

Complaints Policy

This policy applies to all areas of the School including the Boarding House and EYFS.

This policy is reviewed, authorised and approved annually by the Head and Bursar on behalf of Board of Governors and updated as needed on an interim basis by the Bursar.

Version 202009-02 of this document was updated by the Bursar (Martin Sims) on: 1st September 2020

Introduction

Edge Grove School prides itself on the quality of the teaching, extra-curricular activity and pastoral care provided to its pupils. However, there may be occasions when parents are unhappy about some aspect of school life. We believe that parents should feel comfortable in expressing any reasonable concern and that the school will respond in a positive, non-defensive manner. Edge Grove will make the details of its complaints procedures available to all parents of pupils and of prospective pupils on its website and in the school office during the school day. Edge Grove will ensure that parents of pupils and parents of prospective pupils who request it are made aware that this document is published and available, and the form in which it is published and available. Should a parent wish to make a complaint, they can expect it to be taken extremely seriously by the School in accordance with this Policy and procedure.

The School will make available on the School's website or upon request to the School to parents of pupils and of prospective pupils details of the complaints procedure and the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year. This element of the policy is in accordance with paragraph 33(k) of Part 7, Schedule 1 to the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2014 (published in January 2015), and these details will also be provided, on request, to the Chief Inspector, the Secretary of State or the ISI for the purposes of section 162A(1) of the Education Act 2002 (as subsequently amended). This policy is also drawn up having regard to Standard 18 of the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools (April 2015).

This policy applies equally to the parents of all pupils at the School, regardless of age or boarding status (note that there are minor variations in procedure that apply to complaints made in writing relating to the requirements under the Statutory Framework for the EYFS – these are detailed within the policy).

Whilst the policy is available to the parents of current or prospective pupils, the policy may, solely at the School's discretion, also be applicable to the parents of pupils who have left the school where the complaint has been received prior to the pupil leaving the School. This policy is also available, at Stage 3 only, under circumstances where parents may wish to appeal against a decision to permanently exclude a pupil from the School.

No complaint may be brought under the Policy in relation to the non-payment of any sum(s) owing to the school. If a parent has a complaint regarding any action taken (or proposed to be taken) by the School as a result of his/her failure to pay any sum(s) owing to the school the parent may write to the Clerk to the Governors at the School who will refer the matter to the Chair of the Governors. Similarly, if a parent wishes to make a complaint, their attention will be drawn to the School's standard Terms & Conditions under which a place is accepted; the making of a complaint does not remove the obligation to settle fees due and payable under those terms and conditions.

What Constitutes a Complaint?

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction with a real or perceived problem. It may be made about the school as a whole, about a specific department or about an individual member of staff. A complaint is likely to arise if a parent believes that the school has done something wrong, or failed to do so something that it should have done or acted unfairly.

Parents can be assured that all concerns and complaints will be treated seriously and confidentially. The school is here for your child and you can be assured that your child will not be penalised for a complaint that you raise in good faith.

Timeframe for Dealing with Complaints

All complaints will be handled seriously and sensitively. They will be acknowledged within five working days if received during term time and as soon as practicable during holiday periods. It is in everyone's interest to resolve a complaint as speedily as possible: the school's target is to complete the first two stages of the procedure within 28 days if the complaint is lodged during term-time and as soon as practicable during holiday periods.

Stage 3, the Appeal Panel Hearing, will be completed within a further 28 days, if the appeal is lodged during term-time and as soon as practicable during holiday periods.

Recording Complaints

Following resolution of a complaint, the school will keep a written record of all complaints and at which stage they may be resolved and any action taken as a result of the complaint. At the school's discretion, additional records may be kept which may contain the following information:

- Date when the issue was raised
- Name of parent
- Name of pupil
- Description of the issue
- Records of all the investigations (if appropriate)
- Witness statements (if appropriate)
- Name of member (s) of staff handling the issue at each stage
- Copies of all correspondence on the issue (including emails and records of phone conversations)

Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except to the extent required under paragraph 33(k) of Part 7, Schedule 1 to the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2014 by the Secretary of State or where disclosure is required by the ISI under Section 109 of the Education and Skills Act 2008 (as amended), or under other legal authority.

Related Policies & Documents

- School Code of Conduct
- Behaviour Management Policy (Incorporating policies on Rewards & Sanctions and Discipline & Exclusions)
- School Terms and Conditions of Entry
- The Alternative Dispute Resolution for Consumer Disputes (Competent Authorities and Information) Regulations 2015
- The Alternative Dispute Resolution for Consumer Disputes (Amendment) Regulations 2015

Stage 1 – Informal Resolution

- It is hoped that most complaints and concerns will be resolved quickly and informally.
- If parents have a concern they should normally contact their child's Form Tutor or, where the child is a full or weekly boarder, the Head of Boarding. In many cases, the matter will be resolved straightaway by this means to the parents' satisfaction before it becomes any more serious. If the Form Tutor or Head of Boarding cannot resolve the matter alone, it may be necessary for them to consult the Head of Pre Prep, Head of School or one of the two Deputy Heads (Academic or Pastoral).
- If in the case of a complaint made to either the Head of Pre Prep or the Deputy Heads, the Deputy Head will liaise between the parents and relevant staff member(s) in an effort to resolve the situation informally.
- A written record of all concerns and complaints, including the date on which they were received and the action taken as a result of the complaint, will be made by the Form Tutor or other member of staff in receipt of the complaint. These records must be copied to the Head/Bursar to maintain a central file. Should the matter not be resolved within 14 days or in the event that the Form Tutor and the parent fail to reach a satisfactory resolution then parents will be advised to proceed with their complaint in accordance with Stage 2 of this Procedure.
- If, however, the complaint is against the Head, parents should make their complaint directly to the Chair of Governors, who can be contacted in confidence via the Clerk to the Governors at School.

