

ESNE 25

Suggestions and Complaints Policy

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Approval Date (original)	September 2014
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Review Date	September 2026
Next Review Date	September 2027

1. Purpose and statutory framework

King Edwin School aims to provide a high-quality, safe and responsive education service. We welcome feedback and recognise that concerns and complaints can help us identify where something has gone wrong, put matters right where possible and improve future practice.

This procedure is drawn up and will be effectively implemented in accordance with Schedule 1, Part 7, paragraph 33 of the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 and the Department for Education's Independent School Standards guidance (April 2026).

For the statutory purposes of Part 7, this procedure deals with complaints from parents/carers of pupils currently attending the school. King Edwin School may also receive concerns, suggestions or complaints from pupils, professionals, placing authorities and other stakeholders; these will be handled fairly and through the most appropriate route.

The policy will be made available to parents/carers, including on the school website and in an accessible format on request.

2. Principles

- Accessible and SEND-responsive: pupils and families will be offered reasonable adjustments, communication support, easy-read or alternative formats where required.
- Fair and impartial: complaints will be considered objectively by people who are not compromised by prior involvement.
- Non-adversarial and solution-focused: the school will seek early resolution where appropriate without restricting a parent's right to progress through the procedure.
- Timely: the school will work to the clear timescales in this policy and will explain any unavoidable delay.
- Confidential: information will be shared only with those who need it for the proper handling of the complaint, subject to statutory and inspection requirements.
- Safeguarding-led: concerns indicating that a child may be at risk will be referred immediately through safeguarding procedures and will not wait for the complaints process.
- Learning-focused: outcomes, themes and actions will inform school improvement.

3. Definitions and scope

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction about the standard of service, action taken, or failure to take action by King Edwin School or its staff, where a response or remedy is sought.

A concern is an issue raised for consideration or resolution before it becomes a formal complaint. The school encourages concerns to be raised early.

3.1 Matters dealt with under other procedures

Some matters have separate statutory or organisational routes. Where appropriate, the school will explain the correct route and will not use this procedure to displace another process. Examples include:

- child protection or allegations that a child is at risk of harm – dealt with immediately under the Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy and KCSIE arrangements;
- allegations about adults working with children – referred to the Principal, Designated Safeguarding Lead and/or Local Authority Designated Officer as appropriate;
- staff grievances, disciplinary matters and whistleblowing – dealt with under the relevant employment or whistleblowing procedure;

- data protection rights or data protection complaints – dealt with under the Data Protection Policy and applicable information-rights procedure;
- EHCP content, statutory assessment or local-authority decisions – routes may include the local authority's process, mediation and/or the SEND Tribunal, depending on the issue;
- admissions of prospective pupils – Part 7 does not require the complaints procedure to cover a failure to admit a prospective pupil, although the school will respond appropriately to concerns about its own administration;
- matters subject to legal proceedings where continuing the complaints process could prejudice those proceedings.

4. Accessibility, pupil voice and representation

King Edwin School is an independent special school supporting pupils with SEMH and associated SEND. The school will therefore take active steps to remove barriers to making or participating in a complaint.

- Complaints may initially be raised in person, by telephone, email or letter. Formal Stage 2 complaints should normally be put in writing; reasonable assistance will be provided where this creates a barrier.
- A parent/carers may ask another person to help them formulate their complaint.
- Pupils will be supported to express concerns in a way suited to their communication needs. A pupil's concern may also be raised by a parent/carers or appropriate advocate.
- Reasonable adjustments may include additional processing time, accessible meeting arrangements, alternative formats, communication aids or support from a trusted adult.
- No pupil will be disadvantaged because they or their parent/carers has raised a concern or complaint in good faith.

5. Safeguarding and confidentiality

If information received through a complaint suggests that a child is suffering or is likely to suffer harm, safeguarding action takes priority. The matter must be passed immediately to the Designated Safeguarding Lead, or to the appropriate senior person where the allegation concerns a member of staff or the Principal.

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 disclosure is otherwise required or permitted by law.

Anonymous concerns will be considered on their merits. The school may be limited in its ability to investigate, but safeguarding, welfare, misconduct or other serious issues will not be disregarded merely because the source is anonymous.

