

Complaints Policy

Date of Policy: - September 2017

Date of review: - September 2018

Queensgate College believes that all complaints should be treated seriously and courteously and given the time they require to be heard. It is important to the school that complainants have confidence in these procedures and know that their case will be investigated impartially.

Complainants should be advised at the earliest possible stage about:

- The scope, if any, for pursuing their complaint and the extent of the procedure for dealing with it
- The way in which the complaint is likely to be handled

Where there are established statutory and other procedures for dealing with a complaint, these will be followed. These guidelines therefore do not cover those matters for which such a procedure already exists such as:

- Exclusions from school
- Special Educational Needs Provision
- Matters concerned with the school curriculum
- Serious complaints against school staff
- Child Protection issues
- Public examinations

Definition of a Complaint

We regard a complaint as 'An expression of dissatisfaction with our provision or services, with the actions of its employees and/or policies. A complaint requires an immediate response and, if it is serious or cannot be dealt with immediately, need to be investigated and resolved'.

Complaints can be made about:

- Failure to provide a satisfactory service
- Failure to follow agreed policies or processes (or the lack of such processes where they could reasonably be expected to be in place)
- The conduct of an employee of Queensgate College or a volunteer engaged by the school

If a person perceives there is a valid reason for a complaint, this must be treated accordingly and an investigation undertaken. For us, the definition of a complaint within the terms of the procedures described here is an expression of dissatisfaction verbally or in writing by parent/carer/carers of students who attend the school.

After initial investigation of a complaint, a decision may well be made to use the discipline, capability or other appropriate procedure against a member of staff. Anonymous complaints will not normally be considered under the procedure set out here.

The procedure set out in the following pages outlines the stages both formal and informal through which a complaint made against the school will proceed. At all stages, we aim to resolve the matter to the satisfaction of both parties and a mutual understanding of the problems believed to exist in order that improvements can be made where necessary.

Where agreement and resolution cannot be reached, the aim of the procedure is to ensure that all parties are treated fairly and equitably.

Conciliation or mediation between school and complainant can be considered at any time within the informal or formal stages as set out in this guide.

Stage One

Dealing with Concerns and Complaints Informally

STAGE 1 – Informal

1. It is hoped that all complaints and concerns will be resolved as early and as informally as possible. Parent/carer need not only to be listened to but also to feel that they have been listened to. The underlying principle is that concerns ought to be handled, if at all possible, without the need for formal procedures. Nevertheless, anyone receiving a complaint should ensure that a record of the complaint and its outcome is maintained.
2. The vast majority of concerns and complaints can be resolved informally. There are many occasions where concerns are resolved immediately with the teacher, school office or Headteacher, depending on whom it is parent/carer first approach. Parent/carer must feel able to raise concerns with members of staff without any formality, either in person, by telephone or in writing. It may, on occasions, be appropriate for someone to act on behalf of the parent/carer.
3. It may be unclear as to whether a parent/carer is asking a question or expressing an opinion, rather than making a complaint. Similarly, a parent/carer may want a preliminary discussion or be seeking clarification of an issue in order to decide whether he or she wishes to take the matter further.
4. We will inform our staff that they have the right to seek advice or representation at any stage of the complaints procedure once it becomes clear that a complaint is being made about a member of staff.

Procedures

1. Parent/carer should be given an opportunity to discuss their concern with the appropriate member of staff who will clarify the nature of the concern or complaint and reassure them that the school will hear the concern or complaint and attempt to resolve it at the earliest stage. The member of staff may explain how the matter or incident arose and the issues connected with it. It may be helpful at this point for the parent/carer to identify what outcome is expected.
2. The member of staff will need to respond appropriately, taking into account the status and seriousness of the complaint. Hopefully, the matter can then be resolved immediately.
3. If the member of staff first approached cannot deal with the matter immediately, then they should make a clear note of the date, the name and contact address or telephone number given by the complainant. The Headteacher should be informed accordingly.
4. Where the concern relates to the actions of the Headteacher, the complainant should be advised to refer it in writing to the chair of the Governing board, through the school office.
5. The member of staff dealing with the concern or complaint should make sure that the parent/carer is clear about what action, if any, or monitoring of the issue has been agreed, putting this in writing if this appears to be the best way of advising the complainant clearly about the resolution of the matter.
6. In instances where no satisfactory solution has been found within 10 school working days of the complaint having been made, parent/carer should be given clear information both verbally and in writing about how to progress their complaint.

