

Independent Listener Policy and Role Description

Queen's College, Taunton

October 2020 (V1)

Independent Listener Policy

1 Introduction:

At Queen's College we are committed to providing an environment that nurtures and transforms the lives of children attending Queen's and take seriously our responsibilities to safeguard and promote their welfare. In addition, we undertake our responsibilities to work in partnership with agencies as part of the wider, multi-agency, safeguarding system, always acting in the best interest of the child or young person where concerns are identified, in accordance with Queen's College's Child protection and Safeguarding Policy and Procedures, statutory guidance and Somerset Safeguarding Partnership policies and procedures.

2 Our Commitment:

To safeguard and promote the welfare of children through:

- The provision of a safe environment in which children can learn.
- The provision of high-quality residential provision, which nurtures and develops our children to achieve and thrive.
- Identifying concerns early and provide appropriate help and support for children and their parents/carers to prevent concerns escalating to a point whereby intervention would be required under the Children Act 1989 and in accordance with the Somerset Effective Support for Children and Families, Thresholds for Assessment and Services guidance.

3 Provision:

The School believes that the pastoral systems at Queen's College provides equality of opportunity through a caring environment in which each individual, with support, mutual respect and encouragement of members of staff and of other pupils, is valued and is allowed to develop their own personality and talents while learning to live as part of a community. We aim to ensure that this community is one in which there is no place for harassment, discrimination or bullying.

3.1 Each pupil has a number of different adults to whom they may turn for advice and support including their Houseparents in the boarding house; Year Leader, Tutor, Chaplain or a trusted adult in school during the day. Furthermore, all pupils are made aware that one of the School Counsellors is available for consultation during the school day and is in school 5 days a week.

The Medical Centre staff are available 24 hours a day during term-time and a School doctor is on duty every Friday morning. Pupils may make confidential appointments with a School doctor or with any other doctor at the local practice (College Way) via the Medical Centre.

3.2 However, we also recognise that there may be occasions when a pupil wishes to speak with someone who is not part of the School. Furthermore, the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools (April 2015) states that a school must: "identify at least one person other than a parent, outside the staff, and those responsible for the leadership and governance of the school, who boarders may contact directly about personal problems or concerns at school". Queen's College has a volunteer Independent Listener who acts in this capacity.

3.3 Queen's College's current Independent Listener is:

Mrs Helen Foster, Helen is a former parent and governor of the school.

Telephone Number: 01823 340893

- 3.4 These contact details are displayed on House noticeboards alongside those of the Children's Commissioner, Childline and ISI.

4 **Role Description:**

- 4.1 Role Description: As described within the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools, The Independent Listener is a person outside the staff and those responsible for the leadership and governance of the school, who boarders may contact directly about personal problems or concerns at school (Ref: NMS 2.3).
- 4.2 Reports to: Head of Boarding

5 **Introduction:**

- 5.1 Queen's College has a system whereby any child who wishes to talk to an independent adult about personal problems or concerns at school can do so. Details of the Independent Listener are displayed around the School and within all boarding houses alongside the Children's Commissioner, Childline and ISI contact details.
- 5.2 The Independent Listener system is confidential and Independent Listeners are under no obligation to inform the School of any calls. Independent Listeners will also visit the School a number of times throughout the year to make themselves known to staff and boarding students.
- 5.3 The Independent Listener is expected to follow all policies and procedures driven by Keeping Children Safe in Education, (DfE, 2020 – all parts), Working Together to Safeguard Children, (DfE, 2018) and the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools (DfE 2015).
- 5.4 It is a fundamental value of the school that we help our students to remain healthy, enabling them to continue to access their education without stigma or exclusion. Hence all staff at Queen's College are committed to ensuring our students are safe and feel they have someone to talk to.

6 **Main Areas of Responsibility:**

- 6.1 Under the direction of and in consultation with the Head of Boarding, the Independent Listener will be required to note the following:
- Take into account the Schools views on the student's needs, as well as the student's wishes and views;
 - If contacted by a student, they should provide an opportunity for them to talk through problems and issues in a safe and non-discriminatory manner;
 - Encourage the students to participate in decisions affecting them;
 - Keep accurate and confidential records bearing in mind some students wish to remain anonymous;
 - Safeguarding and child protection issues arising from conversations with students should be reported immediately to the Designated Safeguarding Lead
 - Provide feedback to the Head of Boarding for reports, reviews and other meetings;

- Work in a child centered manner, being clear about confidentiality and where boundaries lie.

