KING'S ELY

Parental Complaints and Concerns Policy

May 2026

Parental Concerns and Complaints Policy

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Parental Concerns and Complaints Policy

INTRODUCTION

King's Ely is committed to offering education, pastoral care and communication of the highest quality. The School welcomes constructive suggestions and comments from parents about the services we provide - good or bad. We are a human-based organisation and as such recognise that despite best efforts not everything will be perfect all the time.

If you are not happy with any aspect of the School or your contact with us, we need to know as soon as possible so that we can take action to resolve the issue and make improvements. We very much hope that most problems can be resolved through informal, friendly discussion and without the need for formal procedures.

King's Ely staff take all complaints very seriously because the welfare of all pupils and service to parents are at the top of the School's priorities. In the event of a complaint it is our aim to:

- manage the complaint or concern sympathetically, efficiently and at the appropriate level;
- ensure a full and fair investigation;
- respect any request for confidentiality;
- address all the points at issue and provide an effective response;
- deal with the matter as quickly as possible and within the timescales set out in this Policy;
- acknowledge and correct any matter which may have gone wrong, including reviewing the School's procedures, processes and systems if appropriate.
- record and maintain confidentially records relating to complaints in accordance with regulatory guidance and good practice.

This Policy sets out the process for dealing with a complaint from parents of pupils. It applies to any parent or legal or education guardian of a current or prospective pupil registered at the School. It also applies to a parent of a former pupil if the complaint was initially raised while the pupil was still registered at the School. In addition, the School may, at its discretion, include a parent whose child has recently left the School. It applies to all Sections of the School.

This Policy is available on the School's website for all staff and parents and is also available in hard copy upon request.

This Policy sets out the three-stage procedure to be followed and the timescales for acknowledging, considering, and resolving complaints and concerns. The timescale is set out in working days which means Monday to Friday during term-time only. While we will endeavour to deal with a complaint or concern raised during School holidays in a timely manner this may depend on the nature of the complaint, to whom it is made and whom it involves. A concern or complaint received within one month of the end of a term or half-term is likely to take longer to resolve because of the availability of staff and pupils during School holiday periods. The procedures set out below may be adapted as and when appropriate to meet the aims of this Policy and the individual circumstances of the complaint or concern.

Parental Concerns and Complaints Policy

King's Ely is committed to resolving all parental concerns swiftly and transparently, fairly and without penalty. The School expects parents and staff members to engage politely, calmly, and collaboratively under a framework of mutual respect and constructive dialogue. Clear, authentic communication from you as parents regarding your child's education or well-being is welcomed. While technology can assist in formatting communications, the use of generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools to draft automated, highly legalistic or repetitive complaints is strongly discouraged. Such practices often obscure the core issue, hinder genuine dialogue and delay resolution unnecessarily. We reserve the right to request that complaints be reframed in a parent's own words to ensure the core concern is clearly understood and can thereby be addressed effectively by staff.

The formal complaints procedure detailed in this Policy provides a robust and independent mechanism for resolving disputes, in line with good practice in the UK independent school sector. Parents must not air grievances, publish School communications, or name individual staff members on social media platforms or public fora. Adversarial or targeted social media activity undermines the collaborative relationship that is required to resolve issues and as such, we may view this behaviour as unreasonable and a breach of the standard of conduct expected in the Terms and Conditions (Parent Contract).

In the unlikely scenario that a parent's behaviour becomes vexatious, or where the escalation process is used inappropriately to harass the School, the Principal may implement the following measures:

- a formal warning detailing the unacceptable behaviour and outlining required boundaries for future communication.
- temporary suspension or restriction of the escalation process, or limiting communication channels to a single, designated point of contact.
- action taken under Paragraph 8.13.5 of the Terms and Conditions.

Concerns and complaints from pupils are dealt with under a separate procedure and the pupil should follow the guidance set out in the School's *Pupil Concerns & Resolving Complaints*.

There is a separate procedure for a parent whose child has been expelled or excluded or has been required to leave, or when a child protection issue is involved.

Management of Complaints

The Principal has appointed the Chief Financial Officer as the Complaints Coordinator to be responsible for the coordination and administration of this Policy and procedure at the School. If the Complaints Coordinator is unavailable or is the subject of a concern or complaint, his/her duties will be carried out by a Head of Section or the Chief Operating Officer (COO) or Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) as determined by the Principal.