STAGE 2 – Formal

At this stage, it will be apparent that a formal complaint has been registered and an appropriate response will be required. In some instances, the Headteacher will already have been involved in looking at the matter; in others, it will be their first involvement. In all instances, it will be helpful for the Headteacher (or other designated member of staff) to use these guidelines to ensure consistency and to ensure that regard is paid to the stages of the complaints procedure.

- Headteacher has the responsibility for the day-to-day running of their school. They have responsibility for the implementation of the complaints procedure including decisions concerning their involvement at the various stages. A staged complaints procedure should ensure that more than one individual is involved in hearing and investigating the complaint.
- The Headteacher should make arrangements to ensure that their involvement does not predominate at each stage of a particular complaint.
- Arrangements may be made for designated member of staff to deal with parent/carer concerns at Stage 1, allowing for the Headteacher involvement at Stage 2, should this be necessary. At any stage, the Headteacher may designate another member of staff to collect information and prepare a response.

Procedures

1. Complaints should normally be submitted in writing. In exceptional circumstances, the school may consider progressing a verbal complaint, where there are believed to be sufficient grounds for doing so. The Headteacher (or designated member of staff) will acknowledge the complaint within 3 working days of receipt.
 - We are sensitive to the particular needs of parent/carer who may have difficulty in making a written complaint or for whom English is not their first language.
2. An acknowledgement should provide a brief outline of the school's complaints procedure and an expected date for the provision of a response. This will normally be within 10 school working days. If this proves to be unworkable, the complainant should be provided with an explanation for the delay and given a revised date for the provision of a response.
3. A mediated meeting between the complainant and the school to discuss a solution may be suggested if both parties are in agreement. The aim here is to seek an early resolution to the complaint for the benefit of the child, parent/carer and the school. Prolonging a complaint longer than is necessary is of no benefit to any of the parties involved. Such involvement is not however intended to compromise the formal complaints procedure. A complainant reserves the right to invoke more formal procedures should this be thought necessary to resolve matters.
4. The Head teacher should provide an opportunity for a complainant to meet with them in order to supplement any information previously provided. It should be made clear to the complainant that, if they wish, they may be accompanied at any meeting by a friend, relative or representative to speak on their behalf; and that interpreting facilities can be made available should this be necessary.
5. The Headteacher will, if necessary, interview witnesses and take statements from those involved. If the complaint concerns a pupil, the pupil should also be interviewed. In some instances, another member of staff with whom the pupil feels comfortable may be asked to attend. It may be appropriate, depending on the circumstances, to invite a parent/carer or carer to be present when the Headteacher interviews a pupil. The Headteacher should keep written records of all meetings, telephone conversations and other contacts made during the course of investigation of a complaint.
6. Once all relevant information has been gathered, the Headteacher will then formulate a written response to the complainant. The Headteacher may, additionally, suggest a meeting to discuss the complaint and seek a resolution. The written response should include a full explanation of the decision reached and the reasons for the decision. Where appropriate, this will include details of the action taken to resolve the complaint. If the complaint concerns a member of staff and action is to be taken against the member of staff concerned, the phrase 'Appropriate action has or will be taken' should be used.
7. The complainant should be advised that, should they find the Headteacher response inadequate and they wish to take matters further, stage 3 will commence

Stage 3: Independent Panel

If you are dissatisfied with the response you receive in stage 2 then you must write to the school within 10 working days and request that your complaint is further considered by an independent panel.

On receipt of this information, the proprietor will be responsible for the appointment of the panel and you will be contacted to arrange a suitable meeting time, ideally within 10 working days (term time). The meeting time and venue will be confirmed in writing once agreed so that parent/carers have suitable notice to attend.

The panel will consist of at least three people. One of the panel members will not have been previously involved in the complaint procedure and independent from the management of the school. However, they may be connected to the school by the referral process E.g. the Head teacher of a LA Pupil Referral Unit.

The meeting will be attended by the independent panel, the Headteacher and parent/carers. Parent/carers are entitled to bring appropriate accompaniment to the meeting should they wish. The complainant will be able to fully discuss their dissatisfaction and concerns as well as allowing the Head of School to explain the school's earlier responses.

Minutes will be taken by the chair of the panel. Both the headteacher and parent/carers will be informed of the result of the panel review in writing within 10 working days of the meeting. All minutes and documents relating to the complaint will be kept confidential, however will be shown to Ofsted and any other statutory inspections.

This policy will be reviewed and where necessary updated on an annual basis.