7 **Safeguarding Responsibilities:**

- 7.1 To know the identity of the School's Designated Safeguarding Lead and Deputy.
- 7.2 Proactively be alert to indicators of potential safeguarding issues and report these immediately in accordance with the School's procedure.
- 7.3 Be aware of the School's Safeguarding Policy and to follow its requirements.
- 7.4 Attend training relating to safeguarding of children provided by the School if required.
- 7.5 Engage in safe practice and professional conduct to safeguard children to mitigate against the potential for misunderstandings or situations being misconstrued.
- 7.6 The School is fully committed to safeguarding the welfare of children and young people and expects the same from its volunteers, employees and representatives.

8 **Supervision:**

- 8.1 Supervision will be provided through the Head of Boarding termly.
- 8.2 Support from Head of Boarding - The Independent Listener will receive ongoing 'on the job' support and guidance from the Head of Boarding on an ad hoc basis during their time as an Independent Listener as and when required.
- 8.3 The Independent Listener will have a termly line management meeting with the Head of Boarding.

9 **Job Context:**

- 9.1 The Independent Listener must be child focused however sympathetic they may be to other points of view. The function is to compliment the work and activities of the boarding staff and parents.
- 9.2 In bringing this autonomous perspective, the Independent Listener must behave in an anti-discriminatory manner. The Independent Listener is not expected to accept unquestioningly what those responsible for the child tell them is in the child's interests, but should remain open-minded and foster a healthy scepticism.

10 **Knowledge Experience and Training:**

- 10.1 The Independent Listener should have qualities, skills, experience and/or qualifications in other settings that enable them to undertake work in a professional capacity with children. These may include:
 - An understanding and empathy of the needs of school age children and adolescents;
 - An understanding and appreciation of the difficulties caused by living away from home;
 - The ability to work flexibly with a variety of adults and children;
 - An understanding of Good Care Practice and Principles;

- An appreciation of the Children Act 1989, the Children Act 2004 and the National Minimum Standards and other relevant legislation;
- Qualifications/experience in counselling or other relevant disciplines.

11 **Problems and Decisions:**

11.1 The Independent Listener will consult and work with the Head of Boarding (and the DSL where required), boarding staff and the students. They will work within all school policies and procedures. All grievances or disputes should follow the procedure and guidance within the School's Policy.

12 **Duration:**

12.1 The initial arrangement would be for a period of 12 months, after 12 months the arrangement will be reviewed by the Head of School, Head of Boarding and the DSL. However, if for any reason an Independent Listener is unable to continue with the role they should contact the Head of Boarding as soon as is reasonably practicable.

13 **Notes on Independent Listeners:**

13.1 The National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools (NMS) requires the School to identify at least one person other than a parent, outside the staff, and those responsible for the leadership and governance of the school, who boarders may contact directly about personal problems or concerns at school.

13.2 The role is voluntary although reasonable expenses for travel may be agreed in advance.

13.3 The following procedure is to be followed in any appointments:

- Appointment procedures will be required to follow the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools standard 14 on Safer Recruitment standards;
- The position is subject to the usual DBS, child protection, welfare and 'whistleblowing' requirements;
- Offer an appropriate role description (this document) and briefing/induction;
- Be clear that the position is independent of the main lines of school management, but still subject to the School's specification and organisation;
- Ensure Independent Listener knowledge of 'school norms and expectations'
- There should be an awareness of perception of the Independent Listener's other roles (e.g. police officer, governor, doctor, vicar, counsellor, local dignitary);
- There must be clear rules on confidentiality – and duty to breach in the event of disclosure or if informed of safeguarding risks to a student or other students, there must be no absolute guarantee of secrecy;

14 **Monitoring arrangements:**

14.1 This policy will be reviewed annually by the Head of Boarding.

15 **Links with other policies:**

15.1 This policy links to the following policies and procedures:

- Safeguarding and Child Protection
- Behaviour
- Staff Code of Conduct
- Complaints
- Health and safety
- Online safety
- Equality
- Sex and relationship education
- Designated teacher for looked-after and previously looked-after children
- Privacy notices
- Whistleblowing
- Anti-bullying
- IT acceptable use

Effective date of the policy	20 October 2020
SLG Responsible Member	Andrew Free, Deputy Head

Authorised by	Board of Governors
Signed	Mark Edwards, Chair of Governors
Date	20 October 2020