The main responsibilities of the Complaints Coordinator are to:

- coordinate the complaints procedure at King's Ely;

- advise staff on the complaints procedure and support the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) or other senior staff responsible for conducting an investigation;
- maintain an ongoing training programme for all staff in relation to complaints;
- monitor the keeping, confidentiality and storage of records in relation to complaints;
- ensure that actions taken regarding any findings and recommendations identified by a Complaints Panel are recorded, whether or not the complaint was upheld;
- report regularly to the Principal and the Board of Governors with respect to the status and management of complaints, including the effectiveness and efficiency of the procedure as necessary.

PROCEDURE

First Stage – Informal Resolution:

- It is hoped that most complaints and concerns will be resolved quickly and informally. Any complaint should be raised as soon as you become aware of any issue, and certainly within 14 working days of any significant event. We will acknowledge any complaint within two working days during term time and as soon as possible during School's holiday periods. Further contact will be made within six working days of receipt of the complaint. We commit to resolving any concerns or complaints as soon as is practicable and usually within ten working days (not including the School's holiday periods) of receiving the complaint. Should it not be possible to meet this timescale, regular updates will be provided;
- If you have a concern or complaint, you should normally contact your son or daughter's form teacher, tutor, housemaster or housemistress in the first instance. If this initial contact fails to resolve the matter it will be referred to a more senior member of the School or, if necessary, the relevant Head of Section;
- Complaints made directly to the Head of Section will normally be dealt with by the Head of Section in the first instance;
- Complaints made directly to the Principal will normally be dealt with by the Head of Section initially;
- The Head of Section or the Principal may be involved in the informal resolution of a concern or complaint if this is felt appropriate by the School, depending on the seriousness or urgency of the concern or complaint raised;
- If the complaint or concern is about the Head of Section, you should contact the Principal;
- If the complaint or concern is about the Principal, you should contact the Chair of Governors c/o the Clerk to the Governors;
- The member of staff to whom a concern or complaint is first reported will make a written record of the subject matter and the date on which it was received. This will be sent to the relevant Head of Section for information.
- Should the matter not be resolved satisfactorily at the informal stage, you will be advised to

proceed with your complaint in accordance with *Stage 2 – Formal Resolution*.

Stage 2 – Formal Resolution:

- If your concern or complaint cannot be resolved informally then you should write to the relevant Head of Section, the Principal or the Complaints Coordinator setting out the full details of your concern or complaint and the outcome/s that you are seeking, with all relevant documents and your full contact details.
- Complaints will be referred to the Complaints Coordinator who will inform the Principal and decide with him the appropriate course of action to be taken.
- The Complaints Coordinator will acknowledge receipt of your concern or complaint by telephone or in writing within five working days of receiving the written complaint during term time and as soon as possible during School's holiday periods. This acknowledgement will include an indication of the action to be taken and the likely timescale;
- If the Principal considers it necessary for further investigation of your concern or complaint, an Investigator will be appointed who will be a member of the School's SLT. If your concern or complaint is about a Head of Section, the Chief Operating Officer, the Vice-Principal (Academic) or the Chief Financial Officer, the Investigator will be a member of the SLT of at least equal status. Where appropriate the Principal may speak to, or meet with, you to discuss the matter, normally within seven working days of receiving your written complaint during term time and as soon as is reasonably practicable during School's holiday periods. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage;
- The Investigator will be responsible for the conduct of the investigation, which will probably include interviews with those who are likely to have relevant information or knowledge about the circumstances of your concern or complaint, including you directly having raised the concern or complaint. The Investigator may seek additional documents and information related to the investigation from those involved. The Investigator will keep a written record of all meetings and interviews and copies of all documentation from the investigation into your concern or complaint.
- The Investigator will report the outcome of the investigation in writing to the Principal with any relevant information, including notes of meetings or interviews.
- Once the Principal is satisfied that all the relevant facts have been established, so far as is practicable, the Principal will consider the matter and a decision will be made and communicated to you in writing. The Principal will also give reasons for the decision. The investigation and notification of the decision will be made normally within 28 working days of the date of receiving the Stage 2 written complaint during term time and as soon as is reasonably practicable during School's holiday periods;
- If you are not satisfied with the Principal's decision, you should proceed to *Stage 3 –Panel Hearing*.
- If the concern or complaint is about the Principal, the Chair of Governors will appoint an appropriate Governor to be the Investigator, who will be supported by the Clerk to the Governors. Once the Chair of Governors is satisfied that all the relevant facts have been

