

Suggestions & Complaints

Policy

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1. Introduction

King Edwin School aims to provide a high-quality service. We recognise, however, that there may be occasions when we get things wrong and parents/ carers or young people, and other stakeholders are unhappy about some aspect of our service. The aim of our Complaints Policy is to give clear details of what steps can be taken to try to get things put right where there is a problem and to allow us to keep an eye on the quality of service we provide so that we can continually work to improve it. This policy follows the requirements set out in part 7 of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, which states that we must have and make available a written procedure to deal with complaints from parents/carers of pupils at the school.

It also takes into consideration GDPR guidelines and the Data Protection Act 2018 when handling sensitive and confidential information such as a complaint.

2. Definition of a Complaint

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction (whether justified or not) made about the standard or quality of service and action or lack of action. This is by King Edwin School or its staff affecting an individual or a group of individuals in receipt of a service provided by the organisation.

It is important to differentiate between a young person or other stakeholder notifying King Edwin School of a routine request or other care

or education matter. In such instances, these should be dealt with through established reporting procedures. A complaint, under the terms of this policy, will occur where there has been a failure in routine service delivery and the service user has then expressed their dissatisfaction with the earlier service or action taken.

3. Key Principles

King Edwin School's Complaints Policy is based upon four key principles:

- It will be responsive - We will offer those who complain a clear response to their complaint. Responses will be provided within clearly defined timescales and in a sensitive and sympathetic manner.
- It will seek to improve service delivery - It will give us a second chance to achieve satisfaction, prevent recurrence and thus help shape future improvements in service delivery.
- It will be easy to access and be well publicised - King Edwin School will accept complaints from young people, their parents/carers or from those appointed to represent the complainant. This could be either in person, by telephone, by letter or via the internet. King Edwin School's Complaints Policy will be made available in large print or other formats if and when required. Assistance will be provided to young people with additional needs who wish to make a complaint.
- It will be well managed - Our handling of complaints will aim to be objective and to resolve problems as soon as possible in a manner

- which respects confidentiality and privacy.

4. Using the Complaints Policy

King Edwin School's Complaints Policy may be used by those young people or adults who:

- Attend our school.
- Are parents/carers of a child or young person attending the school?
- Are professionals charged with overseeing the placement of a child or young person?

As far as possible, all complaints will be treated in confidence. The only exception to this will be where there is a statutory requirement placed on King Edwin School to notify specific agencies regarding certain types of complaints. The name of the person(s) making a complaint will not be divulged any more than is necessary within King Edwin School. However, it should be recognised that if a complaint involves another young person, or member of staff, it may be very difficult for us to investigate the matter without talking to them.

Where we believe it is necessary, we will share or release information to others. For example, external agencies such as the Ofsted and Children's Services of placing authorities. Nevertheless, if asked to maintain confidentiality, we will try to respect the complainant's wishes. However, this may impact upon our ability to reach a satisfactory conclusion to the

complaint.

Where complaints are made in relation to the general management of our services. And in which other stakeholders may reasonably have an interest, the process may involve meeting with groups of people to help us reach a satisfactory resolution. We will not normally deal with anonymous complaints, other than in a very general way. This is given the difficulty of our carrying out a full investigation. However, we will retain such complaints on file as they may provide an early warning of a service delivery failure.

5. The Complaints Procedure

Our complaints procedure consists of various stages. It is envisaged that a complainant will usually lodge their complaint at the earliest stage. They will then proceed, as appropriate, through the subsequent stages. However, all complainants have the right to bypass King Edwin School's internal complaints procedure and complain to the Head Office or to the Department for Education directly should they wish to do so.

King Edwin School aims to resolve all complaints as quickly as possible. However, inevitably some issues will be more complex and therefore may require longer to be fully investigated. Consequently, timescales given for handling and responding to complaints are indicative only. If a matter requires more detailed investigation, the complainant will receive an interim response describing what is to be done to deal with the matter, when a full reply can be expected and from whom.

If the complaint is trivial or repeats in substance a complaint already made and resolved previously then King Edwin School may decline to consider it.