6. Overview of the three-stage procedure

Stage	Route	Lead	Normal timescale
1	Informal concern/complaint	Relevant staff member / senior leader	Acknowledged promptly; aim to resolve within 10 school days
2	Formal written complaint	Principal or nominated investigator	Acknowledge within 5 school days; written outcome normally within 20 school days
3	Complaints panel hearing	Panel appointed by/on behalf of proprietor	Acknowledge within 5 school days; hearing normally within 20 school days; outcome normally within 10 school days of hearing

School days means days on which pupils are normally expected to attend school. Complaints received during school holidays will normally be treated as received on the first school day after the holiday. If a deadline cannot reasonably be met, the school will tell the complainant why and provide a revised date.

7. Stage 1 – Informal resolution

Parents/carers are encouraged, where appropriate, to raise a concern as soon as possible with the member of staff best placed to resolve it. A senior leader may support the discussion where this would help.

- The school will listen to the concern, clarify the issues and ask what outcome the complainant is seeking.
- Relevant information will be considered and a response given as soon as reasonably practicable, normally within 10 school days.
- If the parent/carer remains dissatisfied, they may proceed to Stage 2. The school will explain how to do so.
- Use of Stage 1 does not prevent urgent safeguarding action or referral to another statutory process where necessary.

8. Stage 2 – Formal written complaint

If the parent/carer is dissatisfied with the Stage 1 response, they may make a formal complaint in writing to the Principal. The complaint should identify the issues, relevant facts, steps already taken and the outcome sought. The school will provide reasonable help to record a complaint where disability, SEND, literacy or communication needs make a written complaint difficult.

The complaint will normally be acknowledged within 5 school days. The Principal will investigate or appoint an appropriate investigator who has sufficient independence from the matters complained about.

8.1 Complaints about senior leaders

A complaint about the Principal will be referred directly to the proprietor or a suitably authorised representative who has not been involved in the matters complained about. Where a complaint concerns a person who would ordinarily oversee the process, responsibility will be reassigned so that the complaint can be handled impartially.

8.2 Investigation

- meet or speak with the complainant where useful;
- consider relevant written, electronic and other evidence;
- speak with staff, pupils or other persons where necessary and proportionate;
- seek information from a placing authority or other agency only where relevant and lawful;
- keep an appropriate written record of the investigation and decision.

The school will normally provide a written Stage 2 outcome within 20 school days of receiving the formal complaint. The response will address the issues raised, give reasons for the conclusions, identify any action or redress, and explain the right to request a Stage 3 panel hearing if the parent/carers remains dissatisfied.

A request to proceed to Stage 3 should normally be made within 10 school days of the Stage 2 outcome. The school may accept a later request where there is a reasonable explanation, including where SEND, disability, illness, bereavement or other significant circumstances affected the complainant's ability to act sooner.

9. Stage 3 – Complaints panel hearing

Where a parent/carers remains dissatisfied following Stage 2, the proprietor will arrange a hearing before a complaints panel.

- The panel 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 King Edwin School.
- The panel will be appointed by or on behalf of the proprietor.
- The parent/carers may attend and may be accompanied if they wish. Reasonable adjustments will be made where required.
- The hearing will normally take place within 20 school days of receipt of the Stage 3 request. The complainant will receive reasonable written notice of the date and practical arrangements.
- Relevant papers will be circulated to the panel and parties in sufficient time for fair consideration, subject to safeguarding, confidentiality and data-protection requirements.

9.1 Role of the panel

The panel will review the complaint fairly and independently. It may uphold the complaint in whole or in part, reject it, or make findings that do not fit neatly within those categories. The panel may make recommendations to the proprietor or school.

9.2 Panel outcome

The panel's findings and recommendations will normally be issued in writing within 10 school days of the hearing. A copy will be provided to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about. A copy will also be available for inspection on the school premises by the proprietor and the Principal/headteacher.

The Stage 3 decision concludes King Edwin School's internal complaints procedure.

10. Records of complaints

King Edwin School will keep a written record of all complaints made under the formal Stage 2 procedure. The record will state:

- whether the complaint was resolved following the formal procedure or proceeded to a panel hearing;
- the action taken by the school as a result of the complaint, regardless of whether the complaint was upheld;
- the outcome and relevant dates.

Records will be stored securely and retained in accordance with the school's Data Protection Policy and records-retention arrangements. The school will also make available to parents, in accordance with the Independent School Standards, the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year.