established, so far as is practicable, the Chair will consider the matter and a decision will be made and communicated to you in writing. The Chair will also give you the reasons for the decision. The investigation and notification of the decision will be made normally within 28 working days of the date of receiving your Stage 2 written complaint during term time and as is reasonably practicable during school holidays. If you are not satisfied with the Chair of Governors' decision, you should proceed to *Stage 3 – Panel Hearing*.

Stage 3 – Panel Hearing

- If you wish to invoke Stage 3 and request a Hearing before a Complaints Panel, having failed to achieve earlier resolution, you should write to the Chair of Governors (via the Clerk to the Governors, King's Ely, Cambridgeshire, CB7 4DW) setting out the full details of your concern or complaint. The Clerk will acknowledge receipt of your concern or complaint within seven working days of your concern or complaint being received.
- If the Chair of Governors considers it necessary, a Governor may be appointed to undertake a further investigation of the matter in conjunction with the Principal. If the concern or complaint relates to the Principal, then any further investigation will be undertaken by a Governor who will not have been involved in the Stage 2 Investigation;
- A Complaints Panel will be established, and a Hearing will be arranged. A Complaints Panel Hearing is a review of the decision of the Principal or Chair of Governors under Stage 2.
- The Complaints Panel will consist of at least two Governors having no direct involvement in the matters detailed in your concern or complaint and one person who shall be independent of the governance, management or running of the school; one Governor member of this Panel will be designated as the 'Convenor' and Chair of the Complaints Panel and will be supported by the Clerk to the Governors;
- The Clerk to the Governors will arrange a Hearing to take place as soon as practicable and within 21 working days of receipt of your concern or complaint by the Chair of Governors during term time and as soon as is reasonably practicable during School's holiday periods. The Clerk to the Governors will confirm the date, time and place of the Hearing, together with brief details of the Panel members and any other persons who will be present at the Hearing as soon as is reasonably practicable, and in any event at least five working days before the date of the Panel. A Panel will not normally be held during a School holiday period, including half-terms and Bank Holidays;
- The Panel may require further information regarding your concern or complaint or any related matter in advance of the Hearing. Copies of any such information will be supplied to those involved in the Hearing not less than three working days before its scheduled date;
- You may be accompanied to the Hearing by another person(s) e.g. relative, teacher or friend. Legal representation is not normally appropriate. If you wishes to be accompanied by a legally qualified person, acting in their professional capacity, you must inform the Clerk to the Governors at least seven working days in advance of the date of the Hearing. The attendance of a child at the Hearing is at the sole discretion of the Panel Convener, if you wish for your child to attend for part or all of the Hearing then a request in writing should be made to the Clerk to the Governors at least seven working days in advance of the date of the Hearing.
- If you wish to provide additional documents for consideration at the Hearing you should send copies of the additional documents that you wish the Panel to consider to the Clerk to the

Governors at least seven working days in advance of the date of the Hearing;

