the concern, offer a discussion and support, and give a written warning setting out reasonable expectations. Where necessary, a proportionate communication plan may identify a named contact, agreed appointments, response intervals or a manageable correspondence format. Reasonable adjustments and an urgent safeguarding route will remain available.

Any restriction will state the reasons, scope, duration and review date, normally within one term, and how to request review by the Chair or an uninvolved governor. Immediate measures may be necessary where there is a credible safety threat; reasons and review arrangements will follow promptly. Site access decisions will follow the applicable separate process.

Once all stages are complete and the school has explained its final position and external route, it may stop replying to repeated points already answered. Significant new evidence and genuine new complaints will still be assessed. No restriction will remove access to the published review stages or amount to a blanket ban on raising concerns.

11 Records confidentiality and learning

The school will maintain a secure record of formal complaints, stages reached, correspondence, evidence, findings and actions, in accordance with its retention schedule. Confidentiality will be respected but cannot be guaranteed absolutely where lawful sharing is necessary for investigation, safeguarding or regulatory duties.

The Headteacher will report anonymised themes and improvement actions to governors. Those who may later hear a complaint will not receive unnecessary case details. Governors will review this policy annually and ensure the current version is available on the school website and from the office.

12 External routes after the school process

Stage 3 completes the school's internal procedure. If the complainant believes the school has acted unlawfully or unreasonably, failed to perform an education duty or failed to follow its published procedure, they can contact the Department for Education through its school complaints service. DfE does not normally rehear the merits of an individual complaint.

Information and the current route are available at https://www.gov.uk/complain-about-school. Normally the school procedure should be completed first, although safeguarding risks or obstruction of the process may justify earlier contact. Separate statutory appeal and regulator routes remain available where applicable.

Key Message:

Most concerns can be resolved quickly through a clear, focused conversation—often in a face-toface meeting with the Headteacher.

Phoenix Arch School will always remain open to genuine new concerns, but reserves the right to manage: Repeated, excessive, or unfocused complaints in order to protect staff time and ensure that all concerns are handled fairly and efficiently.

Appendix 1 Complaint form

This form is optional. You may send a letter or email, or ask the school for help to record your complaint. Return it through the school office to the appropriate recipient in section 5, marked Private and Confidential.

Your name and preferred contact details

_____
_____

Pupil name and your relationship if relevant

_____

Any communication needs reasonable adjustments or representative

_____
_____

What happened including relevant dates and the issues you want investigated

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Who you have already contacted and the response received

_____
_____
_____

What outcome you are seeking

_____
_____
_____

Documents or evidence attached

_____
_____

Date and confirmation that this reflects your complaint

_____

For school use

Date received: _____ Stage: _____ Acknowledged: _____

Investigator or panel contact: _____ Response due: _____

Appendix 2 Timetable

Stage 1 — acknowledge within 5 school days; aim to resolve within 10 school days.

Stage 2 — acknowledge within 5 school days; written outcome normally within 20 school days of receipt.

Stage 3 request — normally within 10 school days of the Stage 2 outcome; late requests considered on their circumstances.

Stage 3 — acknowledge within 5 school days; aim to convene within 20 school days; papers normally circulated at least 5 school days before the hearing.

Panel outcome — normally within 10 school days of the hearing.

If a deadline changes, explain the reason and confirm a revised date. School days exclude weekends, school holidays and closure days.

Sources

Department for Education — school complaints procedures guidance for maintained schools https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-complaints-procedures

Department for Education — maintained schools governance guide