



Complaints

Policy Document No. 7

Eastcourt Independent School

August 2010

Last reviewed: August 2015

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Note: throughout this document the word 'parents' is taken to refer additionally and where relevant to carers, guardians or anyone else responsible for a pupil at Eastcourt.

INTRODUCTION

The Education (Independent Schools Standards)(England) Regulations 2003, as amended 17 January 2005, requires all independent schools to have a written complaints procedure. In addition,

“Schools must ensure that all parents and prospective parents are aware of the existence of the complaints procedure and must supply a copy on request.”

The procedure provides that correspondence, statements and records of complaints are kept confidential in a locked cabinet.

UNDERLYING PRINCIPLES

It is important to keep in mind the distinction between concerns, problems and complaints. The existence of a statutory written complaints procedure must not be seen as an encouragement to raise everyday concerns and problems to the level of complaints. A complaint, as defined in this document, implies a degree of seriousness and importance requiring formal procedure, the possible involvement of third parties (such as other staff or their legal representatives) and a time-frame extending beyond the immediate. It is not an informal chat.

That understood, complainants will be treated seriously and courteously and given the time they require to be heard. It is important to Eastcourt that complainants have confidence in these procedures and know that their cases will be impartially investigated.

Complainants will be advised at the earliest possible stage of:

- 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

DEFINITION OF A COMPLAINT

A complaint within the terms of the procedures described here is a serious expression of dissatisfaction verbally or in writing by parents of children who attend Eastcourt. All complaints from parents of children who attend the school will be investigated as such.

Anonymous complaints would not normally be considered under this procedure.

This Complaints Policy outlines the stages by which a complaint may be made against Eastcourt. At all stages the aim of the policy is to reach a mutual understanding of the problems so that improvements can be made where necessary.

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

Conciliation between school and the parents can be considered at any time.

1. THE FIRST STAGE: DISTINGUISHING AND DEALING WITH CONCERNS AND COMPLAINTS

Guidelines

It is hoped that all concerns are resolved as early and informally as possible. Parents need not only to be listened to but also to feel that they have been listened to.

The vast majority of concerns can be resolved informally. There are many occasions where concerns are resolved straightaway through the class teacher, Mrs Bishop or Mrs Redgrave, depending on whom the parents first approach. Parents must feel able to raise concerns with members of staff without any formality, either in person or in writing. At first it may be unclear whether a parent is asking a question or expressing an opinion rather than raising a concern or making a complaint. A parent may want a preliminary discussion about an issue to help decide whether s/he wishes to take it further.

Procedures

Parents will be given an opportunity to discuss their concern with the appropriate member of staff who will clarify the nature of the concern and reassure them that the school wants to hear about it. The member of staff may explain to the parents how the situation arose. It may be helpful to identify at this point what sort of outcome the parent is looking for.

The member of staff will need to respond appropriately, taking into account the seriousness of the concern. Hopefully the matter can be resolved immediately.

If the member of staff first contacted cannot deal immediately with the matter, they will make a clear note of the date and the name of the complainant and notify Mrs Redgrave.

The member of staff dealing with the concern will make sure that the parent is clear what action (if any) or monitoring of the situation has been agreed, putting this in writing if this seems the best way of making things clear.

Where no satisfactory solution has been found within five school working days, parents should be given clear information about how to proceed with what may now be termed their complaint.

2. THE SECOND STAGE: REFERRAL TO MRS REDGRAVE

Guidelines

By now it will have become clear that the concern is a definite complaint. In some cases Mrs Redgrave will already have been involved in looking at the matter; in others it will be her first involvement. In either case, Mrs Redgrave will use these guidelines to ensure consistency among cases, and to make sure that nothing happens at this stage which could make it difficult for later stages to proceed smoothly.

As headteachers have responsibility for the day-to-day running of their schools, they have responsibility for the implementation of a complaints system, including the decisions about their own involvement at the various stages. For example, arrangements may be made for other staff to deal with parents concerns at Stage 1, while Mrs Redgrave deals with contacts with parents at Stage 2. Even at that stage Mrs Redgrave may designate another member of staff to collect some of the information from the various parties involved.

Procedures

Mrs Redgrave, having ascertained that the complainant wishes to proceed beyond Stage 1, will acknowledge the complaint orally or in writing within twenty-four hours of receiving the complaint.

Eastcourt is sensitive to the needs of the parent who may have literacy difficulties or for whom English is not their first language.

The acknowledgement will give a brief explanation of Eastcourt's complaints procedure and a target date for providing a response to the complaint. This will normally be within five school working days; if this proves unworkable, a letter will be sent explaining the reason for the delay and giving a revised target date.

Mrs Redgrave will provide an opportunity for the complainant to meet her to supplement any information provided previously. It will be made clear to the complainant that, if they wish, they may be accompanied to any meeting by a friend, relative, representative or advocate who can speak on their behalf.

If necessary, Mrs Redgrave will interview witnesses and take statements from those involved. If the complaint centres on a pupil, the pupil may also be interviewed. In some circumstances, another member of staff with whom the pupil feels comfortable will be asked to attend. In certain circumstances and taking into account the nature of the complaint, it may be appropriate to invite a parent to be present when Mrs Redgrave interviews a pupil. Mrs Redgrave will keep written records of meetings, telephone conversations and other contacts.

Once all the facts have been established, Mrs Redgrave will wish to meet the complainant to discuss/resolve the matter directly. Where appropriate, a written response will include a full explanation of the decision and the reasons for it, as well as what action Eastcourt will take to resolve the complaint.

3. THE THIRD STAGE: FORMAL HEARING BEFORE A PANEL

A formal complaint must be notified to the DfE.

Complaints unresolved at this stage will now be dealt with as follows:

- Mrs Redgrave will appoint a panel of at least three people who were not directly involved in previous consideration of the complaint.
- One person on the panel will be independent of the management and running of the school.
- Eastcourt will set out clear timescales for the management of the complaint, providing adequate notice of the hearing.
- Parents will be allowed to attend and be accompanied if they wish.
- The panel will make findings and recommendations, and ensure that the complainant, Mrs Redgrave, and, where relevant, the person complained about, are given a copy of any findings and recommendations.

4. THE FOURTH STAGE

Complaints left unresolved at this stage would presumably be directed to the Secretary of State, to a Local Government Ombudsman, or indeed to a solicitor.

IN CONCLUSION

Eastcourt traditionally has excellent relations with parents, and cases that have arisen have always been resolved at either of the first two stages outlined above. We work hard to preserve a good atmosphere in the school: Mrs Redgrave's office door is always open, and we hope we may never need to implement the latter stages of this policy. We want to hear of concerns (which we do not see as complaints) and are always willing to discuss day-to-day issues so that they do not give rise to anything more serious.