As part of the complaints procedure, King Edwin School shall ensure that there is an adequate system in place to record details of all complaints made. Including details of how the complaints are resolved, and whether any further action is to be taken. This system will also record the time taken to respond to each complaint. It will be monitored every quarter to ensure that we are providing the most effective, efficient and high-quality complaints handling service.

6. Informal Consideration of a Complaint

Prior to submitting a formal complaint and where appropriate, complainants should try to discuss and resolve the matter with staff from the school. The most appropriate SLT member will be instrumental in supporting this and will act to support the best interests of the young person and family.

7. Formal Consideration of a Complaint

While we welcome the opportunity to deal with all complaints ourselves. All complainants have the right to bypass stages one and two of the formal complaints procedure and proceed immediately to stage three and complain directly to the Department for Education if they so wish.

a. Stage One - Initial Investigation

- In the first instance, if a complainant is unable to resolve the issue informally, they should write to the most senior member of staff

responsible for the area of the complaint (e.g., Head of School). The written document should set out the details of any complaint, the consequences for the complainant as a result and the remedy sought.

- Where a complaint is made and the person receiving the complaint has no authority to deal with it, they shall refer the complaint to the appropriate person and advise the complainant accordingly.
- A complaint shall not normally be considered if it is received more than TWELVE (12) months after the last incident to which the complaint refers.
- Any extension of the above time limit shall be granted only where there is a reasonable explanation for the delay in presenting the complaint. The Senior Leadership Team shall be responsible for deciding whether any such delay is reasonable or not.
- A formal complaint made in writing will be acknowledged within FIVE (5) working days and the complainant will be given a reference number and be told who is dealing with their complaint.
- A formal complaint will be investigated, and the complainant will receive a written response within TWENTY-EIGHT (28) days or longer if there has been prior agreement to prolong the investigation.
- In considering the complaint at stage one, the member of staff investigating the complaint (the "initial investigator") may use the following methods to ensure that they have access to all the relevant

facts in assessing the complaint:

- The initial investigator may hold face to face meetings with the complainant and/or the person(s) that the complaint is about if required.
- The initial investigator may consider all available evidence, written or otherwise (except for unauthorised recorded material).
- While confidentiality and privacy will be respected, the initial investigator may need to contact other persons materially associated with the complaint for their responses. In this event, the initial investigator will inform the complainant of his/her intention before contacting any third party.
- The investigator will, as a matter of course, contact the SEN officer for the Local Authority the young person belongs to, if the complaint relates to a young person at King Edwin School.
- At the conclusion of stage one, the initial investigator will write (or telephone if the complaint was over the phone) to the complainant and any person(s) that the complaint was about, informing them of the outcome of the complaint. They will let them know the reasons behind any decision reached and advise them of any further action to be taken. The complainant will also be advised of the possibility of proceeding to stage two if they are unhappy with the decision made.

b. Stage Two - Review

- If the complainant is unhappy with the response, they can ask that a

panel review the complaint. The Panel considering a complaint at this stage will comprise of at least three people. A request for a review should be submitted to the Senior Leadership Team in writing, and the document should state the grounds for requesting a review. Along with details of the initial member of staff who investigated the complaint and copies of all correspondence and documentation.

- A request for a review of a complaint should be submitted by the complainant to the Senior Leadership Team within TWENTY-EIGHT (28) days of receiving the stage one written response.
- Any extension of the above time limit shall be granted only where there is a reasonable explanation for the delay in presenting the complaint. The panel shall be responsible for deciding whether any such delay is reasonable or not.
- A complainant can expect the relevant member of the panel or in some cases, the Director reviewing the complaint to acknowledge a request within FIVE (5) days and to respond within TWENTY-EIGHT (28) days or longer if there has been prior agreement to prolong the investigation.
- In considering the complaint at stage two, the relevant member of the panel reviewing the complaint may use any of the methods detailed in stage one for reviewing the complaint.
- The relevant member of the panel may also send a copy of the stage

two request to the initial investigator with a request that they respond to any issues raised. The relevant member of the panel or the Director reviewing the complaint may seek additional information from the complainant or any other associated person to ensure that the panel or the Senior Leader reviewing the complaint has access to all the relevant facts in assessing the complaint.