- The Principal shall be entitled to attend the Panel Hearing (unless your complaint directly concerns the Principal when the attendance of the Principal is at the discretion of the Complaints Panel);
- The Panel will try to resolve your complaint without the need for further investigation. Should further investigation be required it will be conducted as directed by the Panel;
- A Complaints Panel hearing is a private proceeding and not a legal proceeding. The Hearing will be conducted in an informal manner. All statements made at the Hearing will be unsworn. The Chair of the Complaints Panel will ensure that all those present at the Hearing will have the opportunity to ask questions and make comments in an appropriate manner. Any person attending the Hearing who is dissatisfied with any aspect of the way the Hearing is conducted must say so at the time that the matter arises. A comment or statement of dissatisfaction will be recorded by the Hearing note-taker and considered by the Complaints Panel before the proceedings go any further.
- All those present at the Hearing will be entitled to write their own notes for reference purposes. The Clerk to the Governors or the Governance Assistant will normally be present as the note-taker for the Hearing. An audio or video recording of the Hearing will not be permitted. No notes or other records or oral statements about any matter discussed at the Hearing or arising from the proceedings shall be made available either directly or indirectly to the press or other media, including social media postings.
- The role of the Complaints Panel is to establish the facts of your concern or complaint made by reviewing the documents presented by the School and by you, to consider any issues of procedure and to hear representations by the School and by you. The Panel will not consider any new concern or complaint which has not been previously investigated or raised as part of Stage 1 or Stage 2 of this procedure. After due consideration of all the facts and information that the Panel considers relevant, the Panel will determine its findings which will be made on the balance of probabilities. In addition to determining its findings and deciding whether to uphold or to dismiss your concern or complaint, the Panel may make recommendations on the matter heard or any other issues arising from the Hearing to the Principal or the Board of Governors as appropriate.
- All those present at the Hearing are expected to show courtesy, restraint, and good manners. If not, the Chair of the Complaints Panel may, after due warning, adjourn or terminate the Hearing. If the Hearing is terminated for such reason/s the original decision of the Principal or Chairman regarding your concern or complaint will stand.
- The Chair of the Complaints Panel may adjourn the Hearing at any time at his/her discretion.
- The Complaints Panel shall be under no obligation to hear oral evidence from witnesses but may do so if the Panel considers it would inform their deliberations. The Panel will consider all relevant facts before reaching its decision about your complaint and making any recommendations within five working days of the Hearing. The Panel will convey its findings and recommendations in writing, via electronic mail or otherwise given to you and, where relevant, to the person complained about. The decision of the Panel will be final. There is no further right to Appeal or a further Hearing within the School's procedure;
- The Panel's findings and any recommendations it may make will be made available for inspection on the School's premises by the Chair of Governors and the Principal.

If you, having invoked Stage 3 and at the point when the Clerk to the Governors has acknowledged your concern or complaint, indicate that you are satisfied and do not wish to proceed further, you

must do so in writing.

If you, having invoked Stage 3, do not attend the Complaints Panel Hearing without good reason, such as illness or considering comments concerning the Panel's composition, the Panel may consider your complaint in your absence and determine its findings.

Confidentiality

You can be assured that all concerns and complaints will be treated seriously and confidentially.

As a School King's Ely processes data in accordance with its Privacy Notice. When dealing with your concern or complaint, the School (and any Complaints Panel member appointed under Stage 3 of this procedure) may process a range of information and personal data, such as your name, the description of your concern or complaint, records of investigation, witness statements copies of correspondence, notes of the Hearing and the written decision. The personal data may include sensitive information, such as physical or mental health, where this is considered necessary owing to the nature of your concern or complaint.

The Complaints Coordinator will keep a written record of all formal complaints made under Stage 2, including whether they relate to boarding provision, and of all Complaint Panel Hearings, including their outcomes, as required by regulation and in accordance with the School's Privacy Notice and Retention of Records Policy and Procedures. These records, correspondence and statements relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential, except where the Secretary of State, a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the Education and Skills Act 2008, or another legal authority requests access to them.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)

At King's Ely Acremont and Fairstead House, where there is provision for the EYFS, the following provisions apply and are specifically detailed within this Policy:

- The School will notify parents of the outcome of an investigation within 28 days of having received a written complaint about the fulfilment of the EYFS requirements;
- the School will retain a written record of complaints for at least three years, and;
- the outcome which was taken as a result of each complaint;
- the record of complaints must be available to Ofsted and ISI upon request.

Boarding pupils

Furthermore, as there are boarding pupils at King's Ely, the requirements under Standard 14 of the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools apply to and are contained within this Policy.

Data Protection Complaints and Information Rights

Data-specific grievances are governed by the Data Protection Act 2018, UK GDPR and Data (Use and Access) Act 2025. We will normally process these concerns as described in King's Ely's Data Protection Policy. This ensures a consistent approach to resolution for parents while meeting our statutory data protection obligations. For clarity:

- Complaints should be made for the attention of the Compliance Lead via dataprotection@kingsely.org, or sent to King's Ely Main Reception, Bishop Woodford House, Barton Road, Ely CB7 4DW;
- in accordance with statutory requirements, the School will acknowledge receipt of a data protection complaint within 30 days.
- The School will investigate your complaint and respond to you without undue delay. Where a data complaint is complex or requires extensive technical review, we will provide regular updates on progress.
- The outcome of the complaint will be communicated to you without undue delay.