Stage 2 – Formal Resolution

- If the complaint cannot be resolved under Stage 1, then the parents should put their complaint in writing to the Head. The Head will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action to take.
- The Head will seek to meet the parents concerned to discuss the matter as soon as possible but, during the school term within 14 days and, during the school holiday period, within 28 days, of receiving the complaint. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage.
- Written complaints about the fulfilment of the EYFS requirements will be investigated by the Head in conjunction with the Head of the Pre Prep Department and the complainant notified of the outcome of the investigation within 28 days. The record of any such complaints investigated under Stage 2 will be made available to Ofsted and ISI on request.
- It may be necessary for the Head to carry out further investigations and, in such cases the parents will be informed of this process with a date agreed for follow up action and meetings.
- The Head will keep a written record of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint as well as a note of any resolution at this stage.
- Once the Head is satisfied that, in so far as is practicable, all of the relevant facts have been established, a decision will be made and parents will be informed of this decision in writing. The Head will also give reasons for his decision.
- If the complaint is against the Head, the Chair of Governors will call for a full report from the Head and for all the relevant documents. The Chair may also call for a briefing from members of staff, and will, in most cases, speak to or meet with the parents to discuss the matter further. Once the Chair is satisfied that, so far as is practicable, all of the relevant facts have been

established, the parents will be informed of the decision in writing. The Chair will give reasons for his/her decision.

- If parents are still not satisfied with the decision, they should proceed to the more formal Stage 3 of this Procedure.

Stage 3 – Panel Hearing

- If parents seek to invoke Stage 3 (following failure to reach an earlier resolution at Stage 2), they will be referred to the Chair of Governors, or in his/her absence or in the case of a complaint against the Head in which the Chair has already been involved at Stage 2, the Clerk to the Governors, who has been appointed by the Governors to call hearings of the Complaints' Panel.
- The matter will then be referred to the Complaints' Panel for consideration. The 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 of the School. Each of the Panel members shall be appointed by the Board of Governors. The Chair of the Governors (or, in cases where the Chair has been involved in stage 2, the Clerk to the Governors), on behalf of the Panel, will then acknowledge the complaint and schedule a hearing to take place as soon as practicable within 14 days of the referral. This time frame may not necessarily be achievable during School holiday periods.
- If the Panel deems it necessary, it may require that further particulars of the complaint or any related matter be supplied in advance of the hearing to all parties not later than seven days prior to the hearing.
- The parents may attend the hearing and be accompanied to the hearing by one other person should they wish. This may be a relative, teacher or friend. Legal representation will not normally be appropriate.
- If possible, the Panel will resolve the parents' complaint immediately without the further need for investigation.
- Where further investigation is required, the Panel will decide how it should be carried out.
- After due consideration of all facts they consider relevant, the Panel will reach a decision and may make recommendations, which it shall complete within 14 days of the Hearing.
- The Panel will write to the parents informing them of its decision and the reasons for it within 14 days of the hearing. The decision of the Panel will be final. The Panel's findings and, if any, recommendations will be sent by electronic mail or otherwise given to the parents, and, where relevant, the person about whom the complaint had been lodged as well as to the Head and Board of Governors; a file copy of the decision will be available for inspection on the School premises by the Board of Governors and the Head.
- The Head will ensure that a copy of the panel's findings is maintained along with the files referred to under stages 1 & 2 together with the details of any action taken.

The same procedure detailed in Stage 3 above will also form the appeals process for parents wishing to appeal against an exclusion decision taken by the School. For further details see the School's Behaviour Management Policy which is available on the School's website or on request from the School Office.

Record Keeping

The School maintains records of all complaints made under this policy and any subsequent actions taken and the number of complaints dealt with under this policy in the preceding school year is advised to parents through updates to this policy which is also available from the School Office at any time.

Complaints in Past Years

There were 4 complaints investigated and resolved under Stage 3 and one under Stage 2 of this policy in the school year 2019/20.

External Agencies

Parents may, at any stage of the complaint procedure, feel free to contact the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) on 020 7600 0100 or by email at concerns@isi.net

Parents of pupils in the EYFS setting, who believe the School is not meeting the EYFS requirements, may contact either ISI as above or directly to Ofsted via email to enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk or by telephone on 0300 123 4666.

Edge Grove School will provide ISI (and Ofsted for EYFS), on request, with a written record of all complaints made during any specified period, and the action which was taken as a result of each complaint. The record of any such formal complaints will be kept for at least 5 years.

Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR)

From 1 October 2015, under EU regulation, ADR applies to all contracts for services and the School's contracts with parents therefore fall within its scope.

ADR takes effect when the School's internal complaint-handling procedures detailed above in Stages 1 – 3, is exhausted without resolution of the matter. In this unlikely eventuality, the School is required to provide parents in writing with the following:

- an appropriate statement to the effect that the School is unable to settle the parental complaint and
- the name and website address of an ADR provider that could deal with the complaint, if the parent wishes to use ADR.

However, parents are advised that the School is not required to submit to an ADR procedure.

Martin Sims
Bursar
September 2020