11. Persistent, duplicate or unreasonable conduct

The school will not reject a complaint merely because it is inconvenient, strongly expressed or considered minor. A complainant will normally be allowed to complete the procedure.

Where substantially the same complaint has already completed the procedure and no material new evidence is provided, the school may explain that the matter is closed and provide the previous outcome. Where conduct becomes abusive, threatening or unreasonably persistent, the school may set proportionate communication arrangements while ensuring that legitimate new concerns, particularly safeguarding concerns, can still be raised.

12. External routes after the school procedure

The Department for Education (DfE) does not act as an appeal body for the merits of individual complaints about independent schools. It may, however, consider information suggesting that an independent school is failing to meet the Independent School Standards and may take regulatory action within its powers.

Where the subject matter has another statutory route - for example safeguarding, SEND/EHCP decisions, discrimination or data protection - the school will signpost the complainant to the relevant body or process. Nothing in this policy removes any statutory right available to a complainant.

13. Placing authorities and other professionals

Local authorities and professionals involved in a pupil's placement may raise concerns with King Edwin School. The school will seek to resolve those concerns promptly and will cooperate with placing authorities where this is relevant, lawful and in the pupil's interests. Information will not be shared automatically merely because a complaint concerns a pupil.

14. Suggestions, comments and compliments

King Edwin School welcomes suggestions, comments and compliments from pupils, parents/carers, professionals and other stakeholders. Feedback may be given verbally, in writing or using any feedback mechanism made available by the school.

Pupils will be supported to contribute in a way that reflects their communication needs. Themes from feedback will be considered through the school's quality-improvement arrangements.

15. Redress and learning

Where the school identifies that something has gone wrong, appropriate redress may include:

- an explanation and acknowledgement of what happened;
- an apology where appropriate;
- corrective action to address the immediate issue;
- changes to procedures, practice, training or supervision to reduce the risk of recurrence;
- review of support or reasonable adjustments for a pupil;
- other proportionate action within the school's authority.

An acknowledgement that the school could have handled a matter better does not, by itself, amount to an admission of legal liability.

16. Monitoring, reporting and review

The Principal and proprietor will monitor the operation of this policy, including timeliness, recurring themes, accessibility and actions arising from complaints. Formal complaint information will be reviewed in a way that protects individual confidentiality.

This policy will be reviewed at least annually and earlier where legislation, statutory guidance, inspection expectations or school arrangements change.

17. Related policies

- Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy
- Data Protection Policy
- SEND Policy
- Equality / Single Equality Policy
- Accessibility Plan
- Behaviour Policy
- Whistleblowing Policy
- Staff Grievance and Disciplinary Procedures
- Online Safety / Acceptable Use Policy

Appendix 1 – Complaints process at a glance

Stage	What happens	If still dissatisfied
1 Informal	Raise concern with relevant staff member/senior leader. Aim: resolution within 10 school days.	Move to Stage 2.
2 Formal written	Write to Principal (or proprietor if complaint is about Principal). Acknowledge within 5 school days; outcome normally within 20 school days.	Request Stage 3 within 10 school days.
3 Panel hearing	At least 3 uninvolved panel members; one independent of management/running. Parent may attend and be accompanied. Written	Internal procedure complete; relevant external statutory/regulatory routes may remain.

	findings/recommendations follow.	
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Appendix 2 – Formal complaint information

A formal complaint does not need to use a particular form. Providing the following information may help the school investigate efficiently:

- parent/carers name and contact details;
- pupil name;
- clear description of the complaint and relevant dates;
- what has already been done to try to resolve it;
- any relevant documents or evidence;
- the outcome or remedy sought;
- any reasonable adjustment or communication support required.

Appendix 3 – Reference framework

- Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, Schedule 1, Part 7, paragraph 33.
- Department for Education, Independent School Standards guidance, April 2026.
- Education and Skills Act 2008, including inspection provisions referenced by paragraph 33(k).
- UK GDPR, Data Protection Act 2018 and Data (Use and Access) Act 2025, as applicable to complaint records and information handling.
- Keeping Children Safe in Education and the school's current safeguarding arrangements, where a complaint raises a safeguarding concern.

Policy note: the statutory Part 7 requirements concern complaints from parents of current pupils. King Edwin School intentionally provides wider routes for pupil and stakeholder feedback because this supports accessibility, pupil voice and service improvement.