EXTERNAL OVERSIGHT AND REGULATORY CONCERNS

King's Ely is inspected by the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI). Parents and pupils have the right to contact ISI if they have a complaint concerning any aspect of the School's provision, including the quality of education or the welfare or the health and safety of pupils. ISI will usually expect the parents or pupil to have taken their complaint through the School's complaints procedure before taking their complaint to ISI. ISI will not investigate disputes about fees or specific complaints about pupils no longer at the School.

- Independent Schools Inspectorate, CAP House, 9-12 Long Lane, London EC1A 9HA. Telephone number – 020 7600 0100. Concerns will be recorded and may be copied to the Department for Education.

Any concerns relating to the School's overall regulatory compliance with national standards—including pupil welfare, health and safety, or the quality of education—should be reported directly to the Department for Education (DfE) via their online complaints form:

- Department for Education, Complain about a school: Private schools - GOV.UK

Parents of children in the EYFS are entitled to make a complaint directly to Ofsted and/or to the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI), if they believe the School is not meeting the EYFS requirements:

- Ofsted, Piccadilly Gate, Store Street, Manchester, M1 2WD. General helpline – 0300 123 1231. About schools – 0300 123 4234.

Details of how to contact Ofsted and/or ISI if parents believe that the EYFS requirements are not being met are also made available on the noticeboards in the Nursery. Parents will be notified about an inspection, and once the final inspection report has been provided, it will be supplied to parents.

Complaints or concerns of a child protection nature can also be referred to the LADO (Local Authority Designated Officers) Unit.

- LADO - 01223 727967

If a parent, having completed the School's three-stage procedure, is unhappy with the *process* followed (not the outcome) of the School's internal complaints procedure, this can be raised as a procedural concern with the Department for Education via their website after the Panel Hearing.

- Department for Education - Complain about a school: Private schools - GOV.UK

A parent has a statutory right to lodge a complaint with the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) if they believe the School has not handled their personal data in accordance with the law. The ICO typically expects a complainant to have exhausted the School's internal complaints process before they will intervene.

- Information Commissioner's Office - Email: icocasework@ico.org.uk Phone: 0303 123 1113

APPENDIX ONE

Complaints Procedure – Independent Member of the Panel

The following guidance comes from a letter sent by the DfE to the ISC General Secretary in 2002. Although dated, the advice is extant:

"Whilst we do not intend to be prescriptive our general view is that suitable people would be those who have held positions of responsibility and who are used to analysing evidence and putting forward balanced arguments/points. It would add credibility if independent panel members had some standing in the local community. In this connection serving or retired business people, civil servants, heads or senior members of staff at other schools, people with a legal background – perhaps retired members of the Police Force – might be considered suitable by schools. Schools will have their own views and may well have other suitable suggestions to make.

You asked if it would be acceptable to appoint former governors or staff of the school as the independent panel member. The regulations do not preclude this since the stipulation is that the person must be independent of the management and running of the school. Clearly former governors or staff would not have any such involvement. However, schools should bear in mind that they may be subject to criticism that such people would remain too close to the school and would not be truly independent."

This was expanded in the DfE's Registration of Independent Schools' Information Pack of July 2011:

"Whilst we do not wish to be prescriptive about who schools should appoint as an independent person our general view is that people who have held a position of responsibility and who are used to analysing evidence and putting forward balanced arguments would be suitable. Examples of persons likely to be suitable are serving or retired business people, civil servants, heads or senior members of staff at other schools, people with a legal background and retired members of the Police Force might be considered by schools. Schools will of course have their own views."

APPENDIX TWO

Number of complaints registered under the formal procedure (Second Stage – formal resolution) during the preceding academic year:

King's Ely Senior - for the academic year 2024-25 the school received 3 formal complaints
King's Ely Prep - for the academic year 2024-25 the school received 0 formal complaints
EYFS - for the academic year 2024-25 the School received 0 formal complaints

The School's record of complaints is monitored and analysed by the Complaints Coordinator whose report is considered by the SLT and reviewed by the Governing Body. Any child protection related complaints would immediately be brought to the attention of the designated Child Protection Governor.

King's Ely
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www.kingsely.org