- At the conclusion of stage two, the relevant member of the panel or the Director reviewing the complaint will write to the complainant and any person(s) that the complaint is about. Informing them of the outcome of the complaint, the reasons behind any decision reached and advising of any further action to be taken. The complainant will also be advised of the possibility of proceeding to stage three if they are unhappy with the decision made.

c. Stage Three Complaints Panel

- At the conclusion of stage 2 if the complainant(s) are not satisfied with the outcome of a written complaint they have the right to have their complaint considered by the Complaints Panel.
- The complainant should put their complaint in writing and submit a formal request for it to be considered by a Complaints Panel.
- A Complaints Panel will be convened. There will be at least three members of the panel, all of whom will have had no direct involvement in the previous consideration of the complaint and one of whom is

independent. The independent member will have no management responsibility for the day to day running of the school and is appointed for their skills, knowledge, attributes and independence in these matters.

- A complainant can expect the chair of the Complaints Panel reviewing the complaint to acknowledge the request within FIVE (5) days.
- Advanced notice of the hearing will be given to the complainant(s).
- The complainant(s) have the right to be accompanied to the panel hearing if they wish. The notice of hearing will appraise them of this.
- A written outcome including all findings and recommendations will be delivered and notified to the complainant, Senior Managers, the School Leadership Team and if relevant the person complained about within TWENTY-EIGHT (28) days of the Complaints Panel.

d. Stage Four - Department for Education

- Any complainant who receives education services at King Edwin School has the right to complain directly to the Department for Education.
- Concerns about Independent Schools can be made in writing to:

Independent and Boarding Team
Department for Education
Mowden Hall
Staindrop Road
Darlington
DL3 9BG.

- King Edwin School staff will assist young people, their families and carers with any aspect of making a complaint should the need arise.
- Parents/carers can have representation or be accompanied to any complaint hearing if they request it.

e. Stage Five -

- If the complainant is not satisfied with the way in which the school and the Department for Education have handled their complaint, they can forward their complaint to the ombudsman. At the moment, the ombudsman can only deal with certain issues about school:
 - school transport services
 - special educational needs
 - student support
 - school admissions
 - permanent exclusions from school.

Details of how to contact an ombudsman to make a complaint can be found at

<http://www.adviceguide.org.uk>

8. Placing Authorities

Local Authorities placing children and young people at King Edwin School will have a right to complain to the school. Parents/carers have the right to complain to the Local Authority responsible for placing the child or young

person.

Again, we would stress our desire to have the opportunity to resolve any problems before they are taken to a Local Authority. However, should a complainant wish to complain to their placing authority, relevant contact details are available from King Edwin School.

9. Independent Advice

King Edwin School will always try to resolve complaints informally. However, should a complainant feel it is important that they get independent advice before proceeding with a formal complaint, the following local agency may be able to help:

The Citizens Advice Bureau, <http://www.adviceguide.org.uk>

10. Suggestions & Comments

Complaints tell us something about our service performance. However, we also welcome suggestions and comments on how we can improve our service. We understand that there may be some resistance to lodging a formal complaint. Therefore, we encourage young people and other stakeholders to write to us with their suggestions and comments for improving all our services. To assist in this, we will make suggestion forms available within every establishment. These can be completed and returned to King Edwin School for consideration and action as appropriate.

11. Redress

If King Edwin School is at fault, where possible, redress should be offered.

Including an explanation of what went wrong, what steps will be taken to prevent a recurrence and what redress is proposed. These details will be outlined as part of our response to individual complaints.

12. Summary

To ensure we continue to provide the best possible complaints handling service for our stakeholders, this policy will be subject to ongoing evaluation and annual review.

Staff involved in complaints handling will be consulted for their views and suggestions on how the policy may be improved.

King Edwin School's complaints and suggestions policy provides a framework to maximise the capture of stakeholders' feedback and ensure that it is used to enhance service standards and inform the quality improvement process.

Written records of all complaints and their outcomes will be filed. All correspondence regarding complaints will be stored in a confidential manner but will be available for inspection by the statutory services as and when required.